



Mapping opportunities and constraints for affirming Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) curricula

ABSTRACT

This abstract refers to a report which results from a research collecting information and data related to SSE in IVET curricula in order to “map” the existing situation in Europe. The report is an intellectual output resulting from the project “*Social and Solidarity Economy in Europe: affirming a new paradigm through IVET curricula innovation*” (September 2016 – August 2018), co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme. The countries directly involved in the project are: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Romania. The common template explores various aspects, both in terms of context (historical, normative, social, political) and of content, that lead to assert, through comparative methodology, the need to develop a common set of IVET training modules on SSE.

The Social Solidarity Economy asserts itself and is increasingly understood as a promising socio-economic model in the EU and in various parts of the world. There is no common definition of SSE throughout Europe, only a few countries have references in their Constitution to the principles of SSE, and laws and regulations relate to SSE through a variety of approaches such as mutualism, cooperation, self-management, social and solidarity inclusion, etc. – with different legal, social, and political degrees of awareness, understanding and acceptance. But beyond the institutional recognition and legal definitions of SSE, there is a much wider understanding and practice of Social Solidarity Economy, with its historical, social and cultural contexts, not only confining SSE as a sector of economy. This survey asserts SSE as a movement gathering inclusive values and practices, a transformative approach towards all socio-economic activities, promoting democracy at work and in the community, social justice and ecological awareness of the planet's limits. SSE is an alternative to the current economic paradigm which is no longer providing answers to the people's deep aspirations and the planet.

Education and training are fundamental factors for this change of paradigm. Predominantly, outcome-oriented curricula can then offer a valuable platform for bringing closer the worlds of education, training and work – and particularly IVET (Initial Vocational Education and Training) and VET – with a great potential to transform younger generations into citizens and professionals more knowledgeable, aware, and capable to address societal challenges. In that perspective, **the combination of IVET and curricula is central in this**

study, in the perspective of developing a comprehensive learning environment enhancing the SSE as well as benefiting the learners at all ages, meeting the need of the more at risk population. The Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)¹ underlines it²: *“curriculum relevance is a condition sine qua non, not only for improving the human capital potential of education and training graduates but also for retaining learners in education and training systems.”* Thus in the years following 2000, the Europe 2020 Strategy (COM, 2010) for smart growth (developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation); sustainable growth (promoting a low-carbon, resource-efficient and competitive economy); and inclusive growth (promoting a high employment rate economy that ensures social and territorial cohesion) has somehow been reflected in the design and implementation of national curricula for IVET. The opportunities to include SSE skills and competences, as well as specific professional path, in IVET curricula are to be build. This will bring technicalities: the different SSE dynamics at play in the European countries will have to build together a common understanding of skills and competences, transversal enough to fit the variety of their initiatives and institutional forms.

First, this survey provides a **panorama of the education systems philosophy and organisations**, giving perspective through comparison. Mostly, the curricula are under the State's responsibility and are framed as the reference for any school or training agency, although in some country employers, trade unions are involved (Germany and Bulgaria, Romania). They are based on a combination of skills, competences and acquired knowledge articulated in learning outcomes and including a content necessary for their attainment, and evaluations systems. Most countries have established **National Qualification Systems**, relating their qualification levels to those of the European Qualification Framework, improving the transparency, recognition of qualifications and thus potential mobility in Europe for learners and workers. VET and IVET are no exception, especially because in many countries it is considered as an integral part of the education system. Some countries (Germany, Portugal, Italy) have a long standing system of vocational training where in others (such as in (Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Greece), it has been more recently implemented.

All the countries provide vocational trainings inside the public school system, under the responsibility of the Ministries of Education (State National or Regional decentralized educational structures, or both), from the secondary level up to the third and even the fourth. Some other Ministry may also be implied, e.g. the Ministry of Labour. Aside from the national public school system, but bound to the national/regional requirements and approval of their curricula, a variety of private agencies are involved in IVET, including Chambers of commerce, institutes specialized in vocational training, job agencies, and even enterprises. The latter are particularly used as partners to help find jobs at the end of a training course. Internships or on-the-job trainings are increasingly seen as the best way to help students get adjusted to jobs expectations. When it comes to orienting and changing national or regional policies that inform and promote the IVET system and potentially SSE, entrepreneurial institutions, unions and professional organisations, juridical entities, research institutions, and social enterprises can be involved.

While all countries have a similar definition of the Vocational Education and Training as post-compulsory school (upper secondary education, age bracket 16-24, with some exceptions ranging from 13 to 19) and in professional qualification objectives, the way Initial VET is organised varies. The training mostly takes place at secondary level in school. **Although training is almost everywhere free of charge, its comes almost with no supplementary aid (except for Germany were enterprises are paying the students they train) and there is a large variety of prerequisites** for young people to be accepted in an initial vocational training school, with a wide difference from country to country (age, examination, obligation of a contract, first

¹ *“Learning outcomes approaches in VET curricula: a comparative analysis of nine European countries”*, CEDEFOP, see: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/>

² *“Learning outcomes approaches in VET curricula”*, Cedefop – Europa.eu (2010b)

education cycle required, etc.). **Those basic conditions of accessibility are utterly important considering the fact that the lack of a secondary qualification is strongly associated across countries with high unemployment and school drop outs rates** (high rates country being Italy, Portugal, Bulgaria with 13 to 15%, dramatically high being Greece, Romania, up to 20%). Alleged reasons are "*most frequently **precarious economic situation**, disorganised families, parents working abroad, lack of attractive jobs for young people, consumerist models*" (Romania), while in Greece it has to do with "*the ongoing economic crisis (...) the choice to leave school in order to seek work is one based on pure **survival needs***".

On a broader scope, the NEETs³ could be one of the main population benefiting from the implementation and fostering of IVET. According to a 2014 OECD report for instance, Portugal indicates that the increasing rate of NEET people has boosted the will to organise adjusted means to meet the problem. Alongside VET and IVET, **quality apprenticeships** can be considered an effective learning pathway as a smoother transition from school to employment for youth at risk of dropping out early, by combining work and study. Apprenticeships usually allow participants to earn a wage while studying, and offer valuable work experience. It has been formally integrated in the last years in most of the countries of this project (Bulgaria and the Czech Republic excepted). Nonetheless, this "dual corporatist" needs to be re-tailored for SSE, to be less labour market centred, thus offering young people at risk to experience more cooperative and socially oriented entrepreneurial environments.

The general diagnosis strikingly highlights that SSE is hardly present in training curricula, with no explicit mention of SSE in most, if not all, countries within the IVET systems, due to the fact that SSE is a recent development and only partially recognized. When it is, it is generally at the highest level of studies, of social innovation and in courses which are part of a larger topic such as management, economy or public administration. Some private entities include seminars or courses on SSE aspects in their curricula, but on a small scale. It is emerging though, as it is expanding from movements and practices spreading fast across Europe and the world, it is being studied at the academic level in several Universities. If taken on a broader definition, SSE is also present in other educational dimensions such as seminars, events, popular Universities, delivered by NGOs, foundations, etc. They aim at stating a public agenda and give new insights and skills to the professionals working in the sector. **One of the main conclusions is that the SSE needs to foster a pedagogical and advocacy approach towards IVET as well as other levels of education**, from downstream all the way up to the national qualification frameworks and European strategies, starting with the curricular innovation, providing young people better understanding and detecting potential disposition for SSE processes and careers. At the centre of all the proposals advanced so far, there is a significant theme regarding the so called "**soft skills**", **transversal competences** that are not acquired through technical training, but can and must be cultivated through active and participative methodologies, even through non formal education and training. Economic and management knowledge concerning social enterprises also represents a strong opportunity to work on involving SSE initiatives to collaborate at different levels with public and private (possibly non-profit) institutions to develop these educational needs. Thus, the solidarity principles and practices in the professional SSE networks are challenged to be able to express **specifics yet transversal skills and competences that are, especially through ongoing practices, already advocating for a more sustainable, inclusive and fair society and European community**. Furthermore, as the report shows, mostly, the trainers are expected to follow the guidelines of the programmes, so there are perspectives of improving the pedagogy by combining an outcome-based curricula and a learner-centred approach through examples like in Italy where the trainers play an important role in the evolution of the pedagogy and the content of their courses, or in Greece, where trainers can be hired also under their professional competence.

³ 15 to 24 year olds who are not employed (International Labour Organisation definition) and who have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey.

Finally, training programmes for trainers should also be developed in compliance with the territorial differences as well as the different accredited institutions. Trainers should be granted the right/duty to access **continuous training updates** (tools and innovative pedagogical methodologies about active and participatory learning, SSE theories and practices to be integrated in the learning units of their programmes, etc.). The Portuguese general conclusion expresses some development perspectives, SSE not [yet] having a clear influence at the level of: a) definition, design, organisation, planning and implementation of learning activities in IVET; b) teachers autonomy to reformulate the curriculum; c) differences between public and private curricula; d) cooperative and peer learning methodologies. Regarding those different issues, **integrated advocacy in the development of professional organisation networks**, and umbrella organisation could help **joining the conversation on labour, education and training at a European level** as well as **fostering national recognition**.

Consultation within the SSE field (dialogue, co-decision, mutual exchange of information) is necessary to define the major training needs and **help foster an adequate response from the IVET system**. In countries where the social (solidarity) economy field is newly developed (Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic), a limited number of social businesses have survived (Credit union, Social integration enterprises mainly). **A study among experienced social enterprises** could help identify training needs. IVET organisations should have an understanding of how SSE can be a relevant field in which to train young people, and how it has a potential for innovation and employment creation: vocational training centres could develop towards both trainees and local stakeholders of the territory. In Italy, there is a proposal – richly detailed in this report – to integrate the **Vocational Training Centres as parts or nodes of the SSE Networks or Districts**, both as a local economic actor and as a *social and cultural innovation synergy operator*. The final purpose being to pass from a labour market and job searching vision *"to a model finalised to the creation of opportunities of work (from searching to creating work), in which people can actively and autonomously reach the objectives they are attracted to and are capable of finding the necessary resources to realise their project."* SSE stakeholders now need to gather all the willingness and effort to organise the convergence of voices and practices into shared analysis processes, participant observation, quality evaluation and progress-making approach in order to highlight the potential change of paradigm to be achieved through SSE IVET implementation.

Partners:



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