

SEEDING

Social Economy Enterprises addressing
Digitalisation, Industrial Relations and the European Pillar of Social Rights

First transnational online workshop

Wednesday 27 May 2020 (10:30-12:30 CET)
Zoom meeting

NOTES

In the Seeding project, two international workshops were planned in Slovenia and Italy as part of the activities. Due to the unforeseen circumstances that Covid-19 has caused, the project partners decided to replace the first European Workshop in Slovenia with three online events. The first of these was held on 27 May 2020 on Zoom by [Diesis Network](#) and [Association Social Economy Slovenia](#) (ASES). For the first event, more than 60 people registered from the EU member states and other European countries as well as from the US and Asia, and more than 40 participants attended.

The first event focused on Slovenia and Poland. **Gianluca Pastorelli** (president, DIESIS) welcomed the audience and gave the floor to **Melinda Kelemen** (project manager, Seeding) who explained the project's goals and its activities so far.

Feliciano Iudicone (researcher, FGB) on behalf of [Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini](#), the partner responsible for delivering the project's research activities, presented the preliminary research results. The background report will include information on the social economy, industrial relations, digitalisation and its effect on employment in the target countries – France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Poland and Ireland. He first gave a general introduction to the social economy, highlighted the differences between the different target countries and the definition (or lack of it) of the social economy. He also mentioned special forms like *Sozialwirtschaft* in Germany and *sociedad laboral* in Spain. Then he talked about general trends and the challenges caused by the digitalisation and automation of work. His summary was that the focus seems to

be on innovation in public administration and companies and the usual tools are public investments, incentives for private investment, funding for training and awareness-raising, and forming networks and alliances. Whereas studies highlight there are both risks and opportunities for employment and working conditions arising from the digitalisation of employment, their governance by policy-makers and at company level can have decisive effects on its actual impacts.

From Slovenia, **Sebastjan Piki** (Association Social Economy Slovenia – ASES) introduced the social economy in Slovenia and the Southeast European context and highlighted two actions initiated by ASES. The first is #BuyResponsible – a market and awareness-raising campaign in the whole region launched in 2018 that shows that the social economy has an impact. As one of the results, ASES opened three shops. The other project mentioned is establishing a Business School on Social Economy – since a successful social enterprise requires business skills.

The next speaker, **Mojca Žganec Metelko** (CEO, Zavod KNOF) introduced one of the two Slovenian case studies to be published during the project. Zavod KNOF is active in waste management and is one of the best-known social economy and green economy actors in the country. It operates five shops and a co-working space, and continuously aims to extend and improve its activities, including using digitalisation as a tool. It sees digitalisation as an advantage rather than a risk. In the Circular Lab the emphasis is on recycling, as a good example of circular economy. KNOF also wants to be a “meeting point” for social enterprises.

The other country in focus was Poland. **Julia Koczanowicz-Chondzyńska** (president, Foundation for Social and Economic Initiatives – FISE) explained that in Poland there is an “old” government initiated social economy sector (worker’s and agricultural social enterprises) and also the community initiated “new” social economy, started around 2007. The number of social enterprises in the strict sense is around 1,000-1,200 these days. Most are active in B2B services, catering, education, tourism, social services, communal services and production. Digitalisation and automation issues are not high on the agenda in the country, but effect the enterprises to various degrees depending on the sector.

Julia briefly introduced two of the three cases, the [District Dairy Cooperative in Piątnica](#) and the [Cooperative Bank in Kruszwica](#). The dairy cooperative is one of the largest companies in the agriculture sector in Poland, with wide range of products, and the aim of its automation process was to simplify the production process. In the case of the bank, the motivation was more external, to implement an online banking system to keep up with its competitors.

The last of the three Polish cases presented in the project was [Panato](#), a multi-branch social co-operative working in the textile and clothing sectors, and was introduced by **Paulina Ograbisz** (manager, Panato). Panato helps disadvantaged groups by providing them with employment in the production of clothes and bags. It has introduced digitalisation in order to optimise its production processes. Modern communication methods were set up to connect all stakeholders, the steps in production were standardised, and order distribution was modernised. As a result, after two years, the company's sales are up, but the production standardisation and communication still need to be developed further. The main challenges are collecting data and raising the level of trust in the programs that draw up production plans.

Finally, during the discussion session on “Social economy enterprises in the era of digitalisation: challenges and impact on working conditions and employment” there were a number of questions from the audience.

The questions and answers:

Q. 1 (to Mojca): The green economy is not so popular in Slovenia, neither within business nor among workers. What is your view?

A. 2: Conventional businesses have found big opportunity in the green economy. The biggest polluters of the world also find it a way to go. Sustainability seems the only way for the future.

Q. 2: Apart from the knowledge gap mentioned, what are some other challenges and opportunities related to social economy enterprises given the pandemic crisis?

A. 2: As regards producing face masks, cooperatives and social economy enterprises were engaged in the emergency response before the government, because it was simpler for them to act given their lack of bureaucracy and closeness to the ground. Talking about the post-emergency phase, public authorities have a more important role. Public investment is most needed in education, health, energy and so on. Green cooperatives and housing cooperatives have an important role to play at that stage as well.

In Poland, social enterprises were quickly able to reorientate their services (especially catering) to support vulnerable people. There was a big movement at the beginning of the Covid crisis. In mask production it is the same (as in the case of Panato). Social economy support organisations are also making it their job to talk to government and ministries to support social enterprises.

Q. 3: Do you have any experiences or inspiring practices in bringing digitalisation, the social economy and the green agenda to the criminal justice institutions? I am asking mainly about prisons and probation services.

A. 3: In the project we do not have such cases, but in the DIESIS network there are several organisations from various countries which are involved in those fields with some experience – mainly from Italy and Spain.

Q. 4: How important a role does government procurement play in purchasing your goods or services or influencing the development of those goods and services?

A. 4: In Poland, public procurement is a legal instrument, but it is not so popular because companies are afraid of audit controls. In Slovenia the situation is the same as in Poland, and public procurement is not sensitive towards the social economy. ASES tries to promote public procurement processes but it is still at an early age. DIESIS commented at since the European public procurement

directive of 2014, there is a greater emphasis on including social economy enterprises in public procurement processes. This was addressed in the [Buying for Social Impact](#) project, in which Diesis was a partner.

Before the closing words, Luca Pastorelli invited **Samuel Cohen** ([FranceBarter](#)) to talk briefly about the barter system developed in France, to give a taste of the case to be presented at the next online event. As to whether the crisis has changed anything in the life of FranceBartner, Samuel said that it seems that network members are showing more solidarity and willingness to share their unused assets.

After the last question **Gianluca Pastorelli** and **Melinda Kelemen** made a short summary of the event. The next workshop will be on 24 June 2020.

30 May 2020