

SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY: PRINCIPLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

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Abstract

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) offers an innovative framework for addressing global challenges related to sustainable development and social inclusion. By integrating principles of equity, solidarity, participatory governance, and sustainability, the SSE provides a viable alternative to traditional economic models. It aims to empower marginalized communities and foster systemic change through innovative and inclusive approaches. This article examines the core principles and operational frameworks of the SSE, emphasizing its significant role in advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The methodology used includes a conceptual analysis and an assessment of the operational frameworks supporting the development of the SSE, with a focus on legislative measures, institutional support and social entrepreneurship. The analysis shows that they relate on the importance of robust ecosystems in supporting SSE initiatives, focusing on key factors such as tailored legislative measures, institutional support, and entrepreneurial activity. Raising public awareness about social entrepreneurship is also identified as a critical element for fostering a cultural shift that enhances the sector's reach and impact. The study concludes that the successful implementation and scalability of SSE initiatives depend on sustained policy support, innovative practices, and mobilizing entrepreneurial efforts. By aligning social, economic, and environmental objectives, the SSE emerges as a transformative model capable of driving sustainability and inclusivity. Its capacity to address systemic challenges positions the SSE as a key contributor to building equitable and resilient societies.

Key words: SSE; SDGs; legal frameworks; social entrepreneurship; social inclusion; marginalized communities; entrepreneurial drivers

JEL Classification: Q01, P13, I31, O35, D63

INTRODUCTION

Current economic contexts, dominated by globalization and neoliberalism, have generated multiple social and economic problems, including the increase of disparities and the marginalization of certain social groups. Excessive concentrations of wealth and the significant share of the workforce in the informal economy, lacking adequate social protection, perpetuate global cycles of poverty and exclusion. Although governments have implemented resource redistribution strategies and social assistance programs, such as the European Union's cohesion strategy and numerous social initiatives in developing countries, these measures have proven insufficient in the long term. The lack of sustainable mechanisms for economic development through government policies underscores the need for alternative approaches.

In this context, the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has emerged as a viable alternative, founded on principles of democratic involvement, equity, and solidarity. Models of the SSE, including cooperatives and social enterprises, have demonstrated the capacity to support regional development and improve the standard of living in disadvantaged communities. By leveraging these principles, SSE not only addresses immediate economic and social needs but also creates a sustainable foundation for long-term development.

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the global role of the SSE as an alternative model for addressing sustainable development and social inclusion, emphasizing its principles, frameworks, and practical applications. To achieve this goal, the following objectives are addressed ([World Economic Forum, 2022](#)):

- Explore the integration of social economy and solidarity economy concepts into a cohesive SSE framework, highlighting their global significance.
- Analyze comparative legal and institutional frameworks supporting SSE in various countries, emphasizing their impact on fostering inclusive growth and sustainability.
- Examine the contributions of SSE to achieving SDGs, with a focus on innovative practices and their scalability.
- Identify the core principles and drivers of social entrepreneurship within SSE and their transformative potential for addressing systemic challenges.

This approach facilitates the identification of key factors influencing the development of SSE, offering a robust foundation for crafting effective global strategies and public policies that promote sustainable development and social inclusion.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

The SSE has been widely explored in academic literature as a transformative framework addressing sustainable development and social inclusion. From the perspective of the research theme, two primary aspects are recurrently emphasized in the literature: *SSE's contribution to achieving SDGs* and *its role in fostering social innovation*. However, certain gaps remain in the comprehensive understanding of SSE's systemic impact and adaptability across diverse contexts.

1. Contribution of SSE to Sustainable Development and Social Inclusion

The literature confirms the significant role of SSE in achieving SDGs, particularly through localized and inclusive approaches. Studies highlight how SSE entities address economic, social, and environmental challenges by promoting social equity and ecological sustainability. For instance, research from South Korea underscores SSE's impact on urban agriculture and circular economies, advancing SDG 1 (poverty eradication), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production), and SDG 13 (climate action) (Lee, 2020). Similarly, case studies from Brazil, such as initiatives in Araraquara, demonstrate SSE's contribution to employment generation and community empowerment, aligning with SDG 11 (sustainable cities) and SDG 5 (gender equity) (Morais & Bacic, 2020).

The transformative role of SSE in fostering gender equality and social cohesion is further evidenced by studies in Morocco, where women-led cooperatives address both ecological and economic goals (Bouhazzama & Guenaoui, 2020). Additionally, the Basque Country presents a compelling example of how local SSE policies balance economic growth with environmental sustainability while contributing to SDG 8 (decent work) and SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production) (Villalba-Eguiluz et al., 2020). These studies confirm SSE's capacity to integrate global sustainability objectives into local development practices.

Despite its successes, certain gaps remain in assessing SSE's systemic resilience during global crises. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD's 2023 review emphasizes the need for clearer frameworks to quantify SSE's impact on addressing market and state failures, particularly during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. While the literature acknowledges SSE's role in providing essential services and fostering community-driven solutions, it often lacks comprehensive methodologies for evaluating long-term impacts.

2. Social Innovation through SSE

Another central theme in the literature is SSE's role as a driver of social innovation. Confirmations are abundant regarding how SSE fosters novel solutions to societal challenges by aligning community needs with sustainable practices. For example, studies from the UK, Portugal, and Brazil illustrate how SSE initiatives promote SDG implementation through values of solidarity and reciprocity (Esteves et al., 2021). Similarly, cooperatives are recognized as incubators of social innovation, enabling democratized decision-making and collective ownership that empower communities to address systemic inequities (Filippi et al., 2023). Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a game-changing technology in the SSE scene in recent years, improving resource allocation, efficiency, and decision-making (Dragomir & Alexandrescu, 2017). Cooperatives and social entrepreneurs may better distribute resources, detect new community needs, and increase the scalability of creative solutions with the use of AI-driven data analysis. Furthermore, platforms driven by AI provide increased participation and transparency in SSE governance, strengthening democratic ideals and reducing the possibility of bias in judgment. Organizations can increase their effect and promote more inclusive and flexible answers to social and economic concerns by using AI into SSE projects.

The literature also highlights SSE's contributions to rural development, as evidenced by Ecuadorian initiatives that utilize participatory governance to enhance socio-economic resilience (Pérez González et al., 2023). Comparative analyses from Geneva and Manila demonstrate the adaptability of SSE frameworks to diverse cultural contexts while maintaining shared principles of sustainability and mutual support (Sahakian & Dunand, 2015).

However, the literature reveals gaps in understanding the scalability of SSE's social innovations beyond local contexts. While case studies confirm its adaptability and success in localized initiatives, there is limited exploration of how these innovations can be expanded to national or global scales without compromising their core values. Additionally, the role of digital transformation in enhancing SSE's capacity for social innovation remains underexplored.

II. INSIGHTS FROM SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

In the academic literature, three distinct terms are frequently encountered to describe emerging alternative economic models: *social economy*, *solidarity economy*, and *social and solidarity economy*. The designation of

social and solidarity economy is intentional; while social economy and solidarity economy may appear synonymous, they are fundamentally distinct in their nature and breadth.

The social economy is founded on established entities like cooperatives, mutual societies, and social businesses. It underscores democratic governance, prioritizes social aims above profit, and advocates for the reinvestment of surpluses for community benefit. The emphasis is on stability, institutional acknowledgment, and functioning within established frameworks, particularly seen in Europe.

Conversely, the solidarity economy is defined by grassroots, community-oriented efforts that emphasize equity, mutual assistance, and transformative practices. It frequently arises informally, catering to the needs of underprivileged populations through experimental and localized methods, especially notable in Latin America. In contrast to the social economy, it seeks to confront prevailing economic frameworks by promoting systemic transformation through solidarity and inclusion.

Since both concepts – the social economy and the solidarity economy – address similar social and economic challenges but differ significantly in their approaches to solving them, the need emerged to integrate these two into a unified framework. The social and solidarity economy was introduced as a comprehensive concept that bridges the formal, structured approaches of the social economy with the transformative, grassroots-driven initiatives of the solidarity economy. This initiative was spearheaded by international organizations such as the *International Labour Organization (ILO)* and *OECD, United Nations (UN)* recognizing the potential of this integrated model to drive sustainable development and foster social inclusion on a global scale.

To better understand the distinctions and connections between the *social economy*, *solidarity economy*, and their integration into the *social and solidarity economy*, a comparative analysis is essential. The following table summarizes the core objectives, key characteristics, scope, legal recognition, and geographical application of these concepts. This overview captures the essence of each approach and illustrates how the SSE unites the strengths of the social and solidarity economies into a cohesive framework for addressing social and economic challenges.

Table 1. Comparative analyses of theoretical concepts

Aspect	Social Economy	Solidarity Economy	Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)
Core Objective	Promotes social well-being and collective development.	Promotes social inclusion, equity, and solidarity, often addressing marginalized communities.	Provides a comprehensive framework unifying social and solidarity economy elements for sustainable development.
Key Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal entities (cooperatives, social enterprises, mutual societies). - Democratic governance and participatory decision-making. - Reinvestment of profits into social goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grassroots, community-based initiatives. - Informal, flexible, and experimental approaches. - Focus on solidarity and mutual aid. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unified framework combining formal and grassroots approaches. - Adaptable to diverse socio-economic contexts. - Drives social innovation for systemic impact.
Scope	Includes formal entities such as cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, and foundations.	Encompasses informal, community-based initiatives like self-help groups and lending circles.	Broad scope, covering both formal entities and grassroots, solidarity-driven initiatives.
Examples	Cooperatives, mutual insurance societies, and social enterprises.	Community kitchens, solidarity-based lending circles, and popular economy initiatives.	Cooperative networks incorporating solidarity practices; hybrid organizations blending both approaches.
Legal and Institutional Recognition	Widely recognized in Europe through laws and policies (e.g., Spain's 2011 Law on the Social Economy).	Recognition varies; prominent in Latin America and some European countries, often less formalized.	Increasingly recognized globally by organizations like the OECD, ILO, and United Nations.
Geographical Application	Predominantly in Europe (e.g., Spain, France, Belgium) but with global relevance.	Strong presence in Latin America (e.g., Brazil, Colombia) and in proximity services in Europe.	Globally applied as a unifying concept across diverse contexts and regions.
Primary Scholars	Defourny et al. (1999), Evers and Laville (2004).	Laville and Nyssens (2001), Galera and Chiomento (2022), Fonteneau and Pollet (2019).	Defourny and Nyssens (2010), OECD (2022), UNTFSSE (2023).

Source: Elaborated by the author based on the analysis of relevant literature

The integration of the social economy and the solidarity economy into the unified framework of the SSE represents a significant evolution in addressing social and economic challenges. As shown in Table 1, the SSE combines the structured, formalized approaches of the social economy – emphasizing stability, democratic governance, and reinvestment of profits – with the grassroots-driven, transformative practices of the solidarity economy, which focus on equity, inclusion, and community empowerment. This unification creates a

comprehensive model that leverages the strengths of both approaches, making it uniquely suited to tackle complex societal issues through innovative and inclusive solutions.

The SSE is built on a set of core principles that distinguish it from traditional economic models and position it as a transformative approach to sustainable development and social inclusion. These principles guide the activities of organizations within the SSE framework and reflect its values-driven, community-centered mission.

1. *Primacy of People and Social Objectives over Capital.* At the heart of the SSE is the commitment to prioritize people and social well-being above profit. Organizations within this framework, such as cooperatives, mutual societies, and social enterprises, operate with the aim of addressing social and environmental challenges, fostering inclusion, and enhancing collective welfare. Unlike conventional businesses, where maximizing shareholder returns is the primary goal, SSE entities reinvest their surpluses to achieve these broader social objectives.
2. *Democratic and Participatory Governance.* SSE organizations are governed democratically, ensuring that decision-making processes are inclusive and participatory. Members or stakeholders have an active role in shaping the direction of the organization, promoting transparency and accountability. This principle fosters empowerment and ensures that the voices of marginalized or underrepresented groups are included, reinforcing the social mission of these organizations.
3. *Reinvestment of Surpluses for Community Benefit.* A defining characteristic of the SSE is the reinvestment of profits or surpluses into the organization's mission or the broader community. This principle ensures that resources are channeled back into initiatives that enhance social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and local development. By doing so, the SSE creates a cycle of value that benefits society as a whole rather than concentrating wealth in the hands of a few.
4. *Solidarity and Cooperation.* The principle of solidarity underpins the SSE, promoting mutual aid and collaboration among individuals, organizations, and communities. This fosters networks of support and collective action, addressing systemic inequalities and creating opportunities for those who are often excluded from traditional economic systems. Solidarity also extends beyond local contexts, encouraging global partnerships to tackle shared challenges.
5. *Sustainability and Social Innovation.* SSE organizations aim to achieve long-term sustainability by addressing the root causes of social and environmental issues through innovative solutions. By integrating social innovation into their operations, these entities develop cost-effective, inclusive approaches to challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation.

These principles collectively define the SSE as a holistic framework that integrates ethical values, democratic practices, and inclusive strategies. By adhering to these principles, SSE organizations contribute to building a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient global economy.

How the SSE contributes to sustainable development and social inclusion

The SSE plays a crucial role in addressing pressing global challenges related to sustainable development and social inclusion by integrating social, economic, and environmental objectives into its core operations. Rooted in principles of solidarity, equity, and democratic participation, the SSE provides innovative and inclusive solutions that promote long-term sustainability and foster cohesive societies (Borzaga et al., 2019).

1. *Sustainable Development through Local Empowerment and Environmental Responsibility.* SSE organizations prioritize environmentally sustainable practices by addressing the root causes of ecological degradation and promoting green initiatives. For instance, cooperatives and community-based enterprises often adopt circular economy principles, focusing on reducing waste, conserving resources, and utilizing renewable energy. Furthermore, by reinvesting profits into local economies, the SSE supports job creation and economic resilience in marginalized communities, fostering self-reliance and reducing inequalities. These localized efforts contribute directly to achieving global sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as climate action (SDG 13) and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).
2. *Social Inclusion through Equity and Empowerment.* One of the defining features of the SSE is its commitment to addressing systemic inequalities and promoting social inclusion. By providing employment opportunities, fair wages, and access to essential services, SSE entities empower vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and marginalized communities. Grassroots initiatives, such as solidarity-based lending systems and community cooperatives, ensure that those excluded from traditional financial systems can actively participate in economic activities. This inclusivity fosters a sense of belonging and community, directly addressing SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).
3. *Democratic Participation and Solidarity for Resilient Societies.* SSE organizations emphasize democratic and participatory governance, ensuring that decision-making processes include all stakeholders. This approach not only empowers communities but also enhances trust and accountability within institutions. By fostering solidarity and collaboration, the SSE builds networks

of mutual aid that enable communities to respond collectively to crises, such as economic downturns or natural disasters. This resilience is essential for creating sustainable and inclusive societies.

4. *Innovation for inclusive solutions.* The SSE serves as a driver of social innovation by developing cost-effective and scalable solutions tailored to the needs of diverse populations. Whether through cooperative housing projects, community-supported agriculture, or social enterprises addressing unemployment, the SSE leverages its flexibility and creativity to tackle challenges that traditional economic models often fail to resolve. These innovations are crucial for achieving inclusive growth while safeguarding environmental and social priorities.

By integrating environmental responsibility, equity, democratic participation, and social innovation into its operations, the SSE not only tackles immediate challenges but also creates a foundation for long-term, systemic change (Socoliuc et al., 2020). Its contributions align closely with the SDGs, positioning it as a critical driver of global sustainability and inclusion.

The role of entrepreneurial initiative in the SSE

The entrepreneurial initiative is crucial to the SSE, serving as the catalyst for sustainable and inclusive social and economic development - entrepreneurial activities prioritize addressing community needs over exclusive profit generation, fostering innovative solutions for social and environmental challenges.

The primary contributions of the entrepreneurial initiative within the SSE encompass:

- *Social innovation and community problem-solving:* recognizes unmet community needs and proposes inventive solutions, frequently utilizing local and sustainable resources, thus tackling issues such as social exclusion, poverty, environmental conservation, and restricted access to education and healthcare (Kholiavko et al., 2021).
- *Job creation and the integration of vulnerable groups:* emphasizes the socio-economic inclusion of at-risk individuals, including the long-term unemployed, individuals with impairments, and marginalized populations.
- *Long-term sustainability:* they allocate the majority of resources towards initiatives that foster growth and tackle community challenges, therefore enhancing the sustainability of the solidarity economy.
- *Advocating for a participative and democratic economy:* it fosters economic democracy, wherein choices are collaboratively determined by employees and community members, establishing a balance between economic efficiency and communal welfare.

These entrepreneurial endeavors enable the solidarity economy to establish a viable alternative to the traditional economy, wherein economic success is inherently connected to social inclusion and long-term sustainability. The entrepreneurial initiative thus serves as a fundamental pillar in establishing a more fair and sustainable economy focused on the common good.

The Role of Social Entrepreneurship in Advancing of the SSE

Social entrepreneurship holds a significant role in both the social economy and the solidarity economy. In the social economy, social entrepreneurship operates through structured entities such as social enterprises, contributing to democratic governance, reinvestment of profits, and prioritizing social objectives over capital gains. Similarly, within the solidarity economy, social entrepreneurship fosters grassroots initiatives that emphasize equity, solidarity, and transformative practices to address systemic inequalities.

Social entrepreneurship contributes to the development of the SSE by acting as a bridge between these two components. It integrates the formal and institutional strengths of the social economy with the grassroots and inclusive approaches of the solidarity economy. By leveraging advanced techniques, including digital tools and cybersecurity measures, social enterprises can enhance operational efficiency, protect sensitive data, and build trust within communities (Bores & Hlaciuc, 2016; Dragomir, 2017a). This dual role enables social entrepreneurship to develop innovative and scalable solutions that address complex social and environmental challenges while ensuring secure and resilient digital infrastructures, reinforcing the SSE's mission of sustainable development and social inclusion. A key contribution of social entrepreneurship to the SSE is its role in driving social innovation through cost-effective solutions that address social and environmental needs, often creating new products, services, or processes that align with the principles of the SSE.

The SSE actively promotes social innovation by integrating social, environmental, and economic objectives into its operations. Social innovation within the SSE framework refers to the development of new and cost-effective solutions that address unmet societal needs while fostering inclusivity and sustainability. The SSE achieves this by leveraging its core principles of solidarity, equity, and participatory governance, ensuring that innovation is driven by the needs of communities rather than solely market demands.

Key directions of social innovation in the SSE include:

- *Social Inclusion:* Developing programs and initiatives that integrate marginalized populations, including women, youth, and minorities, into economic and social processes.
- *Environmental Sustainability:* Promoting green practices, such as circular economy models, renewable energy cooperatives, and sustainable agriculture, to address ecological challenges.

- *Access to Services:* Innovating in areas like affordable housing, healthcare, and education to ensure equitable access for underserved communities (Macovei et al., 2024).
- *Ethical Finance and Fair Trade:* Creating alternative financial systems, such as microfinance and ethical banking, and promoting fair trade practices to empower producers and consumers alike.
- *Community Empowerment:* Strengthening the capacity of local communities to self-organize and respond to challenges, fostering resilience and independence.

Through these directions, the SSE demonstrates its capacity to address systemic challenges and create transformative solutions that benefit society as a whole.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study applies a research methodology designed to explore the global role of the SSE as a transformative framework for sustainable development and social inclusion. A comprehensive analysis of academic and institutional sources was conducted to define the key concepts of the SSE, its principles, and its evolution. The literature review integrated perspectives from prominent scholars and organizations, such as the ILO and the OECD, to establish a solid theoretical foundation.

Additionally, the research incorporates a comparative analysis of legal and institutional frameworks across various countries, examining how these frameworks support the development of the SSE. By highlighting examples from regions such as Europe, Latin America, and Asia, the study identifies diverse approaches to implementing and promoting SSE initiatives. To illustrate the practical applications of SSE principles, specific cases of successful initiatives were analyzed. These cases were selected based on their alignment with SDGs. The examples include cooperatives, solidarity-based projects, and hybrid models that demonstrate the versatility and adaptability of the SSE.

Key themes, such as sustainability, social innovation, and democratic governance, were examined through thematic analysis to showcase how the SSE integrates social, economic, and environmental objectives. This methodological approach provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating the SSE’s capacity to address global challenges and contributes to the development of evidence-based strategies for fostering inclusive and sustainable growth.

IV. SSE’S CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The SSE has emerged as a transformative model capable of addressing the interconnected challenges of sustainable development and social inclusion. Rooted in principles of equity, solidarity, and participatory governance, SSE provides innovative solutions that balance economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Globally, SSE initiatives have proven effective in advancing key SDGs. They contribute to poverty eradication (SDG 1), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) through innovative and inclusive practices (see Table 2).

Table 2. SSE Initiatives Driving SDG Implementation

SDG	SSE Initiatives
SDG 1: No Poverty	Job creation and income-generating activities for marginalized populations.
SDG 5: Gender Equality	Women-led cooperatives fostering economic independence and social empowerment.
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Promoting fair wages, safe working conditions, and economic opportunities for vulnerable groups.
SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities	Empowering marginalized groups through solidarity-based economic activities and inclusive governance.
SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Developing urban agriculture, cooperative housing, and community-based urban solutions.
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Circular economy models, waste reduction initiatives, and sustainable production methods.
SDG 13: Climate Action	Addressing climate challenges through renewable energy, reforestation, and sustainable agricultural practices.
SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	Strengthening local governance through participatory decision-making and fostering social cohesion.
SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals	Building networks between governments, NGOs, and SSE organizations to scale solutions and share best practices.

Source: Elaborated by the author

To understand the potential of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in addressing systemic global challenges, this section examines some prominent SSE initiatives. These initiatives were selected based on their alignment with specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their demonstrated effectiveness in addressing systemic issues, and their potential scalability or replicability in other contexts.

1. *Kimana Community Wildlife Sanctuary, Kenya*

The Kimana Community Wildlife Sanctuary, established as the first community-owned and managed wildlife sanctuary in Kenya, exemplifies how community-based initiatives can integrate biodiversity conservation with socio-economic development (Makindi, 2016). Situated in Kajiado County within the dispersal areas of Amboseli National Park, the sanctuary spans various habitats, including swamps, savannah plains, and Acacia woodlands, and supports a diversity of wildlife such as elephants, buffalo, lions, and giraffes. Its semi-arid location underscores the necessity of community-driven strategies for sustainable resource use.

Kimana operates under the communal ownership of the Maasai people and employs participatory governance structures like councils of elders or group ranch committees to manage natural resources. This democratic approach aligns with the principles of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), emphasizing equity, community involvement, and sustainability.

The sanctuary supports biodiversity conservation through indigenous practices, collaborative management with conservation agencies, and community-oriented activities such as agroforestry. Economically, it generates income for locals through employment as game scouts and in tourism-related businesses, including selling crafts and cultural artifacts. Ecotourism initiatives provide additional income streams while creating awareness about the importance of conservation.

Kimana addresses multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It contributes to *SDG 15 (Life on Land)* by preserving biodiversity and habitats. By creating employment and fostering tourism-related businesses, it aligns with *SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)*. Infrastructure development and access to services such as education and healthcare provided by the sanctuary address *SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)* and *SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)*.

Despite its successes, the initiative faces challenges, including unequal benefit distribution, minimal high-paying job opportunities, and persistent poverty levels among community members. The dependency on tourism revenue also exposes the sanctuary to vulnerabilities such as fluctuations in tourist arrivals.

2. *El Día Después in Spain*

El Día Después is a Spanish initiative fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration to address challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic (Moreno-Serna et al., 2020). Acting as a partnership incubator, it brings together public administrations, businesses, academia, and civil society to co-create sustainable solutions. Key focus areas include food security, energy transition, and social cohesion. For example, partnerships have facilitated local food distribution networks to support vulnerable populations and accelerated the adoption of renewable energy in rural areas.

This initiative reflects SSE principles by fostering partnerships based on solidarity and mutual support. It promotes participatory governance and equitable distribution of resources, aligning with the cooperative and inclusive nature of SSE.

Aligned with *SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)*, El Día Después exemplifies how cross-sectoral collaboration can drive systemic solutions for sustainability challenges.

The initiative has facilitated over 20 multi-stakeholder projects, directly benefiting over 10,000 individuals. Its collaborative model has proven effective in addressing food insecurity and promoting renewable energy adoption.

3. *The EnergyBook initiative in Belgium*

The EnergyBook initiative in Belgium integrates SDGs into community-driven projects by focusing on energy efficiency in schools, renewable energy, and community engagement (Mariani et al. 2022). For instance, the program retrofits school buildings with energy-saving technologies, such as insulation, LED lighting, and upgraded heating systems, while involving parents and local stakeholders in cooperative funding efforts. Additionally, renewable energy installations, like solar panels, have been implemented in some schools, reducing energy costs and carbon emissions (Grosu et al., 2022).

This initiative incorporates SSE principles by actively involving communities in planning and funding, fostering collective ownership of projects, and prioritizing social and environmental benefits over profit motives. Local organizations like Ilanga and Bond Beter Leefmilieu act as facilitators, ensuring collaboration between community members, schools, and sustainability experts.

The initiative supports *SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)* by increasing energy efficiency and promoting renewable energy use, *SDG 13 (Climate Action)* by reducing CO₂ emissions through sustainable practices, and *SDG 4 (Quality Education)* by integrating environmental awareness into educational programs and community activities.

EnergyBook has achieved tangible results, including a 20–25% reduction in energy consumption in participating schools, an average annual reduction of 20 metric tons of CO₂ emissions per school, and cost savings

of €5,000 - € 0,000 per school. Over 30 school buildings were retrofitted during the pilot phase, and more than 500 community members actively contributed to its success.

4. *Beterri Km 0 Project, Spain*

The Beterri Km 0 project in Spain, initiated in 2014, aims to promote food sovereignty and sustainability by fostering local food systems and supporting small-scale agricultural production (Villalba-Eguiluz et al., 2020). The project involves nine production entities supplying food to public-collective dining rooms, including a nursing home, two nurseries, and an elementary school, as well as 13 restaurants and 11 stores. On the supply side, it identifies unused land and allocates it to young farmers while providing training in agroecology and circular economy-based management to enhance productivity and sustainability. On the demand side, it incorporates social and environmental clauses in public procurement tenders to prioritize local production and creates branding and badges for stores selling local products to boost consumer awareness and strengthen their market position.

The project embodies Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) principles by prioritizing community well-being, fostering participatory governance, and promoting environmental sustainability. It reinforces solidarity by supporting young farmers, enabling access to resources, and fostering equitable market opportunities for local producers. The training programs and land allocation initiatives align with SSE's focus on inclusivity and the creation of sustainable socio-economic ecosystems.

The Beterri Km 0 project aligns with several SDGs. It contributes to *SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)* by enhancing local food systems and improving access to fresh, sustainable produce, and to *SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)* by creating employment opportunities for young farmers. It also supports *SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)* through sustainable farming practices and circular economy principles and *SDG 13 (Climate Action)* by promoting environmentally friendly agricultural practices and reducing food miles.

The project has achieved significant outcomes, such as increased sustainability in farming practices and strengthened local economic networks through public procurement and branding strategies. By linking sustainable farming to market demand, it has created a self-sustaining model of food sovereignty and economic development. Its approach is scalable to other regions with unused agricultural land and strong public-private collaboration and replicable in contexts where consumer awareness and public procurement policies can support local producers.

5. *KoopFabrika initiative, Spain*

The KoopFabrika initiative, launched in 2016, serves as a platform for creating, incubating, and consolidating cooperative businesses. The initiative seeks to strengthen the economic fabric by aligning entrepreneurship with democratic, sustainable, and inclusive principles, catering to social needs. It is a collaborative effort involving two universities, a network of cooperative companies, and three local development agencies (Villalba-Eguiluz et al., 2020). Since its inception, KoopFabrika has facilitated the creation and consolidation of 37 cooperative companies and trained 144 entrepreneurs, showcasing its significant impact on fostering cooperative-based economic development.

KoopFabrika operates on three levels. The first focuses on creation, training, and tutoring. Participants receive theoretical training in the principles of SSE and practical training in business management, alongside personalized guidance throughout the entrepreneurial process. Additionally, the initiative strengthens local integration by promoting collaboration among local enterprises. The second level involves incubation, with many startups housed in Iturola, a public co-working space designed to foster connections among economic and social actors within the community. Finally, the consolidation phase emphasizes the creation of a "transformative social economy network" to ensure cooperation among businesses and strengthen their ties to the local territory.

This initiative embodies SSE principles by prioritizing democratic governance, local community engagement, and sustainable business practices. Its focus on fostering networks among cooperative businesses aligns with the SSE's emphasis on solidarity and mutual aid, while its collaborative model with public institutions reflects participatory governance.

The KoopFabrika initiative supports multiple SDGs. It advances *SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)* by promoting entrepreneurship and cooperative business development, providing training, and creating job opportunities. It contributes to *SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)* by encouraging sustainable and locally integrated business practices. Additionally, by fostering collaboration between public and private entities, it supports *SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)*.

The initiative has demonstrated tangible outcomes, including the establishment of cooperative businesses and the creation of a robust support network for entrepreneurs. Its model fosters innovation in economic and social collaboration while addressing local community needs. KoopFabrika's approach is scalable in regions with a supportive institutional framework and replicable in areas where cooperative entrepreneurship can be integrated with local development strategies. Its success illustrates the transformative potential of public-cooperative collaboration in driving sustainable and inclusive economic development.

Despite their successes, these cases underscore the importance of overcoming structural barriers, such as entrenched inequalities and reliance on external funding mechanisms. As noted in global discussions led by the UN Task Force on SSE, the effectiveness and scalability of such initiatives depend on supportive institutional

frameworks and sustained community engagement (ILO, 2022). By addressing these challenges, SSE can continue to provide innovative solutions that drive systemic change and localize the SDGs, ensuring inclusive and sustainable outcomes across diverse socio-economic contexts.

4.1. Legislative Framework as a Catalyst for Strengthening SSE Ecosystems

Given the significant role of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its growth and effectiveness are closely tied to the maturity of the ecosystem in which it operates. The degree to which SSE initiatives can scale their impact, access critical resources, and sustain their operations depends heavily on the development and robustness of this ecosystem. A mature ecosystem provides a stable framework, fostering innovation, collaboration, and long-term resilience. The key elements that define such a mature ecosystem are outlined in Figure 1.

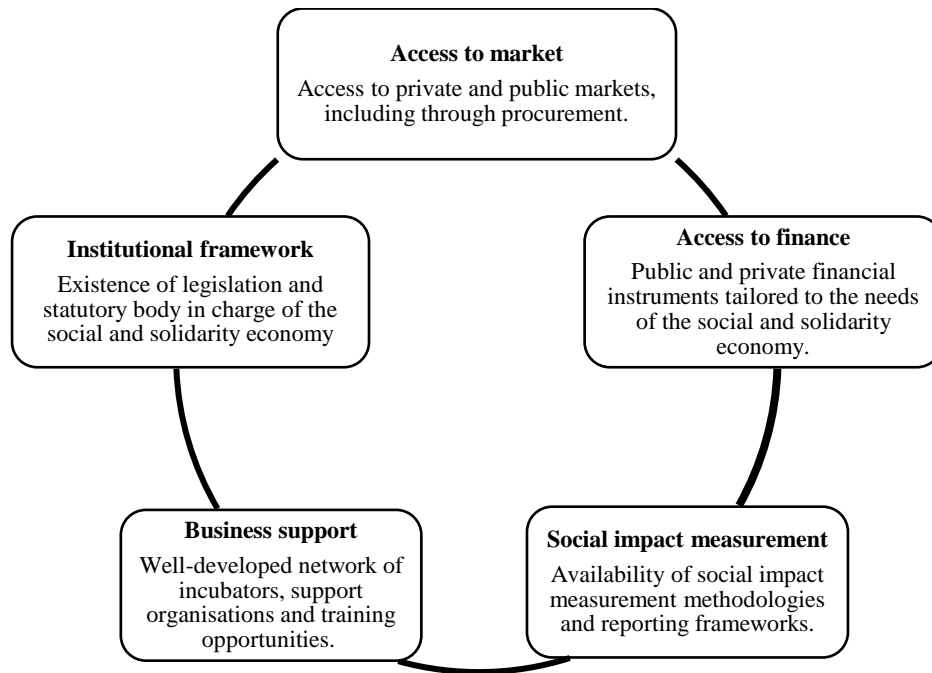


Figure 1. Indicative elements for mature SSE ecosystems

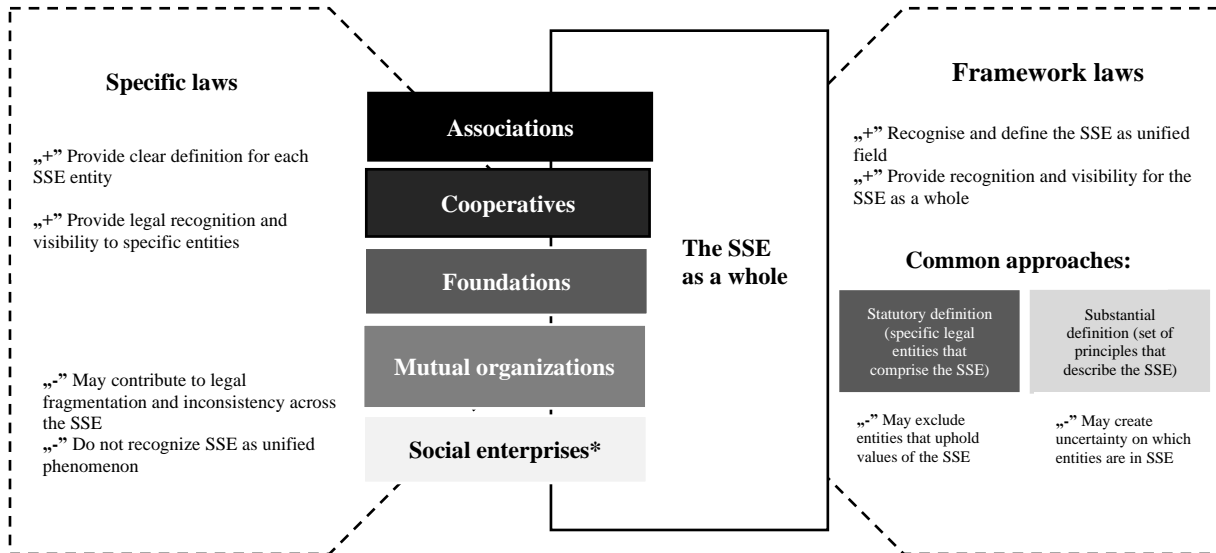
Source: OECD, 2023.

Figure above highlights the key components necessary for a mature Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) ecosystem. These include access to finance through tailored public and private instruments, and access to markets, both public and private, facilitated by mechanisms like procurement. It also emphasizes the importance of a strong institutional framework supported by legislation, as well as a well-developed network of business support, including incubators and training opportunities. Finally, it underscores the need for effective social impact measurement methodologies and reporting frameworks to ensure accountability and continuous improvement within the SSE. Together, these elements form the foundation for a thriving SSE ecosystem.

Among the components presented in the *Figure 2*, the most important element of the SSE ecosystem is the institutional framework, specifically the legal framework. A well-defined legal structure provides the foundation for the Social and Solidarity Economy by formalizing its role within the broader economic and social landscape. It ensures recognition and legitimacy for SSE entities, creating a stable environment for their operations. Moreover, legislation establishes clear guidelines and standards, fostering trust among stakeholders and enabling access to resources such as funding and markets. Without a strong legal framework, the development and sustainability of the SSE ecosystem would be significantly hindered.

A critical aspect of building a mature and effective Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) ecosystem is the establishment of a solid legal framework. The legal environment serves as the foundation upon which SSE entities operate, providing them with recognition, legitimacy, and the necessary structure to engage in economic activities. Different approaches to legal frameworks, whether specific laws targeting individual SSE entities or broader framework laws recognizing SSE as a unified field, significantly impact the quality and coherence of the ecosystem. These approaches and their implications are illustrated in *Figure 2*. Thus, as can be seen the two main legal approaches to structuring the SSE: specific laws and framework laws. Specific laws provide clear definitions

and legal recognition for individual SSE entities such as associations, cooperatives and foundations. However, this approach can lead to fragmentation and a lack of cohesion within the ecosystem, as it does not treat SSEs as a unitary phenomenon. On the other hand, framework laws define SSE as a single, cohesive field, providing visibility and recognition for SSE as a whole. These laws can adopt either a statutory definition, focusing on specific entities, or a substantial definition, emphasizing the principles that guide SSE. Each approach has its advantages and limitations, as shown in the Figure 2.



* Social enterprises are not a specific legal form, but rather can take a diversity of legal forms (including associations, cooperatives or foundations for example) and legal statuses.

Figure 2. Main approaches and trends in introducing legal frameworks for the SSE

Source: OECD, 2023

The legal framework directly influences the quality and functionality of the SSE ecosystem by shaping how entities interact and operate within the broader economic and social landscape. A robust framework law that balances clarity with inclusivity ensures that diverse SSE entities are recognized while maintaining the coherence of the ecosystem. This creates a stable environment that fosters collaboration, trust, and access to resources such as financing and markets. Conversely, fragmented or unclear legal frameworks can hinder the development of SSE by creating inconsistencies, reducing visibility, and limiting the ability of entities to scale their impact effectively. Thus, the legal framework is a cornerstone of a well-functioning SSE ecosystem.

To illustrate the role of legislative frameworks in shaping effective SSE ecosystems, several countries and regions have implemented notable initiatives that reflect diverse approaches to supporting SSE entities. These examples highlight how tailored legal provisions can promote inclusion, access to resources, and sustainable growth within the sector. The Table 3 provides an overview of key legislative initiatives from various regions, showcasing their unique contributions to fostering the development of SSE.

Table 3. Examples of Legislative Initiatives for Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)

Country/Region	Legislation/Policy	Key Features
France	Law on Social and Solidarity Economy	Defines SSE entities (cooperatives, associations, foundations), provides financial support and promotion.
Canada (Québec)	Law on Social Economy	Recognizes SSE, defines its scope, and supports cooperatives, nonprofits, and foundations with funding policies.
Romania	Law No. 219/2015 on Social Economy	Establishes the framework for SSE, focuses on inclusion and employment for vulnerable groups, and sustainability.
Brazil	Law No. 9.790 (Civil Society Organizations of Public Interest - OSCIP)	Grants nonprofit organizations a special legal status for access to public funding and partnerships.
Morocco	National Strategy for Social and Solidarity Economy	Promotes SSE through professional training, access to financing, and supportive legal frameworks for cooperatives.

Source: Elaborated by the author

These legislative initiatives demonstrate the diverse ways in which governments have recognized and supported the development of the SSE sector. The effectiveness of the legislative initiatives can be further understood by examining the impact of SSE in the countries mentioned in Table 3. These examples demonstrate the varying levels of SSE development and highlight the importance of robust legal frameworks in fostering sustainable growth and social impact.

In *France*, the SSE accounts for approximately 10% of GDP and employs over 2.4 million people, reflecting the significant role that tailored legal and financial support has played in formalizing and expanding the sector. The Law on Social and Solidarity Economy has provided cooperatives, associations, and other entities with a structured framework, enabling them to thrive in both urban and rural areas.

Canada (Québec) presents a similarly advanced ecosystem, with over 7,000 social economy enterprises employing more than 210,000 people. The Law on Social Economy in Québec has not only recognized the scope of SSE but also fostered its growth through funding policies and support for cooperative structures.

In *Romania*, despite the adoption of Law No. 219/2015, the SSE sector remains relatively underdeveloped. With a limited number of active social enterprises, challenges persist in translating legislative intent into actionable support mechanisms. This underscores the need for enhanced implementation measures, such as access to funding and public awareness campaigns, to fully realize the sector’s potential.

In *Brazil*, the OSCIP legislation has enabled nonprofit organizations to access public funding and form partnerships with the government, addressing social inequalities through targeted initiatives. However, structural challenges, such as income disparities and regional inequalities, continue to limit the scalability of SSE entities.

Morocco, with its National Strategy for Social and Solidarity Economy, has focused on fostering cooperative development, particularly in rural areas. Over 20% of the active population is engaged in cooperatives, highlighting the sector's potential for job creation and community development. However, access to financing and infrastructure remains a critical barrier to growth, requiring further legislative and institutional support.

These examples illustrate the varying degrees of SSE success and emphasize the importance of an enabling legal framework tailored to local contexts. While some countries have leveraged their legislation to create thriving SSE ecosystems, others still face significant barriers, demonstrating the need for continuous refinement and targeted policy measures to unlock the full potential of the SSE sector.

Building on these examples, the importance of adapting the legal framework for the SSE becomes even more apparent, not only for fostering inclusive growth but also for addressing critical social and economic challenges. International organizations, such as the OECD and the European Union, have highlighted the necessity of a robust legal foundation to ensure the visibility, legitimacy, and effective operation of SSE entities. The OECD’s *Policy Guide on Legal Frameworks for the Social and Solidarity Economy (2023)* provides a comprehensive roadmap for governments, offering structured recommendations to create a supportive environment for the SSE. These guidelines emphasize the need for policy coherence, targeted supportive measures, and mechanisms for continuous improvement, ensuring the adaptability and resilience of the SSE ecosystem.

Below, Table 4 summarizes the key recommendations from the OECD guide, outlining their objectives and significance in shaping effective legal frameworks for the SSE.

Table 4. Key Recommendations of the OECD Guide

Recommendation	Explanation
Define the SSE and its entities	Establishing clear definitions promotes understanding, coherence, and operational clarity for SSE entities, which enhances their integration into broader economic systems.
Promote legislative coherence	Aligning SSE-related laws across national and subnational levels ensures consistency and prevents fragmentation.
Leverage complementary policies	Combine legal frameworks with supportive measures like fiscal incentives, tailored public procurement rules, and funding schemes to maximize their impact.
Implement evaluation mechanisms	Introduce systematic monitoring and evaluation processes to adapt legal frameworks to evolving SSE dynamics and societal needs.

Source: Elaborated by the author

By implementing systematic evaluation mechanisms, governments can continuously adapt their legal frameworks to address evolving societal needs and SSE dynamics. These recommendations collectively emphasize the importance of creating a supportive legal environment that not only legitimizes SSE but also maximizes its potential to drive sustainable development and social inclusion. When applied effectively, such measures can create a resilient ecosystem where SSE entities contribute significantly to solving systemic social and economic challenges.

4.2. Drivers of Entrepreneurial Activity as Integral Elements of the SSE Ecosystem

While a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem and a robust legislative framework provide the structural foundation for the growth of SSE, the emergence and success of entrepreneurial initiatives within this sector are shaped by a combination of external and internal factors. These drivers, ranging from societal needs and market

opportunities to personal values and cultural norms, influence not only the decision to engage in social entrepreneurship but also the long-term sustainability and impact of such ventures. Understanding these factors is essential to comprehending what motivates entrepreneurs to address societal challenges through innovative and socially driven business models.

Entrepreneurs' decisions to develop social businesses are influenced by a combination of internal and external factors (Dragomir, 2017b). Internal factors, such as personal values, motivations, and awareness, play a pivotal role in shaping an individual's desire and willingness to engage in social entrepreneurship. These factors determine the extent to which an entrepreneur feels compelled to address societal challenges through innovative and impactful ventures. On the other hand, external factors act as triggers that catalyze social entrepreneurial initiatives. Societal needs, market opportunities, supportive policies, and personal experiences often provide the impetus for individuals to take action. Together, these internal and external dimensions create a complex interplay that drives the emergence of social enterprises. Figure 3 illustrates this framework, highlighting the key determinants of entrepreneurial activity in the SSE.

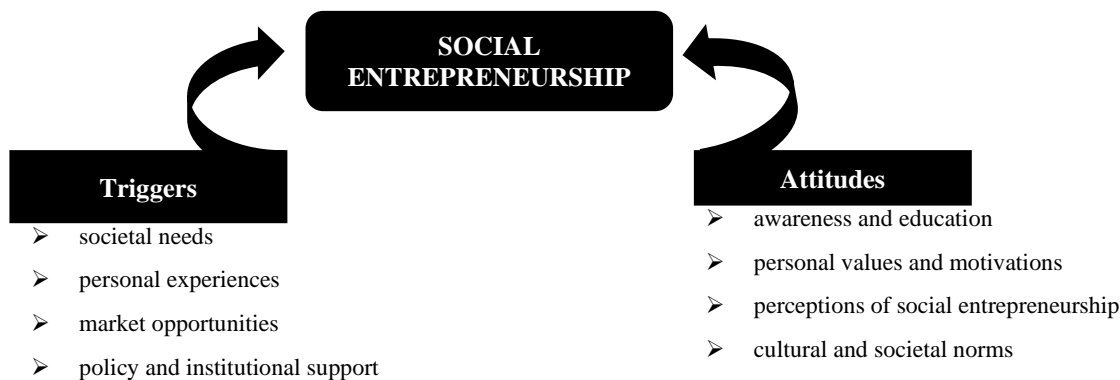


Figure 3. Key Determinants of Social Entrepreneurial Initiatives

Source: Elaborated by the author

To expand on the discussion initiated by the Figure 3, the *internal factors*, represented as personal attitudes, are crucial in shaping how potential entrepreneurs perceive and engage with social entrepreneurship. *Awareness and education* equip individuals with the knowledge to recognize the potential and impact of social enterprises, helping them view this model as both feasible and valuable. *Personal values and motivations*, such as empathy, equity, and a commitment to sustainability, influence their willingness to prioritize social impact over traditional profit-driven goals. Additionally, *perceptions of social entrepreneurship* and the *cultural and societal norms* in which individuals operate can either encourage or discourage their engagement with such ventures. A society that values solidarity and collaboration fosters a more positive attitude toward social entrepreneurship.

The *external triggers*, on the other hand, play a vital role in activating entrepreneurial action. *Societal needs*, such as addressing poverty or inequality, create urgency for innovative solutions. *Personal experiences*, like witnessing or living through social challenges, provide an emotional connection that propels individuals to act. *Market opportunities*, driven by consumer demand for sustainable and ethical products, offer a practical pathway for turning ideas into ventures. Finally, *supportive policies and institutional frameworks*, such as grants, incentives, or mentorship programs, reduce barriers and provide the resources necessary to transform intentions into impactful social enterprises.

The scale and impact of social entrepreneurial initiatives depend on both the personal attitudes of individuals and external triggers that catalyze action. Internal factors, such as personal values, motivations, and awareness, form the foundation for an individual's inclination toward social entrepreneurship. These factors determine the degree to which entrepreneurs are driven by a desire to create meaningful societal impact. However, even the most motivated individuals require external triggers to transition from intention to action.

For instance, an entrepreneur with strong values and a deep understanding of social entrepreneurship may only take action when confronted with a pressing societal need or when supported by favorable policies and institutional mechanisms. Similarly, external triggers such as market opportunities or access to resources may fail to inspire action if the individual lacks intrinsic motivation or awareness. This interplay between internal and external factors underscores their complementary roles within SSE ecosystem, highlighting the need for both personal alignment and structural support to drive meaningful entrepreneurial activity.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The Social and Solidarity Economy emerges as a comprehensive framework that addresses the dual imperatives of sustainable development and social inclusion. By integrating principles of equity, solidarity,

participatory governance, and sustainability, the SSE offers innovative alternatives to traditional economic models, empowering marginalized communities and fostering systemic change. The article underscores the SSE's capacity to advance Sustainable Development Goals by aligning economic, social, and environmental objectives. Case studies illustrate how SSE initiatives contribute to poverty reduction, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, demonstrating their adaptability and potential for replication across diverse socio-economic contexts.

A significant contribution of the article is its identification of the key factors that support the development of the SSE. These factors include robust legal frameworks, supportive institutional ecosystems, access to tailored financing mechanisms, and the promotion of entrepreneurial initiatives. Legislative and policy measures play a critical role in legitimizing and formalizing SSE entities, while fostering collaboration among stakeholders and ensuring equitable access to resources. Moreover, entrepreneurial activity is highlighted as a driving force, catalyzing social innovation and creating sustainable solutions to complex challenges.

The analysis emphasizes the drivers that propel entrepreneurial initiatives in the SSE. Internal factors, such as personal values, motivations, and awareness, play a critical role in shaping the inclination of entrepreneurs to address societal challenges. These internal elements are influenced by the level of awareness and understanding of the importance of social entrepreneurship within the broader public. External triggers, including pressing societal needs, market opportunities, and supportive policies, provide the structural foundation for entrepreneurial action. However, the findings highlight that adjusting the legal framework or providing institutional and financial support alone is insufficient. Measures must also be taken to raise public awareness about the significance of social entrepreneurship, fostering a cultural shift that recognizes its value as a driver of social innovation and sustainable development. By promoting education, outreach campaigns, and community engagement, these efforts can cultivate a societal mindset that not only supports but also actively encourages participation in social entrepreneurial activities, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and impact of the SSE.

In conclusion, the SSE represents a transformative model for achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Its success hinges on supportive legal and institutional frameworks, the mobilization of entrepreneurial activity, and the recognition of the drivers that catalyze social initiatives. Furthermore, sustained efforts to raise public awareness about the value and potential of social entrepreneurship are essential. By leveraging these factors and integrating SSE principles into global and local strategies, the SSE can play a pivotal role in building equitable, resilient, and sustainable societies.

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