SOCIAL ENTERPRISE RESEARCH FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: KEY AGENTS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

LA INVESTIGACIÓN SOBRE EMPRESA SOCIAL DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA INTERNACIONAL: AGENTES CLAVE, DESAFÍOS Y OPORTUNIDADES PARA EL FUTURO

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Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es proporcionar una reflexión conceptual a la luz de la reexaminación de la noción de investigación de la empresa social (ES) dentro de la perspectiva más amplia de los "ecosistemas" desarrollada en el último decenio. Partiendo del análisis de algunos de los desafíos societales más urgentes, se describe el contexto actual de la investigación de la ES. A continuación, se examinan algunos de los proyectos más recientes sobre la ES en particular y la economía social y solidaria en general, así como sobre la innovación social, con miras a señalar las repercusiones -tanto para la comunidad académica como para la sociedad en general- del desarrollo de un "enfoque de ecosistemas de ES". Posteriormente se identifican algunas lagunas permanentes en la investigación de la ES y se hace hincapié en las posibles reconfiguraciones que es probable que se produzcan en cuanto a los desafíos ecosistémicos.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide a conceptual reflection resulting from the re-examination of the notion of social enterprise (SE) research within the wider "ecosystems" perspective developed in the past decade. Departing from the analysis of some of the most urgent societal challenges, the current context for conducting SE research is described. Next, some of the most recent research of SE and the wider social and solidarity economy and social innovation is reviewed with a view on pointing out the repercussions –both for the academic community and society overall– of the development of a "SE ecosystem approach". Some standing SE research gaps are then identified while emphasizing possible reconfigurations likely to occur in terms of ecosystemic challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

A recurrent question when presenting some of the pitfalls of the current socioeconomic system is: *how to change it to make it more sustainable and fairer for all?* This question points directly at the rising levels of inequality and the deficit in citizen participation that jeopardize the achievement of decent living conditions for most citizens. After more than twenty years of active research on social enterprise and related topics such as social and solidarity economy (SSE) and social innovation (we refer to these general research areas as the `SE field´), international communities of researchers have addressed the issue not only of *how to do it* but *who does it*, *with whom* and *for what*.[1] The issue of purpose, a multiplicity of agencies and power relations, and the relational and participative dimensions of the economy indeed lay at the core of what we know as the 'human economy,' where a plurality of socioeconomic institutions can thrive while ensuring that emancipation of the concerned groups, as well as values such as justice and equality, remain at the core (Hart et al. 2010). Therefore a question that arises recurrently at gathering of SE researchers, particularly when it comes to young PhD candidates and recent graduates is "*how can we, as researchers, contribute to the emergence of this new paradigm?*".

In this context, the goal of this paper is to provide a reflection stemming from the re-examination of the notion of SE research within the wider "ecosystems" perspective developed in the past decade as well as some policy reflections around this topic. In order to achieve this, we bring to the fore some urgent societal challenges framing the context where research on SE takes place. Next, the basis for an analysis will be the provided by a brief review of some of the most recent research on SE with a view on pointing to the repercussions —both for the academic community and society overall— of the development of a 'SE ecosystem approach'. Departing from this initial analysis, we identify some standing research gaps in the SE field while

1 A seminal work published in 2013 by Dennis Young posed a crucial question for the sector "If not for profit, for what?". The book is available for download here: https://scholarworks. gsu.edu/facbooks2013/1/. The title and core proposition of the book inspired an international conference on social enterprise held in Belgium in 2017 where not only the organizational purpose but the connections to society were debated and expanded.

emphasizing possible reconfigurations likely to occur in terms of broader ecosystemic challenges.

Bringing this meta-reflection on SE research itself to the fore from a context-dependent analysis contributes to the scientific dialogue and, particularly, to strategies that the new generation of researchers are developing and are likely to consolidate in the near future.

2. WHEN CONTEXTS CANNOT BE IGNORED: TRANSITIONING TOWARD SUSTAINABLE FUTURES FOR ALL

The current article is the result of two lectures presented at a seminar one year before the Covid19 pandemic shook the world.[2] Therefore, the effects of this crisis are not fully taken into account, although it is quite surprising to see how some elements forming the blueprint of the pandemic-accelerated economic and productive breakdown were already in place. Reflections about social transformation and sustainability need to be connected to the wider issues of economic and environmental transitions (including energy and food transitions). Increasing consciousness about climate change opened the door to the urgency to work toward multiple "unavoidable transitions", although the strategies were not alway clear and multiple factors jeopardize their crystallization (Collado 2013, Klein 2014). This multiple transition and chained crises context is where SE research has been taking place, so looking at it more in detail presents a good starting point.

2.1. DESCRIBING CONTEXTS AND POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

Several scenarios have been suggested from various disciplines to bring forward the options that we face as a species at this point in history.[3] Castells and his colleagues (2012) describe an economic system composed of four layers where new values and practices are emerging everywhere to face the current cultural crisis of unsustainability. The first layer is composed of a revamped informational capitalist economy with a dominating professional class considered as a new type of elite. Regarding the public and semi-public sector, they entered a crisis in the late-80s fueled by a neoliberal political agenda with a full New Public Management strategy and concrete austerity measures. This crisis (aggravated by others like the Covid19 pandemic) is here to stay unless the role and relevance of the public sector is reinvigorated with the support of citizen movements and

2 The REJIES-COST International PhD Seminar entitled "Social economy and social enterprise research: Keys from an international perspective" was held at the University of Seville (Spain) in April 2019. More information about this seminar is available here: http://www.empowerse.eu/events/cost-rejies-international-research-workshop/

3 As already mentioned, post-Covid19 crisis scenarios are not taken into account for the description presented here but the reflections and conclusions remain valid in the current "new normality" context.

adaptation to emerging societal needs (e.g. new municipalism to increase local governments' autonomy in negotiating with other government levels). Traditional economic activities in industry and even agriculture will be oriented to the survival of their workers, who will occupy low productivity and low-skill jobs. In many cases, these are 'bulshit jobs' that are creating a full generation of the working poor (Graeber 2013). Indeed, in-work poverty constitutes a growing source of inequality: in 2017, 9.4% of all EU-28 workers lived in households at risk of poverty, which corresponds to 20.5 million people (Peña-Casas et al. 2019). Castells and his colleagues call the fourth layer of the current economy 'an alternative economy sector', based on a different set of values about the meaning of life (Castells et al. 2012). The values driving these actors and groups have been reshaped by current circumstances and include respect for the planet, interconnectedness, citizen mobilization and the common good.

Feminist and social philosopher Nancy Fraser (2014) laid out three possible scenarios to overcome the 2008 crisis. In the first scenario, political elites react on time enough to avoid a new crisis but since profound change does not occur, inequalities increase. In the aftermath of the pandemic it will be abundantly clear that unfortunately, the commodification of nature that Karl Polanyi warned about is yet another illusion shattered by a small virus. The second scenario Fraser proposes describes a downward spiral of disintegration as a result of political elites' inability to react. Society overall enters into this spiral proving containment measures useless. The third scenario depicts civil society regaining strength to force political elites to review the structures that ensure social justice and avoid rampant inequality.

The role of the third sector and SE in the health and social service sector offers a concrete illustration of one of these scenarios. For instance, Pestoff (2009) has studied these services across countries and specific service fields, such as child care, considering them as paradigmatic of a crucial policy for citizens that attract a lot of interest and budgets, and where social enterprises have thrived. The author describes three different evolutionary moments of the most probable scenario in Europe in a framework of efficiency-driven rationalization and neoliberal budget setting. The first moment of Pestoff's scenario includes massive cuts in public budgets for social services resulting in a wide number of families and communities without access to these services. The following moment is characterized by the rampant privatization of social services leading to increased levels of individualization and presence of private companies. Lastly, at this point there could be enough room for the third sector to negotiate action areas in this formerly public, now shrunken policy space, complete with new players with different goals to maximize.

2.2. INCORPORATING POWER INTO THE PICTURE

A consensus among many authors, including those previously cited, seems to emerge on the following points in today's socio-economic scenarios: the re-marketization of spheres that are basic for the reproduction of life; the collapse of the public sector as we knew it; and the anti-austerity social movements that have crystallized in concrete socioeconomic forms of organization with a political transformative agenda. In addition to describing possible scenarios, it becomes urgent to recognize the signs of a downward spiral in light of the continuous rise of inequality and the speed of planetary ecological destruction. Beyond the "evolution or revolution" dichotomy, Edgar Morin suggests the strategy of metamorphosis as the only complex but possible way, versus the increasingly plausible way of disintegration (2013). In Morin's terms, the metamorphosis idea is better suited for the complexity of our societies facing objective resource limitations.

Moreover, when compared to possible revolutions implying a destruction and reconstruction from scratch approach, Morin's proposal applies a principle of conservation: both of nature as well as of some of the cultural heritage from previous societies and civilizations. At this point it is also relevant to bring forward the role of power in Morin's concept of metamorphosis. Thus, following a relational idea of power such as Foucault's (1980), the potential metamorphosis should also change how those power relationships occur in our society. In this sense, the definition of power or even its consideration as a variable of analysis in research is often neglected. When applying Foucault's view to the current analysis, a metamorphosis in society could also result in changes in complex power relationships such as those included under the concept of biopower, i.e. changes in norms which are internalized by people, rather than forced upon them by an external force.

Another relevant power analysis which we can bring to the fore is the concept of symbolic power by Bourdieu (1984). This type of power was firstly defined as "name, renown, prestige, honour, glory, authority, everything which constitutes symbolic power as a recognized power" and it points to the fundamental role played by education and culture in determining how hierarchies of power are situated and reproduced across societies. This is to say, that in order to fully understand the different scenarios and the underlying "theory of change" (i.e. the proposal of a metamorphosis) we also need to understand the role of power. Such an endeavor requires using more complex definitions and approaches than—using Foucault's proposals again—liberal, psychoanalytical or even typical Orthodox Marxist ones. Further analysis is advisable to link Morin to Foucault's work on power or Bourdieu's symbolic power, and to further consider Fraser's critical approaches connecting capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism (2009) as well as de Sousa Santos' 'ecology of knowledges' (de Sousa Santos 2003b, 2004a).

The work of Lukes (2005) constitutes a significant attempt to transcend traditional limitations in the analysis of power: his proposal of power as tridimensional overcomes the behavioural limitations of more traditional and simplistic approaches to power, which tend to interpret it only as the capacity to decide or impose certain decisions on others, or just the capacity to avoid certain issues. Lukes tries in this way to include and synthesize the works of Foucault and Bourdieu while also avoiding some of their pitfalls. Thus, his third dimension of power as ideology, having the capacity to influence people's wishes and thoughts, can offer a potent basis for ecosystemic approaches to change.

`Ecosystem´, as Barco Serrano et al. (2019) signal, is a successful metaphor which has been gaining relevance in analyzing general entrepreneurship and particularly social entrepreneurship. We can date back to 1993 the first use of this term in studies of mainstream business (Moore 1993), and since then several others have addressed the influence of the specific nature of the context (or 'ecosystem') in which enterprises operate (Amin 2009, Bacq and Janssen 2011, Baum 2009, Di Domenico, Haugh and Tracey 2010, Kerlin 2013). More recently we can mention the works of Spigel (2017) and Lévesque (2016) in relation to the social economy. The term supposes a significant step forward in increasingly complex models to understand systemic interactions and dynamics, to the point of including less evident variables such as cultural norms in recent proposals as explained by Biggeri et al. (2018). However, as emphasized by Barco Serrano et al. (2019) it still falls "short of its full potential" and precisely one of its shortcomings is the absence of a highly significant variable like power, and the way it operates and flows within the ecosystem. Moreover, this accounts for including other "contextual and intangible elements such as social capital, mutual trust, and institutional factors that can foster or hinder the emergence of bottom-up dynamics and organizations". In this way and in more general terms, this ecosystem perspective can include sufficient elements to understand and explain some current trends such as the rise of the far-right in democratic states, the existence of illiberal states or other developments which seem to be counter-intuitive if addressed from a less complex perspective and with an unidimensional definition of power.

This could result in a more nuanced scenario that accounts for the underpinnings of the degrowth proposal. As Susan Paulson (2017: 427) explains, "degrowth was explicitly conceptualized by a network of thinkers initially centered in France, among them philosopher André Gorz," referring to initiatives "building toward low-impact livelihoods that prioritize well-being and equity". This proposal places the above-mentioned contextual and intangible elements, as well as Lukes' ideological dimension of power, in a central position of analysis and among the viable options to address some

of the current challenges. Indeed, in her analysis of feasible changes, Paulson (2017: 440), explicitly mentions Gramsci and points out that "historical crises can destabilize that power, opening transformative possibilities". However such possibilities need to incorporate a more nuanced analysis of power struggles and the barriers against change at play. It requires an analysis where the inter-relational nature of power is evident and which no longer implies a simplistic division between elites and the public. However it should consider the iterative and dialogical relationship between them and the need to explicitly address the decolonization of "worldviews of expansionist myths and values" in line with proposals from Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

Furthermore, the idea of transition is central in degrowth proposals. For instance, degrowth is linked with the transition towns movement which was born in the UK around 2004 linked with permaculture and peak oil proposals. Both proposals also explore the need to address the above-mentioned power dimensions and simultaneously evoke a similar idea of change akin to Morin's metamorphosis. This also overcomes the dichotomy of "evolution versus revolution" and allows for using the concept of transition without avoiding the clear role of (the three dimensions of) power and the notion of struggle which it represents.

3. A RESEARCH FIELD IN THE PROCESS OF CONSOLIDATION

Numerous authors (including Borzaga, Chaves, Defourny, Monzón or Nyssens) agree that economics and business have been the dominant disciplines in the SE field. Research stemming from these fields has very effectively explained the economic rationale behind the emergence of social enterprises, as well as the characteristics, dynamics, and strategies of these organizations in an uncertain and resource-limited environment and, to some extent, their role in wider economic systems (Borzaga and Defourny 2001, Nyssens 2006). Sociology has contributed to defining the interplay of agencies, power relations and relevant notions such as 'social capital' (e.g. Lévesque, Bourque, and Forgues 2001, Roy et al. 2014). Political science researchers —mostly in Europe— have also studied the emergence and development of social enterprise and their interaction with policy-making, given the close contact that these organizations have with European public administrations at all levels (e.g. Evers 2001, Nicholls and Teasdale 2017, Pestoff and Hulgård 2016). The burst of the 2008 financial and economic crisis and the turn towards austerity and overtly neoliberal policy-making contributed to the advent of a more financial approach to social enterprise research, as illustrated by the vast body of literature on "social" and "impact investment" (Clarkin and Cangioni 2016, Nicholls and Daggers 2016 or Lehner and Nicholls 2014).

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The seed of this paper first emerged during an academic seminar where the authors were invited to deliver the opening and closing lectures. Based on the personal experience spanning several decades in the field of SE research and practice, the combination of two different perspectives (academic versus consultant approaches) casted new light on issues that proved to strike a chord with the audience of the seminar, mainly composed of early career researchers, recent PhD graduates and PhD candidates. Several salient reflections resulted, stemming from two crucial areas: the research purpose and its link with society. Namely, the traditional topic of engaging in meaningful dialogue with stakeholders and ensuring the transfer of knowledge to society has gained a new sense of urgency in a transition context: how can stakeholders be involved not only in data gathering but also in other phases of research, such as the agenda setting, analysis and interpretation of results, and adaptation to public policies and practitioners' tools? Secondly, when we consider the researchers' active engagement in their object of study and the agendas for transformation that each of them carries, how will this impact the research produced?

This text is therefore an attempt to address some of these questions currently cutting through the professional and human search of many researchers of current and future generations. To do so, we consider the ecosystems perspective and the transition context as two positive factors for developing SE research that contributes to unleashing the transformative potential of this complex field. This exploratory work seeks to unearth a promising line of reflection for developing future research in the SE field by scholars at the beginning of their career. As a conceptual paper, this is done so mainly based on the authors' experience as well as through secondary data analysis.

The basic methodology mobilized is the desk review of secondary data based on two types of techniques: literature review and document analysis. The literature review included the analysis of articles and volumes covering the SE field as well as the work of philosophers and thinkers supporting our argumentations. Regarding the document analysis, we reviewed the reports and methodological notes of five major international projects or initiatives, namely the European EFESEIIS and SE Mapping projects, the global ICSEM and TIESS initiatives and the most recent ILO project.

Regarding the selection criteria, we applied authors' proximity to the process and the team of researchers. The selection was made considering some of the most significant scientific projects departing from the nine ones included in the Synthesis Report of the SE Mapping (European Commission 2020). The most recent ILO project was included as a way to reflect the perspective of a UN-supported project. TIESS was added to this analysis as

a unique case on a knowledge transfer center combining scientific, practice and policy-making expertise.

Considering the large amount of material produced in the course of these projects, we focused on intermediate results reports, final publications, and internal work documents. Table 1 below offers the basic information about these initiatives and projects.

Table 1. Projects and initiatives analyzed

Acronym	Full title	Duration	Website
1. EFESEIIS	Enabling the Flourishing and Evolution of Social Entrepreneurship for Innovative and Inclusive Societies	2013-2016	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/111161/factsheet/en
2. ICSEM	International Comparative Social Enterprise Models Project	2013-2019	https://www.iap-socent.be/icsem-project
3. ILO Finance	Financial Mechanisms for Innovative Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems	2018-2019	https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/projects/WCMS_626176/lang--en/index.htm
4. SE Mapping	Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe	2018-2020	https://europa.eu/!Qq64ny
5. TIESS	Territoires innovants en économie sociale et solidaire (Innovative territories in social and solidarity economy)	Since 2013	https://tiess.ca/

The analysis of the five projects and one initiative was conducted through a basic grid designed to provide insight on how ecosystems were described and operationalized as well as the position and role assigned to research, both vis-à-vis social enterprises themselves along with practitioners and policy makers. Thus, the selection of questions for analysis is based on the key dimensions which can provide more insights regarding the notion of SE research within the wider "ecosystems" perspective developed in the past decade as well as their impact in policy.

Table 2. Grid for analysis of initiatives

Item for analysis	Brief description
a. Goal(s) of the initiative	This question aims to assess the main (research) objective of the project/initiative. When there are multiple goals, they are all reflected although the emphasis is on the idea of ecosystem.
b. Policy background and context of the initiative	Although it may not be directly mentioned in the initiative description, it is important to gauge the current political and policy development environment in order to understand potential existing notions of ecosystem, even if implicitly stated in the text.
c. Provided definition of ecosystem	Sometimes, the initiative provides an explicit definition of ecosystem while others it describes how the various elements interact.
d. Governance system of the initiative	The way in which decision-making occured within the initiative and how coordination flows among the various agents, including stakeholders.
e. Stakeholders' participation in the initiative	Were stakeholders involved in the initiative? Although a variety of groups can participate in projects there are different levels of involving them. This question describes the way in which stakeholders were incorporated into the project.
f. Main impact at policy and/or praxis level	This question addresses the impact on policy-making identified by the project itself. When available it also considers other unplanned impact although considering the usual timeframe needed for new policy, such impact is something observable only in the medium and long term.
g. Tools for practitioners and/ or policymakers	If the project has any specific outputs aimed at non-academic stakeholders, which ones are they and how were they developed?

3.2. ANALYSING RELEVANT RECENT SE PROJECTS

EFESEIIS - Enabling the Flourishing and Evolution of Social Entrepreneurship for Innovative and Inclusive Societies Project (2013- 2016)

a. Goals of the initiative

The project had the goal of "providing a better understanding of Social Entrepreneurship" with the mission of fully understanding "the conditions under which social entrepreneurship starts, develops and can contribute effectively and efficiently to solving societal challenges in a sustainable way"[4]. Its stated objectives were:

- To construct an evolutionary theory of Social Entrepreneurship
- To identify the features of an "Enabling Eco-System for Social Entrepreneurship"
- To identify the "new generation" of social entrepreneurs
- To provide advice to stakeholders

b. Policy background and context of the initiative

This is a EU funded project under its Seventh Framework Programme and it can be included in the increasing number of initiatives in the area of Social Entrepreneurship. It began in 2014, three years after the launch of the Social Business Initiative (SBI) by the European Commissionand lasted until 2016.

c. Provided definition of ecosystem

In their main project paper addressing the concept of SE ecosystems, Hazenberg et al. (2016) signal that "research has also focused on how different social enterprise forms emerge within nation states based upon the differing socio-economic conditions across regions" and that "differences can related to differing historical, legal, political, social and economic structures". However, one of its most interesting proposals is to deepen the ecological nature of the metaphor "through the concept of evolutionary theory, in which social enterprises operate within ecosystems and compete with other organisms for survival". Furthermore, they also signal that prior research has over-simplified "the mechanisms involved in a social system involving human beings". This is a major step in making a fuller use of the metaphor to both analyse different territories at all levels and to provide a more sophisticated policy instrument to better address the complexity of real-life situations.

4 All the information related to this project and its results are available at http://www.fp7-efeseiis.eu

Finally, Biggeri et al. (2018) also suggest that interactions go beyond the local area, that they "should go beyond the relationship between social enterprises and the locality they serve and embrace all the different parts of the ecosystem, some of which might not be set in the same locality".

d. Governance system of the initiative

This research project included partners from the 10 countries in which the analysis was carried out and three international organizations:

ENSIE - European Network of Social Integration Enterprises
EVPA - European Venture Philanthropy Association
UNIDO - United Nations Industrial Development Organization

e. Stakeholders' participation in the initiative

As a traditional research project it did not foresee any change in the traditional roles but it included stakeholders in the governance system mainly through the inclusion of ENSIE and also EVPA.

f. Main impact at policy and/or praxis level

This project was designed with the aim of producing policy-level impact. Despite the difficulty in assessing this, it has already been used in the drafting of the European Commission's policy brief "How Can Policy Makers Improve Their Country's Support To Social Enterprises?".[5]

g. Tools for practitioners and/or policymakers

Most outputs of the project can be considered as tools for practitioners (mostly in the area of advocacy) and for policymakers. It is worth highlighting the above-mentioned framework proposed by Biggeri et al. (2018) which can be seen as a sophisticated tool to help policy design and advocacy strategies.

ICSEM - International Comparative Social Enterprise Models Project (2013-2019)

a. Goals of the initiative

ICSEM aimed at comparing SE models and their respective institutionalization processes across the world.[6] The project relies on the participation of researchers from over 50 countries, who contributed with country-specific and/or field-specific analysis of SE models in addition to comparative work across world regions. All types of researchers, from

5 See https://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy_briefs/efeseiis_pb-1115.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none
6 All the information related to this project and its results are available at https://www.iap-socent.be/icsem-project

experienced to early career researchers as well as PhD candidates joined the project as country partners. All aspects of the project were shared with participants all along the process, including the scientific goals and methodology, the coordination procedures and the governance principles.

The project sought to provide an analysis that combined an analytical approach allowing for a combination of a wide diversity of social enterprise models together with empirical evidence, through statistical exploitation of a large international dataset, resulting from a common albeit adapted survey carried out in 50 countries. The apparent confusion of the SE landscape was overcome by a two-step research strategy that included: 1) mapping major SE models to capture the diversity among SE models and 2) capturing the internal diversity in each SE model (reliance on local researchers' deep understanding of their context).

b. Policy background and context of the initiative

Considering the large number of countries covered by this project, the variety of policy backgrounds go far beyond the scope of this text. That said, and notwithstanding the unique policy background and context in each region, the work conducted as part of ICSEM contributed to overcoming the fragmentation of this knowledge area, therefore creating a common frame of reference for incipient policy systems aiming to support the development of social enterprises. Moreover, concrete areas were developed within the project more specifically, namely work integration social enterprises, and some geographic regions also generated more in depth analysis such as Asia, Brazil, Canada and Central and Eastern Europe.

c. Provided definition of ecosystem

From a research methodology standpoint, no definition of SE (or ecosystem) was imposed or even suggested a priori to participating researchers. The initial question suggested to local researchers encouraged them to activate an interpretative attitude in order to reply to the question: to what extent does the notion of SE make sense in your national context and with respect to existing "neighbouring" concepts? The issue of grey zones and blurring barriers among conceptions within the ecosystem was constantly present. Moreover, instead of trying to capture the huge diversity of SE at a time, the project relied on the notion of "SE models" which encompasses categories, types, classes of social enterprises.

d. Governance system of the initiative

A specificity of ICSEM was the nature of its governance system and, particularly, the various resources mobilized. On the one hand, the central resource is the work invested by their scientific coordinators and all the individual researchers,

made on a volunteer basis. The project mobilized a budget initially as part of a wider research initiative funded by the Belgian Science Policy office that later also received funding from private foundations. This budget supported the hiring of a part time project coordinator and the organization of major ICSEM meetings, including, when possible, research members' travel expenses. Exceptionally, it also provided small allowances to some PhD candidates and post-doctoral researchers willing to link their doctoral or post-doctoral work to the project and to make a contribution during or after their PhD research.

Researchers interested in joining the research project did not have to cover all SE models in a given country; on the contrary, intra-national collaboration among researchers was encouraged from the coordinators. This resulted in intensive discussions and even collaborations among researchers interested in similar topics who brought different perspectives to the table and made complementary contrib utions.

e. Stakeholders' participation in the initiative

As such, non-academic stakeholders were not directly involved in ICSEM but the project managed to ignite a worldwide community of academic stakeholders. It is worth noting, as well, that some of these researchers can be considered as part-time practitioners and supporters of the SE ecosystem in their own countries, therefore blurring boundaries at times between non-academic stakeholders and researchers.

f. Main impact at policy-making and/or praxis level

In addition to the numerous publications, the main impact of ICSEM can be summarized as threefold. Firstly, three of the four models advanced by the project (the social business model, the social cooperative model, the entrepreneurial non-profit model) found strong empirical support in almost all of the participating countries. Secondly, the work process contributed to consolidate an international community capable of approaching a complex study object with a critical and yet focused approach and with a varying level of influence on the development of the SE ecosystem in the country (particularly in countries with an nonexistent or nascent SE community). Thirdly, it offers the first attempt to address the tension between competing models in less developed ecosystems, where up until recently, policy recipes were exclusively based on the models proposed by main donors (cooperation for development agencies, big NGOs and impact investors, for example).

g. Tools for practitioners and/or policy-makers

Two major motivations drove the research design implemented in ICSEM. Firstly, experts realized that an unifying conceptualization of SE across the world constitutes an impossible quest. Such realization stems

from the experience accumulated in several international projects focused on SE as well the knowledge accumulated within the EMES network. Secondly, comparative analysis lacks integrated theoretical foundations and empirical surveys for testing SE typologies within the same country and at the international level. As signalled above, this can also facilitate resisting donors' agendas when developing early stage SE ecosystems.

ILO Finance - Financial Mechanisms for Innovative Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems (SSE) (2018-2019)

a. Goals of the initiative

To foster a better understanding of the global ecosystems, i.e. the relations and interactions between a number of stakeholders favouring SSE, and the financial mechanism that supports and consolidate them.

b. Policy background and context of the initiative

As stated in the Terms of Reference of the project, "Financial crises, limited access to affordable credit on the part of SSE organizations and the commercialization of microcredit all point to the need to transform financial systems. SSE organizations have difficulty accessing funding which prevents all stakeholders, including governments from realizing the full potential of SSE for the creation of decent jobs, among other things (…). A variety of alternative finance schemes such as community-based saving schemes, complementary currencies and social impact bonds are playing an important role in community risk management and local development. While they often operate best at a local level and on a small scale, these and other SSE initiatives point to the potential for crafting a more stable and people-centred monetary ecosystem embodying a far greater plurality of currencies and financial institutions".

c. Provided definition of ecosystem

The project used the well-known definition by Ben Spigel as a basis: "the union of localized cultural outlooks, social networks, investment capital, universities, and active economic policies that create environments supportive of innovation-based ventures" (Spigel 2017: 1042).[7] However the research team proposed to go beyond this and to include in the analysis the "internal and external flows of relevant variables such as information, power, organization, resources"[8] among others and to identify its size "(whether there is a sufficient number of participants) but also how it is organized:

7 Spigel, B. (2017). The Relational Organization of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 41(1), 49–72. https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12167
8   S Barco Serrano, S., Bodini, R., Roy, M., Salvatori, G. (2019) 97.

whether the flow of information and resources is coherent with the goal of producing beneficial social impact or, more specifically, in increasing the capabilities of SSE actors to achieve such impact"[9]. Finally it proposes to recognize that "ecosystems are not static systems, but constantly in flux".[10]

d. Governance system of the initiative
The research project had a two level governance system, one that consisted of the relations with the "client" (International Labour Organisation, ILO) and the other which included the relationship between the authors of the report and the different researchers carrying out the country analysis in the eight selected countries (Cape Vert, Colombia, Ecuador, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Morocco and the Canadian province of Quebec). It also involved the key stakeholder organizations in each of the countries at the national level. For example, they acted as key informants helping to design the final local research, and were also included in selecting local researchers (some of them wore both "hats": researcher and advocate/social entrepreneur), and they were offered the opportunity to jointly develop a mapping initiative but it remains unfinished.

e. Stakeholders' participation in the initiative
Considering the ambitious scope of the research (eight countries and some of them with the largest SSE ecosystems in the world) the researchers adopted a pragmatic approach and assessed the different ecosystems by analysing existing academic and grey material as well as interviews with key stakeholders and informants in the eight countries and in the international ecosystem. It also proposed an initial participatory mapping of the actors in some of the countries, though this desisted due to resource constraints and insufficient engagement.
However it is worth mentioning that this research highlighted the hybrid role of national researchers, social entrepreneurs and activists, since two of the national researchers can not be considered full time researchers but also social entrepreneurs or advocates (Ecuador and Luxembourg). Furthermore, also some of the international researchers are at the same time researchers and social entrepreneurs.

f. Main impact at policymaking and/or praxis level
Given the international nature of the ILO, its policy-making impact is yet to be known since it will necessarily result from their prestige, legitimacy and influence on one side and, in the case of own political documents, it will require much more time considering the level of production of SSE related policy documents from ILO. As for the main findings generating a significant

9 *Ibidem*
10 *Ibidem*

impact, we can highlight two: the counter-intuitive importance of internal sources of capital over traditional financial products such as credit, and the crucial role of endogenous development and the polyarchic structure of ecosystems.

g. Tools for practitioners and/or policy-makers

The research produced a series of recommendations, closely related to the increasing relevance of ecosystems both in descriptive and prescriptive terms:

- The importance of having a mix of different financial tools.
- Support for internal capitalization.
- Role of guarantee schemes.
- Strengthening of ecosystems through co-design processes.
- Moving beyond finance and legal frameworks.
- Need for better data and statistics.
- Cultivating the international dimension.
- Financial mechanisms need to be designed to cope with complexity.

SE Mapping - Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe (2018-2020)

a. Goals of the initiative

This version of the EC-funded mapping of SE in 28 Member States and seven neighboring countries is the second iteration of the initial mapping completed in 2014. The resulting updated mapping study completed in 2020 focused on six areas:

- the historical background and conditions of the emergence of social enterprises;
- the evolution of the concept and the existing national policy and legal framework for social enterprise;
- the scale and characteristics of social enterprise activity;
- networks and mutual support mechanisms;
- research, education and skills development; and
- the resources available to social enterprises.

Although the study does not provide recommendations for future developments, it provides insights on the existing debate in national contexts as well as an overview of possible developmental trends.

b. Policy background and context of the initiative

As stated in the foreword of the comparative synthesis report, social enterprises are "in the spotlight of policy-making" both at EU and national level. Since the adoption of the SBI in 2011, 16 EU Member States have

adopted new specific legislation in the field and 11 EU Member States have created formal strategies or policies for supporting SE development. In 2015, the Council adopted conclusions on promoting the social economy and a European Action Plan for Social Economy is under way (expected for autumn 2021).

c. Provided definition of ecosystem

The first mapping update introduced the concept of the ecosystem describing it as focussing on six features considered important by the European Commission for supportive policy frameworks for SE. These features included: national policy and legal frameworks for SE; business development services and support schemes specifically designed for social enterprises; networks and mutual support mechanisms; social impact investment markets; impact measurement and reporting systems; and marks, labels and certification schemes. This definition emerged top-down based on the policy priorities of the commissioning party. The Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool, jointly developed by the European Commission and the OECD, added one feature, bringing the number of relevant features of an enabling policy ecosystem to seven.

The 2020 version of the mapping provides a snapshot of different traditions and conditions of emergence, the variety of public policies and diverse legal entities, the institutional frameworks, many hurdles and obstacles but also new opportunities.

d. Governance system of the initiative

An EU Coordination team was responsible for the conception of the study and its implementation and management. As for the stakeholders engagement strategy, the main contact point with the local stakeholders community was the national researcher participating in the study who worked closely with one member of the EU Coordination team leading the stakeholder process. The national researcher was also encouraged to assemble a stakeholder core group to act as an immediate resource provider reading drafts, providing new contacts and support throughout the process. Initially a pool of stakeholders was put together, ranging from 10 up to over 80 stakeholders in some countries. A basic questionnaire was then distributed aimed at bringing issues to the surface within the ecosystem that could remain hidden. Lastly, a stakeholder meeting was organized with 10 to 15 participants.

e. Stakeholders' participation in the initiative

This update included a stakeholders' engagement strategy aimed at capturing insights and analysis stemming from various agents within

national ecosystems in all of the 28 countries where a full report was produced. Considered mainly a quantitative methodology aimed at producing facts, figures and examples, mappings have been criticized as being normative, simplistic and promoting standardization of otherwise heterogeneous realities. However, none of the EU mapping updates provides any evaluation or assessment of any framework condition affecting social enterprises or recommendations about what to do next. Recognising the current conceptual and methodological limitations in measuring and mapping SE activity, the study adopts a pragmatic approach to generate a 'first map' based on existing academic and grey material and exchanges with over 750 stakeholders across Europe.

f. Main impact at policy-making and/or praxis level

The main result of the mapping was the confirmation that social enterprises, as defined by the SBI, constitute a growing trend across the covered countries. At the policy level, it confirmed that the first EU-wide strategy developed to support social enterprises, the SBI, was a decisive impulse for the field. It also brought to the foreground the key role of public procurement in the development of the field not only as a means to support its activity but also as a contribution to the establishment of a new sphere of interaction with policymakers at all levels.

g. Tools for practitioners and/or policy-makers

The impact of better knowledge of social enterprises and their ecosystems for policy-making in Europe is summarized in a figure included in the introduction of the Synthesis report (see Figure 1) and it refers to how updated, periodic and analytical pictures not only benefit policy-making at the EU and national levels but it also encourages self-recognition and a stronger identity for social enterprises and the organizations representing them.

TIESS - Territoires innovants en économie sociale et solidaire [Innovative Territories in Social and Solidarity Economy] (2013-present)

a. Goals of the initiative

As stated in its webpage the mission of this innovative initiative is to "contribute to territorial development through knowledge transfer by equipping SSE organizations so that they can address societal issues in an innovative way and transform their practices".[11] To our knowledge, this is the

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11 "Contribuer au développement territorial par le transfert de connaissances en outillant les organismes d'économie sociale et solidaire afin qu'ils puissent faire face aux enjeux de

first institution fully concerned with the transfer of knowledge in relation to social innovation, aimed and governed by and for SSE organizations.

Figure 1. Impact of better knowledge of social enterprises and their ecosystems for policy-making in Europe
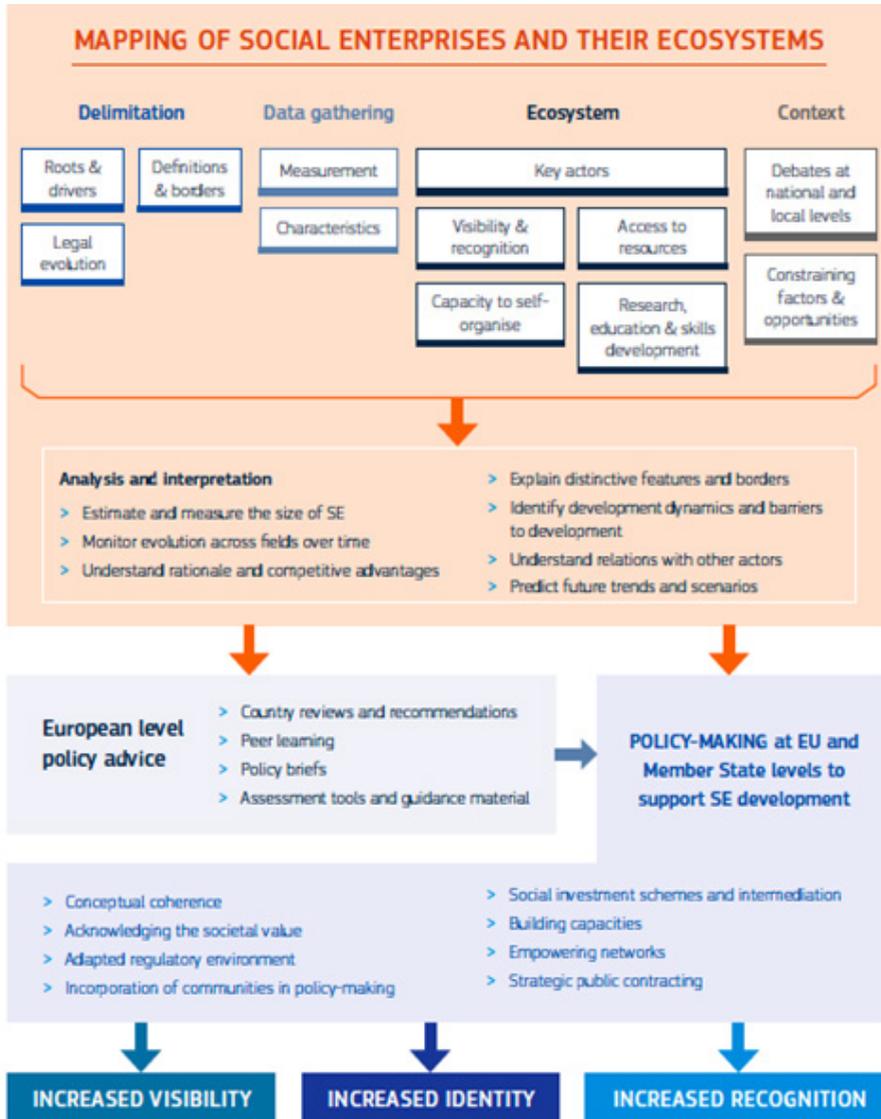
Source: European Commission, 2020.

société de façon innovante et transformer leurs pratiques", translation by the authors. Available at: https://tiess.ca/qui-sommes-nous/le-tiess-en-bref/

b. Policy background and context of the initiative

The birth of this innovative institution needs to be related to a distinctive feature of Quebec's ecosystem: the long standing tradition of social economy partnership research. Researchers have played a key role in the development of the ecosystem and the different key institutions and organizations of the SSE have also played a role not only in the governance of the partnership but also in collaborating in the research. In this context, the issue of knowledge transfer with all its challenges and requests acquired substantial relevance. According to its website, the process was initiated in 2001 and resulted in the creation of TIESS in 2013 with a first assembly with some 60 SSE organizations and research institutions.

c. Provided definition of ecosystem

The initiative does not provide a detailed definition but from its use we can derive that they are using mostly it as a system of actors and stakeholders. For example, they state in one key policy document that "For many years now, an ecosystem supporting social innovation has been built in Quebec, in particular by social economy, social finance and local development organizations".[12]

d. Governance system of the initiative

TIESS follows a governance which is typical in Quebec. Its board is composed of 21 voting members, with 14 nominated by their organizations and seven are elected according to thematic electoral colleges. It also includes observers, which in this moment hail from two different public bodies and a highly recognized researcher (currently Prof. Benoît Lévesque). Besides this board there is a Scientific Council with one representative member at the board. The most interesting part of this governance is that it recognizes the increasingly hybrid nature of research and therefore there are representatives from SSE stakeholders also present in this council.[13]

e. Stakeholders' participation in the initiative

As we can deduct from the previous section, various categories of non-academic stakeholders participate actively both in the governance and in the work of TIESS. One example is the project regarding evaluation and impact measurement which included a committee of partners made of research organizations and SSE actors.

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12 Translation by the authors. https://www.tiess.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/VF-Lettre-ouverte-Rapport-innovation-sociale-et-finance-sociale-05-0..._ef-1.pdf
13 https://tiess.ca/structures-de-travail/conseil-scientifique/

f. Main impact at policy-making and/or praxis level

As stated in one case study[14] "TIESS has developed an innovative transfer approach based on the co-construction of knowledge that recognizes the complementary nature of academic and practical knowledge to address societal issues" where "practical knowledge is deemed to be as significant as research knowledge".

g.Tools for practitioners and/or policy-makers

This can be considered a toolbox for practitioners and policy-makers but also for the governance of the entire ecosystem. It does not aim at advancing research but at transferring it, liaising research and practitioners and scanning practices and innovation. In doing so, it embodies an excellent example of the role of research and knowledge in building a more favourable and resilient ecosystem for SSE. It also shows the hybrid nature of research and practice and their relation with policy.

4. NEW LENSES TO DRAW NEW HORIZONS
4.1. DISCUSSION FROM THE ANALYSIS OF INITIATIVES

The compared analysis of the five initiatives yields some interesting thoughts with regard to the content of the research and the research process itself.

Firstly, it becomes apparent that the degree of freedom allowed to researchers to set the agenda guiding their work tends to vary. On the one hand, when the commissioning party is external, the assignation process follows a competitive process to access the funds (whether research grants or contracts for services) and when there exist previously defined public research agendas, the margin for innovation from research groups is limited. On the contrary, researcher-initiated research projects also exist as exemplified by ICSEM. This option, however, entails ensuring alternative funding to maintain the core functions of the large project, large amounts of voluntary work and the need to act toward the common good in the creation of scientific knowledge. Recent developments in public procurement policy frameworks, however, could offer some interesting paths for greater margin for innovation, such as competitive dialogues or innovation partnerships, for example.

Secondly, the reach of research in terms of informing policy making processes tends to be larger when the commissioning party is already a political body or institution (EC or ILO). Indeed, the SE Mapping study

14 The Canadian Federal government funded, within its Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy, a series case studies of social innovation in action across Canada on 2018. The TIESS was one of them. They can be found here: https://www.impactinvestmentforum. com/sisf-case-studies

and the ILO project prove that academic research represents a key institutionalization factor of social enterprises, particularly in CEE countries and other countries where a SE ecosystem does not exist. However, stakeholder involvement remains an under-explored way to increase the impact of research on society, not only in policy but also in practice.

Thirdly, it becomes apparent from our reduced review that there are efficient models of reflective and empowering co-construction, such as TIESS.

Fourthly, though stakeholder involvement in research program has increased, there is still room for improvement both in tender services and in calls for proposals in order to hybridize research, i.e. the role of researchers in agenda setting/policy design, the role of social entrepreneurs and representative as researchers (as illustrated by the ILO project) and/or the increase of research capabilities of public actors and SE representative bodies. Such hybridization has also been initiated with the institutionalisation of the co-construction of knowledge through the TIESS initiative and through research engagement in institutions such ILO, the creation of research committees in SE representative bodies and through formal and informal fora allowing for interaction between these actors and stakeholders.

Fifthly, there is room for further improvement in terms of horizontal governance in the three types of key stakeholders: funders (public and private ones), social entrepreneurs and their representatives bodies and research bodies. Participation is increasing at project level and in some specific advisory committees, but we could also envisage cross-participation in boards and other governing bodies such as the case of TIESS.

In short, there seems to be a balance to strike in terms of scientific and financial autonomy as well as stakeholder participation and achievable goals.

In terms of scientific challenges for SE research, three seem to emerge from recent research: to evolve from the anecdotic to the explanatory when it comes to SE emergence, development and evolution over time; to visibilize the variety and the impact of SE across activity areas and from a comparative perspective (with the traditional private sector and the public sector); to boost the mainstreaming of SE research into academia so it cuts across different academic disciplines and boundaries.

4.2. CURRENT CRISES AND THE TRANSITION FRAMEWORK AS A COMMON HORIZON

Transitions have been traditionally tackled in a disconnected manner, following an activity field approach that considers solutions and strategies delineating each activity area such as energy, mobility, food, politics, culture, etc. This "silo approach" has probably contributed to limiting the

systemic reach and ability to implement transversal alternatives. Indeed, these multiple transitions are not detached phenomena but rather they point toward the need to connect strategies conceived and implemented by emerging types of institutions and actors (Nogales Muriel 2017, 2019).

Our present is composed of a depleted planet, institutional disengagement (della Porta 2015) and growing inequality levels against the backdrop of chained crises. The prospect of alternatives seem to be very simplistic and reduced to terms of evolution or revolution although many authors have already extended an array of possibilities (Wright 2010). Even within existing frameworks of democratic systems, the mechanisms of how political change emerges is still to be understood. Hughes-Tuoly (2018) warns about two flaws of political science that prevent this understanding: on the one hand, the dichotomization of the impact of policy-making between what is known as "big-bang (systemic) change" and incremental change and, on the other, the inference that equals a "window of opportunity" for political change to a series of chances for change without the required factors for major transformation being present.

The false dichotomy of evolution versus revolution can be resolved in the above-mentioned framework of transition as long as the power struggle is revealed and power is considered in its three dimensions (Lukes 2005). This is evident in the so called 'just transition', an idea which increasingly "features in policy and political discourse and appeals to the need to ensure that efforts to steer society towards a lower carbon future are underpinned by attention to issues of equity and justice" as stated by Newell and Mulvaney (2013). This concept which was originally developed by the trade union movement put forward the idea that for a transition to be considered "just" it needs to address current disparities and therefore, it recognizes the inherent power struggle. More recently, it has succeeded in making its way into policies and even to the creation of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEALL) under the impulse of governments such as Iceland, New Zealand and Scotland. This alliance follows the just transition approach and makes reference to the need to combine a narrative and a power base in its "vision" document.[15] However, this recent practical proposal could further develop what seems to be a superficial understanding of previous literature such as Polanyi's and possibly even the early economic anthropologists. In this way, power struggles leading to the disembeddedness of the economy need to be reversed; hence, the proposals aiming to do so need to be aware of how to counteract this power in its three dimensions: opposition from groups benefiting from status quo, overcoming the obstacles to include this firmly

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15 Available at https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/A-WE-Is-WEAll-Ideas-Little-Summaries-of-Big-Issues-4-Dec-2019.pdf

in the agenda and fighting the ideological/symbolic dimension of power that impedes the action of those groups suffering from the status quo.

In this context, the connection of SE and these practical and theoretical proposals becomes apparent. Particularly, the work of Polanyi is fundamental to understanding the (re-)emergence of the SSE in the last decades of the last century. This emergence and its constant evolution back up the experiences happening today that could become an option for the future. The 2008 crisis fueled the upsurge of initiatives that create alternative spaces of economic activity intertwined with political mobilization (Giovannini 2019). Moreover, these appeared in crucial fields with a renovated transformative aim framed within transitions such as energy and food. Citizen-led renewable energy cooperatives (REScoops) and food sovereignty initiatives around which peasants and consumers joined forces provide some examples and a plethora now exist across activity fields. SSE provides an umbrella under which many of these initiatives gather. This identification varies enormously depending on a number of factors but overall the SSE has witnessed an increase in economic weight and recognition by political institutions across European Member States and international bodies such as the UN.

Such increase has been accompanied by internal tensions between different currents within the wider SSE according to different understandings of legitimacy, content of political priorities and the balance between the economic and political dimensions at play within these organizations. In this context, social enterprises combining economic, social and participatory governance dimensions emerged over three decades ago to bridge these different conceptions although they remain a contested field (Defourny and Nyssens, 2014). Given the transitions context that currently characterizes the ecosystem of SSE organizations, the quest for economic emancipation has to be a prerequisite for any kind of political emancipation not only of individuals but more importantly of communities (Fraser 2013, Laville and Salmon 2015).

Furthermore, this transition context, if taken from an ecosystem perspective would have to also address the issue of the above-mentioned power struggle from the point of view of a paradigm shift in terms of ecosystem governance. This means that these alternative spaces should be able to increase their capacity (as in power) to sustain opposition from other actors benefitting from the status quo, to gain access (agenda setting) and to be able to produce a shift in key symbolic struggles such as wealth distribution or resource management, for example. It is precisely the latter element which has centered one of the most poignant critiques to the general discourse around social entrepreneurship. Thus, as proposed by Dey et al. (2016), "the hegemonization of social entrepreneurship involves articulating certain issues whilst, at the same time, omitting others, or rendering them elusive".

In the same vein, Teasdale et al. (2020) conclude that "despite the 'everyone is a changemaker' rhetoric, the aim is less to change the world, and more to adapt to it, its shortcomings, and its frenetic pace of change".

Such criticism can clarify at the same time the potential and limitations of the transition framework if analysed from the ecosystem approach. Indeed, it can lead us to address the tension between some narratives within alternative spheres and, more specifically between some social economy, social and solidarity economy and social enterprise narratives. An ecosystem approach can clarify the challenges at stake in the current context of crisis mainly thanks to two features: the more nuanced assessment of power and the inclusion of the external dimension. This external dimension (for instance the role of international institutions such as International Monetary Fund or the Basel Committee on local policy developments) significantly influences the local ecosystem where the power struggle is more unequivocally unequal.

At the same time, the ecosystem approach can cast light on the roles and actors in research; some of that tension can be solved if we take stock of what is happening at the local level where the roles of the different actors in research are not rigid (where sometimes researchers are also social entrepreneurs or activists and vice-versa) and we "upgrade" it to other levels.

Finally, the ecosystem approach can also help in realising another significant field of action: the "organization" of ecosystems, i.e. their efficiency in terms of resource distribution and resilience (both social and environmental). In this context, ecosystems could, potentially, be assessed from other points of view: internal and external flows of relevant variables such as information, power, organisation, and resources, for example. Adopting such a perspective, measures such as the 'index of ascendency' could provide new and insightful approaches to this field of inquiry. Ascendency can be depicted as 'organized power', since it relates both the size and the organization of an ecosystem by means of the product of its *total system throughput* (TST) and the average mutual information (Ulanowicz 1997). It can be defined as the product of the aggregate amount of material or energy transferred in an ecosystem multiplied by the coherency with which the outputs from the members relate to the set of inputs to the same components (Ulanowicz 1986). It has also been used to analyze economic ecosystems.[16] From this perspective, we can identify the size of the ecosystem (whether there exists a sufficient number of participants) and also its level of organization: whether the flow of information and resources is coherent with the goal of producing beneficial social impact or, more specifically, in increasing the capabilities of SSE actors to achieve such impact

16 For example Huang J, Ulanowicz RE (2014) and Matutinović, I. (2002)

in the form of local development, fight against poverty, provide decent jobs or facilitate a fairer distribution of wealth creation.

4.3. THE URGENCY OF MAKING RESEARCH (REALLY) RELEVANT TO CITIZENS

When looking at the way SE has been researched, the focus seems to fall on description and quantification stemming from a positivist tradition of research, particularly at the beginning. More critical, interpretivist contributions were also present, though this type of research has substantially increased in the last decade with perspectives coming from alternative traditions like feminist economics and theory, political ecology and critical epistemologies. Cross disciplinary boundaries have also naturally blurred many of these instances in this situation. A promising path for the SE field could be to embark in discursive processes involving argument and debate and reflecting on the ontology, epistemologies, purpose and connection to stakeholders and society at play in each of them. These critical approaches have also shown the relevance of taking stock of previous research, therefore building genealogies within the SE field.

The progressive inclusion of critical perspectives will stimulate the connection with wider phenomena in society. Using a dialogic approach would enlarge the explanatory potential of such effort. Consider the three dimensions of power: it could result that the analysis of one dimension (for example, when designing the research questions) could then be in conversation with how power in its second dimension (control of the agenda) affects that stage of research (for example by making it difficult for some questions to be considered relevant), while the first or third dimension can more positively affect the relevance of our results, findings or even in the implementation stage of the research. Thus, power can be at the same time what the research needs to make evident (an invisible epistemological/heuristical obstacle), but it can also be included as an indicator (if, for example, in line with extended narratives such as solidarity in times of crisis) to increase the impact of research.

This could connect with the proposals of "post-normal" science and its application on the SE research agenda. Specially its three main areas of work: "the communication of uncertainty, the assessment of quality, and the justification and practice of the extended peer communities".[17]

By doing so, the SE research agenda could constantly be updated with new relevant issues to wider phenomena in society. By relevant issues we refer to fostering the relevance both of research as a tool for transformation as well as that of the topics covered. For instance, in addition to addressing

17 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-normal_science#Content

issues that matter to society it is necessary to engage in the analysis of challenges linked to theoretical approaches (positivism, constructivism, etc.) and other relevant epistemological questions directly connected to power through knowledge generation.

Finally, this would facilitate managing tensions between endogenous contexts and external theories and models. For example, with an ecosystem perspective we could avoid some controversial elements in relation to the scope and definition of social enterprises. Thus, by including the different features, dimensions and variables (including power) in all stages of research, which are relevant in a given ecosystem (local, national or international) we may avoid most of the problems of defining the social dimension of social enterprises or their scope.

4.4. A VARIETY OF ECOSYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

Beyond specific issues related to research agendas for SE and how to develop them, a number of challenges connect to how research and knowledge communities organize around joint topics of interest. This section is related to the meta-questions at play in SE research and how the latter can permeate the public sphere where discussions about the future of our societies take place.

For instance, with regards to the type of research conducted, with some exceptions as the TIESS initiative, there have not been stable proposals to sustain transdisciplinary research. This refers not only to the transfer of research results or involvement of practitioners on research projects, but more institutional initiatives where the actors in the production of new knowledge are not exclusively full-time researchers, but also practitioners and activists.

This is also key to foster the relevance of research with a more ecosystemic approach. This could be addressed in two ways, by organically including stakeholders in the governance of research programmes or, vice-versa, by considering the role of researchers also as key activists in advocacy or representative bodies of the SSE.

Another relevant challenge is incorporating the power dimension in all stages of research (design, implementation and transfer), and when assessing its relevance it is all-the-more pertinent. We do not propose that power be included as a variable in those pieces of research where it is not deemed pertinent, but to guarantee that it is considered when evaluating research policies, programmes or individual proposals.

A crucial aspect relates to how to incorporate dynamics that allow both for participation and revision of existing research structures. This has become all the more urgent as the crisis in the traditional locus of academic knowledge, universities, is undergoing a profound transformation that

follows marketization and privatization logics. Using the hardware and software metaphor, the issue of how to sustain the "hardware" for these collective dynamics led by researchers becomes of paramount importance. We advance five strategies to enrich such a joint endeavor:

1. To undertake common actions across the ecosystem that involve a variety of agents (researchers, activists, public officials, judiciary agents, policy makers, funders, media, etc.), of dimensions and properties (material/simple ones such as capital, employment, etc. but also complex ones such as wellbeing, welfare, social inclusion, etc. or even other non-directly observable ones such as symbolic power, efficiency, resilience, etc.) and of geographical levels (supranational, national, sub-national);

2. To foster a community of "translators" or "knowledge brokers" to create engaging narratives and connect with practitioners and administrators. These agents would be a part not only of research communities but also of key stakeholders organizations, which need to include research and researchers in their structures, strategies, etc., not just as formal advisors;

3. As a result, research would need to include other dimensions, such as its material dimensions: assets, jobs, etc., as well as symbolic ones like legitimacy, prestige, etc., particularly when collaborating with key stakeholders, in exchange for the above-mentioned participation of research in their structures. This level of collaboration over time should aim at increasing the hybridization of both research organizations and SE ones;

4. To forge future networks with doctoral students and early career researchers and also with practitioners and policymakers, where they can proactively decide how to conceive and apply training on SE research;

5. To legitimize action-research while developing fundamental research aiming at knowledge transfer and evidence-based policy making. However, both policymakers and researchers should gain awareness about the limitations of this term, as signaled by Greenhalgh and Russell (2009).

The objective of such sustained articulation over time goes beyond influencing research agendas at all levels and aims to empower research communities to dare to propose agendas that they themselves generate (such as is the case of the ICSEM project).

5. CONCLUSIONS: CRITICAL ISSUES AHEAD FOR SE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES

As described in the initial sections of this text, the eco-social crisis we are currently traversing as society demands new paradigms, and research does not escape from such a demand. Such a contextual urgency places

researchers in front of the mirror regarding their roles beyond producers of "research." A central question becomes recognizing and critically approaching the role of research in social change.

As already suggested, when assessing the relevance of their research, researchers require some "practical broker knowledge", so to say. It would be a start to allow for less clean-cut identities, through more hybrid networks and through the above mentioned consideration regarding the visibilization of power in line with the proposal of post-normal science of the works of Shiv Visvanathan (1997) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) calling to pursue "cognitive justice".

Faced with the vast task of evolving within the research system with established norms, protocols and hierarchies, several strategies have been advanced that range from the individual to the collective and systemic. Turning these challenges into opportunities will require time to mature but some seeds have already been planted. Identifying clear achievements so far at the level of SE research is something that we always remind students as well as inviting them to revisit existing relevant research and frame problems from a multidisciplinary perspective.

In addition, nurturing long-lasting networks and while also being involved and active in some would also help this evolution. Reinvigorating existing collaborations and strengthening them os utmost importance. Some concrete (but non exhaustive) examples are the ICA research committee, the EMES network, CIRIEC International, other research institutes as well as other SE actors, particularly representative bodies, interested in applied research. Indeed, articulating new ways of working with actors wearing several hats – researcher-consultant-activist-entrepreneur–while ensuring that there are no conflicts of interest.

Furthermore, the proposed hybridization of both organizations/ institutions and actors could help open new paths for research funding. For example, by pursuing the proposal of co-creating research and knowledge and by nurturing stable relations which facilitate researchers moving from academic institutions into SE organizations or public bodies and vice versa. In this case, the resources needed could come not exclusively from donors or funders for research projects but also from other budgets (travel, meetings, external services, etc.). On the other side, research institutions should also be able to further share their resources with other public and private stakeholders beyond those research projects. For example by hiring SE or policy entrepreneurs, by providing access to databases or research training. Finally, this enhanced continuum within the SE ecosystem could also facilitate a variegated researcher career more in line with the "liquid" era described by Bauman. Thus, going beyond "clean-cut identities" (researcher, lobbyist, entrepreneur, policy maker) a whole community and its allies could enhance the role of research in social transformation.

The analyses, reflections and strategies laid out in this text embody constructive examples of how research and knowledge could contribute to building a more favourable and resilient ecosystem for SSE. It also shows the hybrid nature of research and practice and their relation with policy as well as the need to embrace a real plurality of identities and knowledges. As Hannah Arendt insisted throughout her work, plurality is at the core of human action so real transformative action requires escaping from homogeneity and conformity (Arendt 1958). In doing so, new generations of scholars will also be contributing to the strengthening of the link between science and society and, ultimately the foundations of societies.

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