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**SEED'S Planning Solidarity Economy Districts for Social, Economic,
and Environmental Sustainability**

WP2 – Planning: Reviewing existing frameworks and training needs

NATIONAL REPORT - BELGIUM

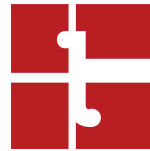


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Introduction



As part of WP2 - *Planning: Review of existing frameworks and training needs, desk and field research* was conducted on the strategic framework and key stakeholders of the social solidarity economy and short food supply chains. One of the objectives was also to identify the training needs of citizens and stakeholders in Belgium through several coaching circles. Specifically, there was the need to identify gaps, overlaps, potential conflicts between existing strategies, policies and practices, identify clear support and institutional barriers to change, as well as specific needs and innovative opportunities for intergenerational cooperation.

How the target group was identified and reached

The purpose of the field research was to implement 4 coaching circles with young people, seniors and stakeholders working in the field of social economy and short food supply chain. Diesis Network reached all target groups through several open calls on social media, the Brussels Municipalities website, the Facebook group, Diesis Network members and the private network. Several calls for participation have been launched on social media and specifically in different facebook groups.

Respondents' profile and why they were chosen to participate in the project

The stakeholders were all representative of the social economy and the short food supply chain sector. They are all involved in several projects related to the social economy in Belgium. They were selected for their different backgrounds, their approach to the topic and their interest, expertise, and promotion of the topic.

The young participants were aged between 18 and 32. Three of the participants were still studying, while the other two were working. They were selected for their interest in the projects and for their cultural, economic and social backgrounds. They are included in the category of vulnerable people, some for cultural reasons and others for economic reasons.

The elderly participants were beneficiaries of a social restaurant in Brussels that hosts and cooks lunches from Monday to Friday for elderly people who are alone. The aim of the organisation is to combat poverty and social exclusion among the elderly. They were selected on the basis of their interest in the social economy and short food chains and their willingness to take part in a coaching circle.





Analysis of desk and field research findings

The national legal and administrative context regarding Social Economy Districts (SEEDs) and Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs)

Belgium has a strong tradition of supporting social economy enterprises, which are organizations that pursue social and environmental goals while also conducting economic activities. The social economy was developed towards the end of the 1980s. It was the region of Wallonia that was really interested in the social economy. The government's policy framework aims to promote the growth and sustainability of social economy initiatives, ensuring that they contribute to social cohesion, employment, and sustainable development. Belgium did not have a single comprehensive policy framework dedicated solely to the social economy. Instead, various policies and initiatives were spread across different regional governments (Flemish Region, Brussels-Capital Region, and Walloon Region) as well as the federal government. These policies aimed to promote and support social enterprises, cooperatives, and other social economy initiatives.

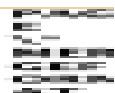
In the Brussels-Capital Region, an ordinance dated 18 March 2004 relating to the approval and funding of local employment development initiatives and integration provides a legal framework and a framework for financial assistance to integration enterprises.

In Flanders, the Employment and Social Economy sector is made up of five entities. In the 2009-2014 Government Agreement, the Flemish Government undertakes to achieve better harmonisation of the various employment measures. The Employment and Social and Social Economy is currently developing a single, transparent Flemish framework for employment measures in all companies, including those in the social economy.

The progress made by social enterprises in the Walloon Region led the Walloon legislator to adopt a decree dedicated to the social economy on 20 November 2008 (décret de l'économie sociale, 31.12.2008, p. 69056)¹. This decree defines the concept of social economy, identifies the tools and public authorities dedicated to the social economy and organises representative and consultative bodies for this sector.

Concerning the short food supply Chains (SFSC) and Solidarity Economy Districts (SEED), many are the policy framework in Belgium, but the most important is the **Good Food Strategy 1** (GFS1) that was adopted by the Brussels Government at the end of 2015, for an initial programming period from 2016 to 2020 (but with some targets to 2035). Achievements show that the strategy has helped to kick-start the transition of the

¹ http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be//mopdf/2008/12/31_1.pdf#Page74



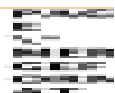


food system towards greater sustainability. In 5 years, the Region has seen the emergence of a multitude of relocation of the various components of the food system, production by professionals and citizens, short circuits -and citizens, short distribution channels, dissemination of a local accessible to all, changes in behaviour in this area, education and education and awareness-raising, combating food waste². Very important in this strategy is its holistic aspect, involving spaces and the communities that inhabit them, a kind of urban regeneration that starts with the relationship with food from production to consumption. This strategy is based on the idea that the transition from a food system to a more sustainable one is a necessity for the Brussels region, both to meet global challenges (protecting nature and biodiversity and combating climate change) and to meet local challenges (social, health, economic and employment).

Even though the socio-economic system in Belgium works well and the federal state and the regions are working hard to change things, there are many gaps in the system. These gaps are obvious between the different regions. While Flanders is well organised and more efficient, the gaps in Brussels-Capital and the Walloon region are quite significant.

- **Income Inequality:** Belgium has faced challenges in addressing income inequality. The wealth gap between the rich and poor has widened, leading to disparities in access to resources and opportunities. The social economy framework might not have been entirely successful in mitigating this issue. This issue is obvious in the Brussels-Capital region.
- **Unemployment and Job Insecurity:** While Belgium generally maintains a relatively low unemployment rate, certain regions (Brussels-Capital and Wallonia) and communities still struggle with high joblessness. Additionally, there has been a rise in precarious employment, where workers face insecurity and lack of benefits. The social economy framework might need to address these issues more effectively to ensure sustainable job creation and stability for workers, with a focus in Brussels.
- **Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups:** Some segments of the population, such as migrants, refugees, and people with disabilities, face difficulties accessing the job market and benefiting from social economy initiatives. There might be a need for more targeted support and tailored programs to include these vulnerable groups.
- **Lack of Coherence in Policies:** Coordination and coherence between different levels of government (federal, regional and local) can sometimes be a challenge, leading to inefficiencies and overlapping initiatives within the social economy framework. There is also a lack of financial support for small social enterprises, which are transformed into precarious employment contracts for workers.
- **Digital Transformation:** The advancement of technology and the digital economy could pose challenges for some traditional social economy sectors. Ensuring that social enterprises can adapt and integrate digital solutions is essential to their continued relevance and effectiveness. People with lower levels of studies struggle to find jobs in this new economy.

² https://document.environnement.brussels/opac_css/electfile/Strat_GoodFood_FR



- **Access to subsidies:** It is even more complicated for the little and medium enterprises to access to the subsidies.



Common opinion among the young and the elderly on Social Economy Districts (SEEDs) and Short Food Supply Chains (SFFCs).

In both cases, when participants were asked if they were actually familiar with the terms 'social economy district' and 'short food supply chain', they also said no. When the facilitator explains in general what the two terms mean, they discuss and say that they know the concept, but not the specific words used to underline the concept itself. They don't know about the solidarity economy district, but for them a short food supply chain means a focus on buying more local and greener. Meanwhile, in many cases, older people prefer to buy local products for reasons such as supporting local businesses, familiarity with the products and the good quality of the food. They prefer traditional and artisanal food that tastes good to them. It's easier for those who live in small neighborhoods to develop the habit of buying fresh and artisanal products than for those who live in large neighborhoods, who sometimes prefer the big supermarket chains. Young people buy from the conventional food chain mainly because of lack of money, as they consider local food to be too expensive. They all agree that local food is healthier and more nutritious because it does not contain preservatives. Every time we buy produce from someone other than a local producer, money leaves the local economy. By buying locally, you are keeping money in our area, which helps to support local producers and create local jobs. By supporting our local farmers today, they're helping to ensure that there are farms in the community tomorrow. It is essential for long-term food security. Buying local food also helps the environment and it's organic too. According to the participants, the biggest challenge for social entrepreneurship in Belgium is the lack of proper education and economic support. People don't really know about it and apart from the people working in the field, the others don't know what is going on and what steps all the associations and organizations are working on. Education is the first step to help and raise awareness about this issue and now it's not doing much.

Attitude of economic actors regarding Social Economy Districts (SEEDs) and Short Food Supply Chains (SFFCs)

The attitude of economic actors towards social economy districts and the short food supply chain in Belgium is quite positive. All regions and municipalities, as well as the federal states, are working together to promote social economy enterprises throughout the country.

In Belgium, the social enterprises have a reduced VAT rate of 6% for certain social economy initiatives and a tax exemption within certain limits. Governments see SEEDs and SFFCs as strategies to promote local economic development, social inclusion, employment and sustainability. Policies to support these initiatives are increasingly being developed to encourage their growth and create a supportive regulatory environment.

Some companies see opportunities in participating in SEEDs and SFFCs, as they align with growing consumer preferences for locally sourced and socially responsible products.



Others, however, are concerned about the potential challenges and costs associated with restructuring supply chains or adapting to new models, as highlighted by stakeholders in the coaching circle.



Small and local farmers view SEEDs and SFFCs positively, as these initiatives can provide them with direct access to local markets, potentially increasing their income.

However, larger agricultural enterprises are more cautious due to concerns about the scalability and efficiency of short supply chains compared to traditional distribution networks.

Several initiatives have been developed to promote the social solidarity economy:

- **The Good Food Strategy 2 (2022-2030)**
- **The Regional Policy Statement (DPR) 2019-2024** takes up several points relating to food, urban agriculture and the Good Food strategy.
- **La Stratégie Régionale de Transition Économique (SRTE) or Shifting Economy-** March 2022. The main objectives are to create new economic opportunities for Brussels entrepreneurs; preserving natural capital natural capital, both locally and globally; preserving human capital, by promoting a fair and equitable distribution of economic gains, inclusion and participatory and participatory and democratic corporate governance and respond to the vital functions of the region needs of the people of Brussels by developing a local economy local economy, with greater autonomy while remaining open to the outside world.
- **The “Meerjarenplan 2021-2025” plan** - VGC « Brussel maken we samen. It aims to carry out sustainable urban development activities for and by the people of Brussels (by supporting initiatives in (semi) public spaces (semi) public space, by co-executing urban renewal projects, urban agriculture initiatives, etc.).

Perceptions of measures and mechanisms needed for the promotion of Social Economy Districts (SEEDs) and Short Food Supply Chains (SFFCs)

The promotion of Social Economy Districts (SEEDs) and Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) involves the implementation of various policies and strategies to create an environment that is conducive to the development and growth of social economy enterprises in a given geographical area. These measures can be implemented at different levels, involving government policies, community initiatives and cooperation between different stakeholders. We need to develop and implement supportive policies at local, regional and national levels that recognise and prioritise social economy enterprises. Many stakeholders underlined the need to create legal frameworks that facilitate the creation and operation of social economy organisations, and other financial incentives such as grants, tax credits and subsidies were discussed to encourage the creation and growth of social economy initiatives. There is also the need to provide training programs, workshops, and mentoring to enhance the skills and capacities of individuals involved in social economy enterprises.



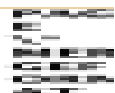


Conclusions and recommendations

Main obstacles and challenges for stakeholders in the social and solidarity economy:

According to the stakeholders, in Belgium there are several barriers to promoting short food supply chains and overcoming them requires addressing several challenges. Some common barriers include:

- **Limited scale and efficiency:** Short food supply chains often involve smaller-scale production and distribution, which may be less cost-effective and efficient compared to large-scale, conventional systems. Overcoming this barrier may involve finding ways to improve economies of scale through cooperative models, shared infrastructure, or innovative technologies.
- **Infrastructure and logistics:** Developing and maintaining the necessary infrastructure for short food supply chains, including storage, transport, and distribution networks, can be challenging. Investment in infrastructure improvements and collaboration between local producers and stakeholders can help address these issues.
- **Lack of Funding:** Difficult access to the funding programs and sometimes lack of funding programs for all the institutions.
- **Lack of a comprehensive education training:** Provide training programs and capacity-building initiatives for individuals and organizations interested in social economy activities.
- **Consumer awareness:** Many consumers may not be aware of the benefits of short food supply chains or may find it more convenient to shop in larger supermarkets. Raising awareness through educational campaigns, marketing efforts and highlighting the benefits of local products can help change consumer preferences.
- **Consistency and year-round availability:** Local food production is often seasonal, and ensuring consistent availability throughout the year can be challenging. Strategies such as diversifying crops, implementing sustainable farming practices and exploring new technologies can help extend the growing season and maintain a more reliable supply.
- **Regulatory hurdles:** Regulatory requirements designed for larger, conventional supply chains may not be appropriate for smaller, local operations. Advocating for supportive policies and regulations that recognise and accommodate the unique aspects of short food supply chains can be critical.
- **Access to markets:** Local producers may face challenges in accessing mainstream markets dominated by larger distributors. Developing alternative market channels, such as farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programmes and direct-to-consumer sales, can help overcome this barrier.
- **Financial constraints:** Small-scale farmers and local producers may face financial constraints in investing in technology, marketing, and other essential aspects of their operations. Financial support, subsidies or grants from government agencies or community organisations can help alleviate these constraints.



- **Competition from large retailers:** Large retail chains often have significant market power and can offer products at lower prices. Emphasising the unique qualities of locally produced food, such as freshness, quality and sustainability, can help differentiate local products and attract consumers willing to pay a premium.



Main training needs for the promotion of Social Economy Districts (SEEDs) and Short Food Supply Chains (SFFCs) and connection with the EntreComp and GreenComp Framework.

What was found through the desk and field research is a low level of awareness among the general public of the meaning and importance of Social and Solidarity Economy and Alternative Food Supply Chains. While the elderly participants in the coaching circle showed a general understanding of the social economy and of short food supply chains, the young participants admitted not knowing these terms and asked for more explanations. Even though in the beginning they admitted being unfamiliar with those terms, throughout the coaching circle they tried to bring some examples from their daily lives regarding the consumer habit of buying food directly from the producer. The coaching circle with stakeholders validated the lack of awareness, understanding and thus, support for social entrepreneurship, as the general public misinterprets what a social enterprise is and what it does, while there is no state support for short food supply chain initiatives. Thus, the training of young and elderly people requires teaching them firstly the basic concepts of Social and Solidarity Economy and Short Food Supply Chains and then providing more specialised knowledge and skills about social and sustainable entrepreneurship and managing a short food supply chain on the community level. How to engage the community, organise successful communication and awareness-raising campaigns and launch political advocacy initiatives in favour of SEEDs and SFSCs were also identified as training needs for the stakeholders of social entrepreneurship and of short food supply chains.

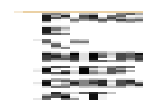
The main training needs for promoting Social Economy Districts (SEEDs) and Short Food Supply Chains (SFFCs) are centred around equipping individuals with the essential competencies outlined in the EntreComp and GreenComp Frameworks. This includes fostering skills such as opportunity spotting, exploratory thinking, vision development, futures literacy, promoting nature, ethical and sustainable thinking, valuing ideas, valuing sustainability, financial literacy, learning through experience and taking action for sustainability. Integrating these competencies will empower stakeholders to navigate the complexities of SEEDs and SFFCs, enabling them to identify opportunities for sustainable economic development and community engagement. Furthermore, connecting these training needs to the EntreComp and GreenComp Frameworks ensures a comprehensive approach that aligns with the principles of entrepreneurship, sustainability, and social responsibility, creating a foundation for successful and impactful initiatives in social economies and local food supply chains.

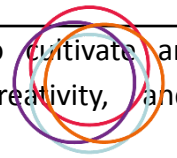




Training material based on the EntreComp and the GreenComp Framework:

Module	Training Material
Social Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overview of Social Economy: Definition and principles of social economy. Historical context and evolution of social economy. ● Social Entrepreneurship: Characteristics of social entrepreneurs. Examples of successful social entrepreneurship initiatives. ● Cooperatives and Social Enterprises: Different models of social economy organizations. Legal structures and governance in social enterprises. ● Successful Social Economy Initiatives: Case studies of well-known social enterprises and cooperatives. Analysis of their strategies and impact. ● Challenges and Lessons Learned: identifying common challenges in social economy enterprises. Learning from failures and adapting strategies. ● Stakeholder Engagement: Strategies for involving the community in social enterprises. Building partnerships with local organizations.
Short Food Supply Chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding SFSCs: Definition and characteristics of Short Food Supply Chains. Benefits and challenges associated with SFSCs. ● Local Food Systems: Overview of local and regional food systems. Comparison with conventional supply chains. ● Food Safety Practices: Ensuring food safety in short supply chains. Compliance with regulations and standards. ● Effective Marketing Strategies.
EntreComp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction to EntreComp: overview of the EntreComp framework and its key components. Understanding the importance of entrepreneurial competencies in various contexts. ● Fundraising and Financing: Sources of funding for social enterprises. Crowdfunding, impact investing. ● Basis of entreComp





	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Entrepreneurial Mindset Development: module to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset, including resilience, creativity, and adaptability.● Pitching and Communication Skills
GreenComp	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Understanding Green Entrepreneurship: introduction to the concept of green entrepreneurship and its significance in the context of sustainability.● Environmental Awareness Training: materials focusing on raising awareness about environmental issues and the role of entrepreneurs in addressing them.● Sustainable Business Models: Case studies and training on sustainable business models that align with the principles of GreenComp.● Life Cycle Assessment Training: introduction to life cycle assessment methodologies and their application in evaluating the environmental impact of products and services.● Circular Economy Principles: module on the principles of the circular economy and how they can be integrated into entrepreneurial ventures.● Module on understanding and complying with environmental regulations and standards relevant to green entrepreneurship.

In terms of format, it must include a blended learning approach, combining online and face-to-face components. This allows flexibility for participants and facilitates a more interactive and dynamic learning experience. The course must include experiential learning opportunities such as internships, field visits or projects with real social enterprises. It must foster a collaborative learning environment by incorporating peer-to-peer interactions. Group projects, discussion forums and networking events can provide opportunities for participants to learn from each other. There is also a need to provide mentorship opportunities with experienced social entrepreneurs or professionals in the field. This mentorship can provide valuable insights, guidance, and networking opportunities.

The training should include ongoing evaluation mechanisms to assess participants' understanding and application of concepts. This could include quizzes, presentations, and project evaluations.

Flexibility is another important point. The trainer should recognise that participants may come from different backgrounds and have different levels of experience. Design the training programme to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of a diverse audience.

Recommended actions for the promotion of Social Economy Districts



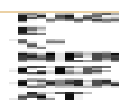
(SEEDs) and Short Food Supply Chains (SFFCs):



- **Local Food Policies:** Develop local and regional policies that encourage the establishment and growth of short food supply chains. Implement zoning regulations that facilitate the operation of farmers' markets and other direct-to-consumer sales initiatives.
- **Infrastructure Support:** Invest in infrastructure that supports short food supply chains, such as farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) pickup points, and food hubs. Provide logistical support for producers to efficiently bring their products to market.
- **Consumer Education:** Conduct educational campaigns to inform consumers about the benefits of supporting local producers through SFFCs. Implement programs that promote healthy and sustainable eating habits through local food consumption.
- **Collaboration with Retailers:** Encourage partnerships between local producers and retailers to integrate locally sourced products into mainstream retail outlets. Develop certification programs that highlight products from short food supply chains.
- **Research and Innovation:** Invest in research and innovation to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of short food supply chains. Explore technology solutions that facilitate direct connections between producers and consumers, such as online platforms or mobile applications.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for supportive national and regional policies that facilitate the development and growth of short food supply chains. Engage with policymakers to address any regulatory barriers that may hinder the operation of SFFCs.
- **Promote Sustainable Practices:** Encourage environmentally sustainable farming practices within short food supply chains. Implement certification programs or labels that highlight the ecological and social sustainability of products within SFFCs.
- **Community Engagement:** Foster community involvement and engagement in local food initiatives, encouraging a sense of ownership and pride in supporting local producers.
- **Capacity Building and Education:** Provide training programs and capacity-building initiatives for individuals and organizations interested in social economy activities. Collaborate with educational institutions to incorporate social economy principles into relevant courses and training programs.
- **Networking and Collaboration:** Facilitate networking events and platforms for social economy organizations to collaborate, share experiences, and explore partnership opportunities. Encourage public-private partnerships to enhance the impact of social economy initiatives.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns to inform the public about the benefits of social economy initiatives in fostering sustainable and inclusive development. Highlight successful SEEDs projects and their positive impact on local communities.
- **Facilitate access to Funding:** Establish dedicated funds or financial instruments to support the startup and growth of social economy enterprises. Simplify and streamline the application process for social economy organizations to access public and private funding.

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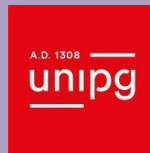
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