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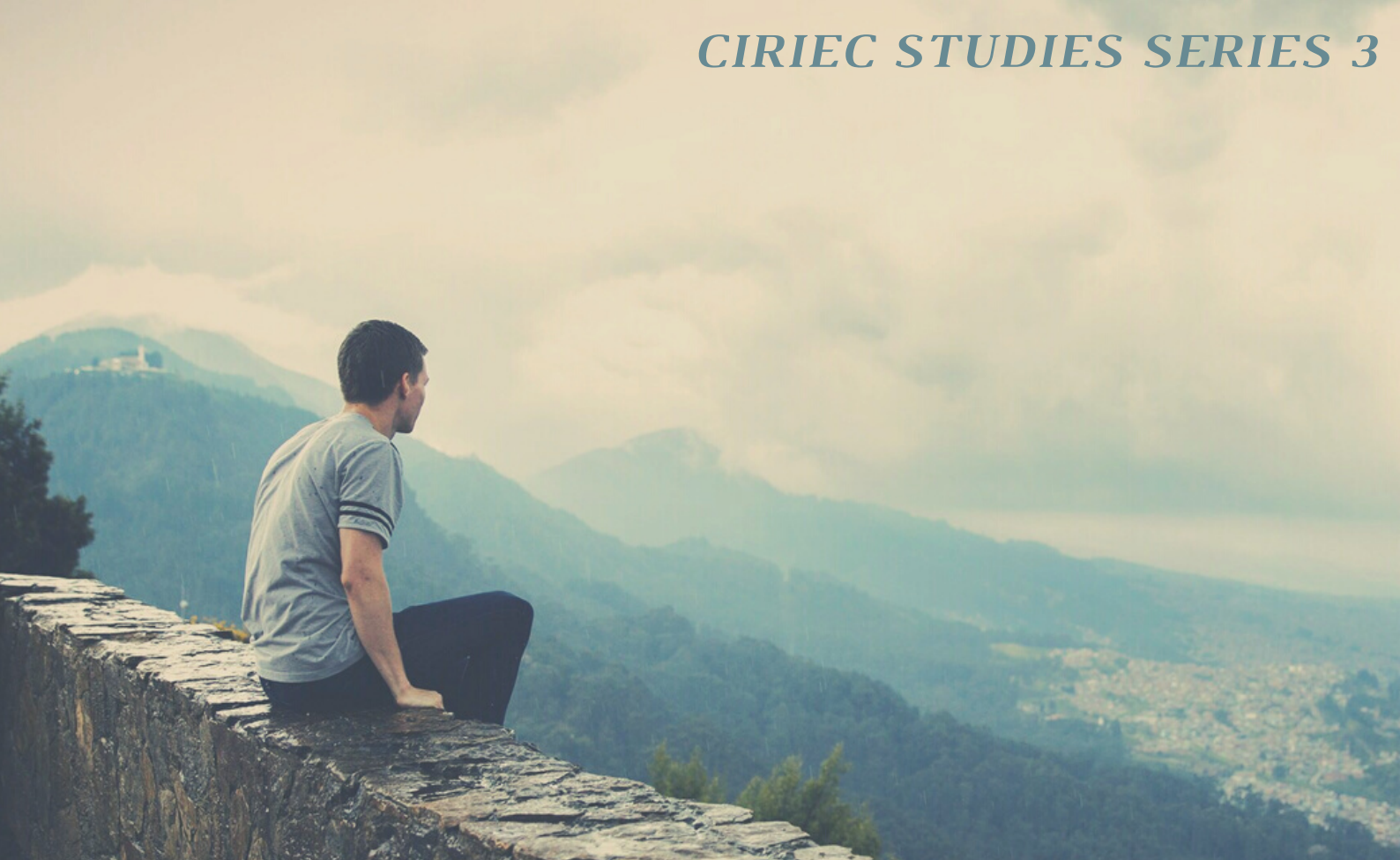
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CHAPTER 10

**SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY  
AND THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF A  
NEW FIELD OF LOCAL PUBLIC  
POLICIES IN FRANCE**

**Laurent FRAISSE**

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## **Social and solidarity economy and the co-construction of a new field of local public policies in France / Chapter 10**

Laurent FRAISSE\*

### **Abstract**

This paper proposes to come back to the construction of local policies in favour of social and solidarity economy (SSE) in France. It is first of all a question of demonstrating how coalitions of elected representatives, technicians, social entrepreneurs, heads of local networks and local managers of support and financing structures have participated in the consolidation of the "social and solidarity economy" which is a French terminological singularity. In the 2000s, when a national policy was lacking, it was at the level of local governments that a public action dedicated to SSE was experimented. New thematic and specific support instruments were then put in place without reference to the normative framework that has become since July 2014 the law on SSE. Then, SSE policies are implemented in tension between a policy of recognition through the implementation of specific instruments and the will to act transversally on the main challenges of the territory (housing, employment, mobility, social cohesion, culture, sustainable development, etc.). Finally, elected representatives and actors of local SSE policies have claimed and experimented processes of co-construction of public action whose contexts, conditions and achievements we propose to highlight.

**Keywords:** social and solidarity economy, public policy, co-construction, coproduction, participation

**JEL-Codes:** B55

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## 1. The emergence of local social and solidarity economy (SSE) policies in France

The emergence of local policies in favour of SSE in France can be traced back to recent history<sup>1</sup>. From the point of view of public action, it is possible to distinguish three periods. The first period goes from the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 2000s. It corresponds to the grouping at the national level of the leaders of cooperative, mutualist and associative families behind the notion of social economy. At the same time, actors and initiatives are claiming to be part of a solidarity economy. Rooted in local development approaches and in territorial networks of initiatives, they organized themselves nationally into networks<sup>2</sup> in the 1990s. This period gave rise to a first phase of institutionalization at the national level, the milestones of which were the creation of an interministerial delegation for the social economy in 1981 and a secretariat for the solidarity economy in 2000.

Between 2002 and 2012 a second period began. It was the local authorities that were experimenting with policies in favour of SSE. First in cities and "communautés de communes"<sup>3</sup>, then in the French regions and departments, SSE has become a formal competence of several local elected officials and has appears to appear in organizational charts. They have contributed to the valorisation of these initiatives and enterprises in local economic development and have facilitated their grouping within territorialized networks. They have positioned SSE on other issues than integration through economic activity. They have co-constructed action plans and experiment targeted support and financing schemes. Local policies have been an opportunity to bring together social economy and solidarity economy actors who have been supported in their community organizing. While there was no longer, strictly speaking, a national SSE policy under the Raffarin (2002-2006) and Fillon (2007-2012)<sup>4</sup> governments, it is therefore at the level of local governments that the SSE has been maintained and developed as an autonomous field of public action.

The last period from 2012 to today is marked by the renewal of a national policy whose culmination was the SSE Act n°2014-856 of 31 July 2014 drafted by Benoît Hamon's Ministry of SSE. It legally recognises and integrated in practice local SSE policies. With a few exception<sup>5</sup>, these policies are being maintained and are passing the tests of political and electoral cycles and the reduction of State allocations

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed history of the social and solidarity economy for the contemporary period, we refer to Timothée Duverger's book, *L'Économie sociale et solidaire. Une histoire de la société civile en France et en Europe de 1968 à nos jours*. Le Bord de l'Eau, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The main groupings were successively the *Agence de liaison pour le développement de l'économie alternative* (ALDEA), the *Réseau d'économie alternative et solidaire* (REAS), then the *Mouvement pour l'économie solidaire* (MES).

<sup>3</sup> Groupings of municipalities.

<sup>4</sup> The inter-ministerial delegation for the social economy still existed but with limited funding and staff.

<sup>5</sup> We are thinking, for example, of the Rhône-Alpes or Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur regions.

to local authorities. The appointment of a High Commissioner for SSE in 2017, following the election of Emmanuel Macron, potentially opens a new period of public policies, more oriented towards social entrepreneurship and social innovation. On a symbolic level, the term SSE is maintained in the title of the mission entrusted to Christophe Itier, in his main speeches and the SSE Growth Pact<sup>6</sup> presented in November 2018.

Local SSE policies have therefore existed since the early 2000s. Although modest, they have rather experienced a positive dynamic of diffusion at the different levels of territorial authorities (Municipalities, Intercommunalities, Departments, Regions). Beyond the affirmation of the socio-economic weight of mutual cooperatives, associations and foundations, which represent between 7% and 14% of employment depending on the region (CNCRESS, 2017), SSE territorial policies strive to support socially innovative initiatives and enterprises, new forms of local fair trades or short-food supply chains, solidarity finance and territorialized economic cooperation. Although it is difficult to quantify its importance, some indicators allow to approach its magnitude. The Network of Local Authorities for a Solidarity Economy (RTES), the main network of elected officials and technicians on this theme in France, states that by the end of 2019 it will have 130-member authorities<sup>7</sup>. During the 2010-2015 mandate, all 22 Regional Councils (in metropolitan France) had a delegation including the SSE competence.

The role of local governments in the development of "other modes of entrepreneurship" was recognised by the SSE Act of July 2014. Article 7 states that "*the region shall draw up, in consultation with the regional chamber of social and solidarity economy and with social and solidarity economy organizations and enterprises, a regional strategy for the social and solidarity economy and may contract with departments, municipalities and public intermunicipal cooperation establishments for the implementation of concerted strategies and the deployment of the social and solidarity economy on the regional territory*". Moreover, article 8 of the law provides for the organization in each region of a regional conference of the SSE, including among other stakeholders, local authorities, to define "*the orientations, means and results of local development policies of the SSE social and solidarity economy*". This recognition of local authorities that have for several years implemented local actions in favour of SSE without a national normative and legal framework is a sign of consolidation of a new field of public action.

Our perspective on the emergence of a new field of public action explores three aspects. The first is the contribution of local policies to the socio-political construction of SSE terminology in France. The second concerns the permanent tension between the implementation of a specific policy of recognition of SSE and the ambition of a

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ecologique-solidaire.gouv.fr/gouvernement-presente-pacte-croissance-leconomie-sociale-et-solidaire>, consulted on March 5, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.rtes.fr/system/files/inline-files/CarteAdh%C3%A9rents2019\\_4.pdf](https://www.rtes.fr/system/files/inline-files/CarteAdh%C3%A9rents2019_4.pdf), consulted on March 5, 2020.

transversal policy. The third aspect explores the contributions and limits of SSE policies to the renewal of public action through the claim and experimentation of co-construction practices.

## **2. The contribution of local policies to the construction of social and solidarity economy semantics**

The first challenge in building a new field of public action has been cognitive<sup>8</sup>. It has concerned the collective understanding of social and solidarity economy (SSE) and more broadly the dominant representations of territorial economic development. It should not be forgotten that before the SSE Law of July 2014, the institutional framing of what SSE represented was normative and legally unstable. The first elected officials had to deal locally with different sensibilities and plural approaches to the field (Fraisie, 2005). In spite of an undeniable acculturation and a growing media coverage of the issue, the initial situation has been a weak legitimacy and legibility of SSE among elected officials and the administration, but also vis-à-vis local economic actors and residents. What is the social and solidarity economy? Which kind of initiatives and companies should be included in this policy field? This is the type of questioning that an elected official in the SSE is confronted with at the beginning of his first term of office.

### **Methodological framework**

Based on a sociology of public action framework, this text put in the perspective fifteen years of research and evaluation on local SSE policies.

This empirical work have combined case studies (Fraisie, Uhry, 2005a), action research (Fraisie, Berger, 2006; Fraisie, 2007; Fraisie, 2018), evaluations (Artois Com, Lille Métropole, Ville de Lille, Plaine Commune). They gave rise to publications that outlined an initial conceptualization of the process of development and implementation of this area singular of public action (Fraisie, 2005, 2008, 2017). This research and evaluation have mobilized around sixteen semi-directive interviews with elected officials and technicians in charge of SSE but also of other sectoral policies, of various network heads and local actors of SSE as well as economic and social actors of the territories concerned. The purpose of these interviews aimed at a locally situated understanding of the SSE, – especially the type of initiatives and enterprises it represented. – The questions also dealt with the degree of knowledge of the field of SSE by local policy makers as well as the objectives and actions of the local government in support of SSE. The objective was to assess whether SSE was seen as

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<sup>8</sup> Cognitive approaches to policy emphasize the role of ideas and learning in explaining policy changes. For Pierre Muller, interests at work in public policy are expressed through "a framework for interpreting the world" (2000).

relevant for addressing cross-cutting issues or only for sectoral actions. In addition, this work was based on a secondary analysis of the deliberations and framework documents of the local authorities studied in order to assess the visibility and positioning of SSE in their main priorities and devices. Finally, these studies were informed by observations made in numerous forums, debates or working groups organised at different stages of the co-construction of these policies facilitating access to many minutes and records of decisions.

The results of these studies on local SSE policies and their specificities are here doubly put into perspective. On the one hand, comparative research conducted on the process of building a national SSE policy in France (Fraisie, 2009; Fraisie et al., 2016) have opened up to multi-scalar analysis. On the other hand, recent investigation on the co-construction of local public policies (Fraisie, 2018; 2019) allows us to situate local SSE policies in relation to other public policy domains (for instance culture or urban policies).

The testimony of one of the first local elected officials in charge of SSE is revealing in this respect:

*"When I was elected in Rennes Metropole in 2001, I created the social and solidarity economy delegation. We didn't talk about it. We created the Network of Solidarity Economy Territories in 2001, with 5 other cities: Lyon, Grenoble, Lille, Nantes and Toulouse. So, we were very little interested in developing this form of economy and entrepreneurship. It was difficult to make our colleagues understand what it is all about - and this is still true today - as the orthodox approach to the economy is still so prevalent in everyone's mind".<sup>9</sup>*

In this context, the content and frontiers of the SSE were the first challenge for elected officials. In this perspective, the question of definition in the elaboration of local policies presented a threefold interest:

- to establish a collective identity for the actors and companies around a shared understanding of the perimeter;
- encourage the acculturation and training of elected officials, territorial agents or representatives of the local economic fabric by involving them in the process;
- make themselves known and recognized locally through the production of knowledge and communication tools (statistical data, promotion of local entrepreneurs, practical guides, public events).

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<sup>9</sup> Interview conducted by Martine Théveniaut, "Alain Yvergniaux : *L'histoire apprenante d'un élu de Bretagne, du local à l'international, de 1995 à l'international, de 1995 à 2010*" (Alain Yvergniaux: The learning story of an elected official in Brittany, from local to international, from 1995 to 2010), 27 May 2010, [http://aloe.socioeco.org/article967\\_fr.html](http://aloe.socioeco.org/article967_fr.html)



In the 2000s, discussions between SSE actors, elected officials and competent services often led to a compromise between a statutory approach to the social economy<sup>10</sup> and the addition of criteria carried by new solidarity initiatives. To the principles of governance common to cooperatives, mutual societies and associations, criteria were added such as "social utility", "territorial anchorage", "sustainable development", "fair trade", "economic citizenship", "social innovation". The reference to the slogan "do business, save and consume differently" was a consensus. This procedural rather than substantive approach to SSE is probably less relevant today because the 2014 Act proposes a legal definition that can be directly appropriated by local authorities.

### **Theoretical framework**

This article draws on a sociology of public action to understand the emergence of SSE as a new policy field for local authorities. It is notably inspired by Pierre Muller's cognitive approach to public policy. This differs from approaches in terms of rational choices ("public choices") which mainly explain public policies in terms of confrontation of interests. It insists on the role of ideas and the learning process of actors to analyse the construction and putting on the agenda of public problems, the elaboration of action plans and the implementation of specific instruments. For Pierre Muller, the interests at work in public policies are expressed through "a framework for interpreting the world" (2000). These cognitive and normative frameworks constitute "public policy referentials" from which "a social problem is formulated" in a given policy field by a group or coalition of actors according to its "identity and power strategies" (2005).

The cognitive sociology of public action has been compared to the "advocacy coalition framework" (Sabatier, 2010) that we mobilized in a European comparison of third sector (Kendall, 2009). The basic principle of the ACF is that "actors are grouped together in one or more advocacy coalitions, whose members share a set of normative beliefs and perceptions of the world, and that they act together to translate their beliefs into public policy." (2010, p. 49).

Thus, the identification of the different coalitions that contribute to the political structuring of SSE is central to the analysis. Taking seriously both the ideas and discourses as well as the strategies and skills of the actors seems to us particularly relevant to explain the process of institutionalization of specific SSE policies at the local level. The unequal existence of dedicated SSE policies according to countries and territories (Chaves, Monzón, 2018; Fraisse, 2019b) testifies to the fact their emergence remains very strongly sensitive to local contexts. Moreover, they allow to consider as policy-makers others networks of actors and enterprises than just elected officials and the local administrative elite who are generally not very aware of SSE issues. Finally, the notion of a "non-stabilized referential" seems to be particularly appropriate for understanding the issue of recognition of SSE as a legitimate public policy issue in the face of the dominant representations of the enterprise and economic development within the local administration.

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<sup>10</sup> Article 1 of the SSE Law lists several conditions for membership, including: "a purpose other than the mere sharing of profits"; "democratic governance"; and profits "mainly devoted to the objective of maintaining or developing the company's activity".

This search for legitimacy of SSE elected officials in the political-administrative sphere has gradually led them to a discursive use of the term "SSE" for three reasons. The first is a representation of the field based on the local production of knowledge. It generally articulates a statistical portrait elaborated from a statutory approach (number of establishments and jobs in cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations and now companies with social purpose) and the public valorization of social entrepreneurs and local initiatives. The production of figures attesting the contribution of SSE to job creation combined with the presentation of emblematic enterprises and innovative projects are the two main levers to convince elected officials and agents of the contributions of SSE to the priorities of local authorities.

The second reason is the construction of what some political science researchers refer to as a "local public policy community"<sup>11</sup> (Keating, Cairney and Hepburn, 2009). Local SSE policy roadmaps often refer to "building an ecosystem of actors and political arrangements for SSE". Where statutory and sectoral fragmentation often prevailed, local SSE constellations have emerged during the development and implementation of local government action plans. For example, in the European metropolis of Lille, the main actors of the "local SSE community" are the following: elected officials and technicians in charge of social and solidarity economy or voluntary sector at different scales (from the city of *Lille* to the *Hauts-de-France* region), civil servant of decentralized State services such as public employment services (*Directe*) or in charge of voluntary sector (*DRJSCS*<sup>12</sup>), regional representatives of the ESS (*CRESS* and *APES*<sup>13</sup>), those of cooperative families (*URSCOP*<sup>14</sup>) or associative families (*Le Mouvement associatif*), researchers (*ChairESS Haut-de-France*), structures specialising in support or managing schemes (e.g. *DLA*<sup>15</sup>), dedicated funding bodies (*Nord Actif*, foundations, *Caisse des Dépôts*). Beyond the interests and particularities of each of the stakeholders, they share a common language around what SSE represents in the metropolis and are familiar with the priorities of the SSE metropolitan plan, emblematic initiatives and innovative projects, support instruments and funding programmes, and higher or professional training. A second circle is constituted of entrepreneurs, local network leaders and project promoters who participate in public meetings on SSE or benefit from support and funding.

The third reason was that the first elected officials had to deal locally with sometimes conflicting sensibilities and approaches to the field. Their will to mobilise a large number of actors and enterprises to legitimise a new policy field led to links between the social economy and the solidarity economy, prefiguring the compromise around

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<sup>11</sup> "We propose the concept of "territorial policy communities" to designate territorially bounded constellations of actors within and across policy sector" (p. 51).

<sup>12</sup> Regional Direction for Youth, Sport and Social Cohesion (DRJSCS).

<sup>13</sup> *Chambre régionale de l'économie sociale et solidaire* (CRESS) and *Acteurs pour une économie solidaire* (APES).

<sup>14</sup> Regional Union of cooperative enterprises (*Union Régionale des scops*).

<sup>15</sup> Local support program dedicated to non-profit organization.

the imperfect notion of "SSE". These rapprochements were possible because, with the exception of a few regions<sup>16</sup>, there were no competing and structuring coalitions of actors as there were at the national level<sup>17</sup>.

### **3. From a policy of recognition to the ambition of a plural economy regulation**

Social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiatives and enterprises have not waited for the appointment of a dedicated elected official to become partners of local public policies. Simply, the historical and main vector of access to public authorities remains sectoral policies. An association managing cultural facilities is primarily aimed at the elected representative for culture, and a structure for integration through economic activity deals with the employment and integration services. A *ressourcerie* (recovery and reuse centres)<sup>18</sup> seeks support for sustainable development or waste recovery policies. The challenge of a local SSE policy is therefore to define its added value in relation to sectoral policies. Concretely, it is a matter of collectively identifying common priorities and horizontal actions for all SSE components. Horizontal means transcending statutory and sectoral logics. A local SSE policy does not aim at a simple numerical increase of cooperatives, mutual societies, non for profit organisations and other social enterprises. Moreover, it is not reduced to an addition of support to a few initiatives, sectors or historically visible fields such as fair trade, solidarity finance, integration through economic activity, the development of home and personal care services.

The development of a strategy and an action plan that mobilizes and consolidates locally a community of SSE initiatives and enterprises while opening it to the local economic fabric implies combining specific and transversal policy instruments (Fraise, 2009). Schematically, a specific policy answers the question: what can a local authority do to develop SSE? Conversely, a cross-cutting policy enhances the capacity of SSE to meet the challenges of a community? By specific instruments, we mean valorisation, support and financing mechanisms dedicated to SSE actors and organisations. Generally, specific actions refer to the following aspects: information, knowledge and promotion of SSE; support to the structuring of the heads of networks and local support organisations; support to the creation and consolidation of new activities and companies (calls for projects); economic cooperation and

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<sup>16</sup> The regions *Nord Pas-de-Calais*, *Basse Normandie*, *Centre*, *Midi-Pyrénées* where local groupings of solidarity economy have been organized in the years 90/2000.

<sup>17</sup> The title of the Secretariat of State for the Solidarity Economy in 2000 was the subject of controversy, as Guy Hascoët explained (2005).

<sup>18</sup> *Ressourcerie* collects objects without selecting them, revalorizes them, redistributes them, and carries out environmental awareness actions. Its aim is the creation of economic activity through recycling, transformation and resale of bulky waste.

mutualisation aiming at changing scale; structuring of sectors; partnerships with the State and other local authorities, etc. In view of the relatively modest budgetary resources, local SSE policies have above all a symbolic scope which is part of a "policy of recognition" of initiatives and companies that have historically been not taken into account the economic development priorities. For a long time outside the scope of the main representations and actions of elected officials and economic and social representatives of a territory, the socio-economic weight of SSE and its contributions to the creation of local wealth have often been invisible or perceived in a fragmentary manner.

However, the efforts made to achieve institutional recognition by adapting to the rules and practices of political-administrative functioning can lead to making SSE an additional policy without real control over the main budgetary trade-offs and the fundamentals of economic development. The claims and transformative capacities of SSE, such as regulating a plural economy or contributing to the democratisation of local public action, are sometimes muted. Without being neglected, these perspectives have been expressed in the speeches of elected officials and actors around two concepts: the transversely of SSE policies and the co-construction of public action.

Cross-cutting actions aim at decompartmentalizing SSE and facilitating the integration of its initiatives and enterprises in common law policies and programs. At a first level, transversally consists in mobilizing political, administrative and financial resources from sectoral policies towards SSE projects. This involves strategies of awareness-raising, discussion and alliances with other elected officials and technicians in order to convince them that SSE initiatives can respond to the major challenges of the local community (e.g. job creation, access to housing, healthy food, waste recovery, diversification of early childhood care, etc.). Involving the managers and agents of other sectoral policies at certain stages of SSE policy development can open opportunities for co-financing projects while facilitating the inclusion of SSE in the main framework policy documents (climate change agenda, economic development plan, local urban planning, city contract, etc.).

Another aspect of transversality is more ambitious. It is no longer simply a question of colouring the sectoral policies with a little SSE by allowing these actors and entrepreneurs to access all the common law mechanisms and financing. The claim is to influence the socio-economic regulations of the territory, or even to promote an integrated area development (Hiller et al., 2004) and ecological transition. Its operational translation consists in influencing the institutional frameworks of resources allocation and thus the programs and instruments which concern all the economic actors of the territory. For example, contractualisation and financing methods (subsidy or public procurement), the evolution of the grant budget in the trade-offs between investment and operating expenditures, the introduction of social and environmental clauses in public procurement contracts, the social and environmental conditionality of aid to firms, the inclusion of social innovation within

innovation policies or the modalities of distribution and allocation of assisted employments are all policies that are potentially favourable to SSE organisations but that also affect other economic organisations and business. However, their political set-up as well as their practical effectiveness often implies an extension of the network of local SSE policies to other political, economic and social stakeholders of the territory.

#### **4. Co-construction as a horizon for the renewal of local public action**

Many elected officials and representatives of social and solidarity (SSE) publicly claim the term co-construction to qualify the processes of local SSE policy making and even implementation. Its relative visibility in the public space is due to the frequent use of the term co-construction by the elected representatives who founded the main network of local authorities for the solidarity economy: the *RTES*. As the President of the *RTES* Christiane Bouchart points out: “What is also important for us is that these SSE policies are not a technical tool, a set of instruments, but they also carry another way of conceiving political action, notably by co-constructing these policies and provoking public debate<sup>19</sup>.” The notion has been taken up by a new generation of SSE elected officials in charge since the 2010's. Thus, Agnès Thouvenot, elected town Councillor, Deputy for the solidarity economy, employment, integration and health at the town hall of Villeurbanne since 2014, affirms about the process of developing her policy: “These assessments of the existing situation, which need to be refined, will enable us to move on to the second stage: the co-construction of an SSE strategy with the stakeholders”. Or as Mahel Coppey, Vice-President of Nantes Métropole, who succeeded Jean-Philippe Magnen in the Delegation for the social and solidarity economy and the circular economy, reminds us: “What is particular to Nantes is this heritage of "doing things with" / "doing things together"... everything here is co-construction, and has been for a long time”<sup>20</sup>. For Jeanne Barseghain, Euro-metropolitan Councillor from Strasbourg, who is the SSE delegate, co-construction is not limited to SSE policy but is intended to be disseminated transversally to other policies: “Then, the SSE council goes far beyond our SSE policy. We are in direct dialogue with the actors. We associate all the agents and elected officials. It is a valuable tool for cross-cutting issues. The spread of SSE council practices within the community in the various public policies has begun.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Christiane Bouchart - President of *RTES*, 26 February 2014, [www.jeunes-socialistes.fr/2014/02/interview-de-christiane-bouchart-presidente-du-rts/](http://www.jeunes-socialistes.fr/2014/02/interview-de-christiane-bouchart-presidente-du-rts/)

<sup>20</sup> “We have a real legacy of dialogue in Nantes” - Interview with Mahel Coppey by Céline Parat - 16 May 2015, <https://www.rtes.fr/nous-avons-un-veritable-heritage-de-dialogue-sur-le-territoire-nantais-entretien-avec-mahel-coppey>, consulted on May 27, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Jeanne Barseghain, Euro-metropolitan Councillor Strasbourg delegated to SSE and Sandra Guilmin, in charge of SSE policy at the City and Euro-metropolis of Strasbourg, by Laurent Fraise on May 2018.

But beyond the speeches and postures of the elected representatives, the notion of co-construction is also present in the resource documents put online, the debates and the training courses organised by the RTES. The Eurometropolis of Strasbourg has formalised and enhanced its practices by publishing in 2019 a guide "Co-constructing public policies. How do we do it?". The political operationalisation of the concept also took shape in the Law on the Social and Solidarity Economy of July 2014 as a sign of the recognition of the role of local authorities in its development. This approach met with relative success since, following the proposed amendments to the RTES, article 8 mentions: "*The public policies of local authorities and their groupings in favour of the social and solidarity economy may be part of co-construction approaches with all the actors concerned. The modalities of this co-construction are based in particular on the setting up of bodies associating the players concerned or approaches associating citizens in the public decision-making process*"<sup>22</sup>. It should also be noted that the notion of co-construction appears in other legislative texts (Fraisie, 2019), in particular in article 122 of Law no. 2014-173 of 21 February 2014 on programming for the city and urban cohesion<sup>23</sup>.

Within the framework of a sociology of public action, co-construction can be defined as *an instituted process of open and organized participation of a plurality of stakeholders in the elaboration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies* (Fraisie, 2017). The process is instituted in the sense that co-construction is concomitant with experiments in participatory democracy that are relatively well documented and analysed today (Blondiaux and Fourniau, 2011), although it is possible to link it to a longer history of attempts to rebalance relations between local authorities and associations (Barthélémy, 2000). Co-construction belongs to the register of political participation. It differs from processes of political elaboration and decision-making that tend to exclude or marginalize non-institutional actors. This is the case of the "decisionist" conception, where priorities and trade-offs are decided by a political leader. The Fifth Republic, sometimes referred to as a "republican monarchy" (Duverger, 1974) is emblematic in this respect. This is also the case with the "technocratic" conduct of public policies, where senior civil servants, technicians in administrations and more generally experts play a central role in the decision-making and policy implementation processes. As opened and organised process of participation, co-construction is distinguished by the following practices: informal, bilateral and behind-the-scenes consultations of civil society organizations that may be captive to notable networks (Grémion, 1978), clientelist practices or interest groups lobbying. Finally, co-construction differs from "new public management" or,

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<sup>22</sup> Article 8, II, Loi ESS LOI n° 2014-856 du 31 juillet 2014 relative à l'économie sociale et solidaire, [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000029313296&categorieLien=id](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000029313296&categorieLien=id), consulted on March 5, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> For an evaluation of co-construction in citizens' councils, see the evaluation report of the National Commission for Public Debate (CNDP) on participatory democracy in neighborhoods (2019), available at <https://www.debatpublic.fr/mission-conseils-citoyens>, consulted on March 5, 2020.

more precisely, from a tendency to introduce "corporate management" techniques into the public policy making.

#### **Co-construction, consultation, negotiation, concertation and coproduction**

Co-construction does not reduce to a simple *consultation* by looking for an agreement beyond a non-binding collection of opinions or points of view.

It differs from *negotiation* insofar as it is based on collective construction issues and solutions, and is not just about the a compromise between opposing interests.

It will beyond *concertation* as a process that carries on public policy and not just on the resolution of a problem or the implementation of a program.

Finally, it is different from *co-production* which is more about "cooperation necessary for the creation, implementation work and management of services of general interest by the third sector" (Pestoff, Brandsen, Verschuere, 2012). Co-construction cannot be reduced to a simple *public social and solidarity partnerships* analysed as "phenomenon of cooperations between public organizations (...), and SSE organizations so as to guarantee the provision of new services" (Bance, 2018, p. 303).

Beyond the coproduction of services of general interest, co-construction is also about contributing to "new forms of public action in the territories" (Bance and al., 2018, p. 178) by concretely experimenting new objectives, process and instruments of public policies.

This promotion of co-construction in France by the RTES was noted by Yves Vaillancourt (2014) in his international perspective on the role of the third sector in the development of public policies. This analysis refers in particular to the book *Action publique et économie solidaire* (Laville et al., 2005) in which a first framing of the notion is proposed (Fraisie, 2005). A transversal rereading of the chapters highlights that the term co-construction was at that time far from being hegemonic. It coexisted with other notions such as consultation, debate, participation, concertation, cooperation or partnership. This plurality indicates varying degrees of intensity in the modalities of associating SSE actors in the elaboration of the policies that concern them. It shows that in the mid-2000s, the reference to co-construction was not stabilised.

Its progressive and recent affirmation can be interpreted as a way of standing out from other terminologies that are too institutionally connoted. For example, the use of *public debate* procedures "mainly concerns development or equipment projects with significant socio-economic stakes and/or impacts on the human and natural environment: road, rail or electricity infrastructures, port facilities or incinerators, etc." (Rui, 2011, p. 121). *Participation* has been strongly invoked through the various attempts to involve inhabitants in the social development projects of neighbourhoods promoted by the initial period of the urban policy (Avenel, p. 2007). *Partnership* was a mode of action that was put forward for a time to qualify the relations between associations and local authorities before a critical distance was taken from the constituent asymmetries of the practices that claimed to be based on it (De Maillard, 2002). Co-construction appears to be a less politically marked term

among the panoply of approaches aimed at democratising local public action. But above all, it is more in line with the specific challenges of a new SSE policy whose political legitimacy and institutional contours are poorly defined and appropriated by the elected representatives and technicians of local authorities.

The reasons for using this concept among elected representatives are both their profile and the will to act politically in accordance with the values of the SSE (democracy, solidarity, cooperation, etc.), but also to a pragmatic strategy to overcome the lack of political-administrative resources. The participation of actors and networks in SSE policy-making is not only based on a democratic ethos or a willingness to transform the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed. The capacity to rely on a visible local civil society and active local groupings is a condition for legitimizing elected officials in SSE who often have few political and administrative resources in local executives. Politically, elected officials in charge of SSE are often newcomers. They are rarely local notables or leaders who occupy strategic decision-making positions and have the relational networks likely to influence political and budgetary arbitrations. The broad participation of actors and representatives of the different SSE sensitivities, their visibility in the public space, their confrontation with the agents of local authorities and the conventional economy are conditions to be able to negotiate a capacity for action within the local politico-administrative system.

The participation of actors in the elaboration of local SSE policies is also explained by the singularity of their stakes:

- integrate SSE into the dominant representations of the economy;
- delimit a perimeter of intervention constrained by the competences of the community and the existing devices;
- prepare a credible action plan or encourage a collective and representative dynamic of actors.

The co-construction of these policies is characterized by coalitions of values and interests at the intersection of public and collective actions. It combines processes of representative and participatory democracy. The analysis of the processes of co-construction of SSE local policies consisted in identifying the sequences and configurations. The main stages identified in a recurrent way are the following:

- (1) the achievement of an inventory of SSE in the territory, which often takes the form of a shared diagnosis or an action research. To a certain extent, co-production of knowledge is part of the co-construction processes of public policy.
- (2) the organisation of public meetings (conference, seminar) open to all interested actors often articulated in collective work in workshops or thematic groups around political priorities.



- (3) a collective selection of the main orientations or priorities that will constitute the architecture of a local SSE development plan, the identification of emblematic and innovative actions that will be supported.
- (4) the monitoring and evaluation of the policy which can take the form of consultation bodies, permanent forum, participatory evaluation.

Co-construction is upstream and downstream of the deliberation process that engages the community on the SSE Action Plan and its budget.

Three co-construction configurations have been distinguished (Fraisie, 2017):

- (1) The first is a "corporatist" co-construction<sup>24</sup> dominated by a face-to-face meeting between elected representatives and technicians of the community and the main network heads. By designating the Regional Chambers of SSE (CRESS) as the main interlocutor of the public authorities, the law on SSE encourages this configuration, which refers to a single territorial grouping the task of representing and mobilising the actors.
- (2) The second configuration mixes a participatory process open to all interested stakeholders while relying on legitimate and competent local network managers. The use of participatory processes is all the more frequent as the elected representatives do not have locally an organized and representative interlocutor.
- (3) The third and last configuration places the co-construction of SSE policies within the framework of local consultative bodies involving organisations representing the economic and social interest groups of the territory. This was the case, for example, of the Grenoble metropolitan policy, which created a partnership monitoring committee composed of several colleges (SSE actors, large companies, other local authorities, resource persons) (Fraisie, Uhry: 2005a). Sometimes these bodies already exist. Thus, Rennes Metropole has relied on CODESPAR (*Comité de Développement Economique et Social du Pays de Rennes*) to implement its SSE policy.

The recent analysis of the co-construction of the SSE policy in the region Nouvelle Aquitaine (Colomes, Caire, 2020) is an example of the integration of SSE support in the regional economic development and innovation plan (SRDEII). This official document is the roadmap for economic development policy. Implementing articles 7 and 8 of the SSE Law of 2014, the Regional Chambers of SSE (CRESS) have organized a broad multi-stakeholder process to collect and synthesize proposals to develop SSE. A published document organising proposal by main priorities was transmitted to the Regional Council, which amended them and then presented and

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<sup>24</sup> "Corporatist" co-construction refers to the situation where, by injunction of public decision-makers or by the hegemonic will of an organization, representation and relationship with public authorities is monopolized by a single network head or federation.

discussed during a regional conference. More than 65 percent of the SSE proposals were finally included in the SRDEII. Presented as an example of the institutionalization of the co-construction process, the authors confirm among the limits, the corporatist character of the process partly due to the central role granted by law to the CRESS as the main interlocutor of the local public authorities.

Our analysis confirms a certain number of favourable situations (Vaillancourt, 2015) for co-construction. Firstly, there are more opportunities at the time of the genesis of a policy whose referential is not very stable in the dominant representations and the existing institutional architecture. Secondly, co-construction is claimed by actors who "are often forgotten or marginalised in the development of public policies". It is a watchword of people and organisations who are unfamiliar with institutional arenas and who are endowed with limited resources to form an interest group. Finally, co-construction is a decision-making process that is more appropriate at the local level and less operative at the state level.

Other factors favourable (Fraise, 2019) to co-construction are the willingness, profiles and positioning of elected officials, but also the openness and acculturation of local authority agents. The capacity of SSE actors to build local coalitions, interlocutors of public authorities, is another decisive condition. The preservation of autonomous and non-institutional forums for deliberation, led by the actors and linked to the official consultation bodies, is also a requirement for building citizen expertise. The co-piloting of the calendar, the animation and the formulation of objectives and recommendations is a useful methodological principle to guard against the risks of instrumentalization. Taking into account and compensating the inequality of resources (time, skills, socio-economic weight, etc.) for the participation of a diversity of stakeholders is essential. Finally, if an ethic of listening and dialogue is necessary to change the posture of stakeholders it must be linked to an ability to identify disagreements and positively management of potential conflicts.

## **Conclusion**

Other comparative studies conducted at the international (Utting, 2017) or European level (Chaves et al., 2018) have recently analysed SSE policies. They favour the comparison of public policy mechanisms and instruments over the analysis of the processes of their co-construction. The interest of the CIRIEC studies lies in the distinction between "hard policies" and "soft policies". From this point of view, local SSE public policies implement incentive rather than binding instruments. This is one of their limits. They have little control over company legislation, taxation, the public procurement code or employment policies. However, they do have room for manoeuvre in interpreting the law, for example, on the arbitration between subsidies and public procurement in the financing of associations.

Nonetheless, local SSE policies in France have resisted relatively well since the middle of 2010 to the combined effects of political changeovers, local authorities reform and the decrease of State grants to local governments. Overall, they have managed to maintain the name SSE in organizational charts despite the emergence of competing terminologies, notably social entrepreneurship which has been promoted by the State since the presidential election of Emmanuel Macron. Some local governments also succeed in broadening the repertoire of economic development policies. In recent years, local governments have focused on cross-cutting actions and instruments to decompartmentalize SSE: social innovation, economic cooperation, responsible public procurement, ecological transition (AVISE/RTES, 2019).

At the end of this descriptive and analytical process of the co-construction processes of local social and solidarity economy (SSE) policies in France, is it possible to draw up an assessment of the contribution of these approaches to the democratisation of local public action beyond the discourse and postures of elected representatives? SSE policies undeniably rely on the participation of local actors and networks, particularly in the construction of their action plans. Co-construction is not reduced to simple consultation. Beyond a collection of points of view, it is a matter of collectively formulating problems and experimenting with solutions. By seeking a common agreement on objectives and priority actions, the two limiting points of co-construction are co-decision and co-management. There is always a possible gap between an action plan co-designed with the stakeholders and political deliberation, which is subject to a vote by a representative and sovereign body with elected representatives. Budgetary issues are the other blind spot in co-construction. The amount and distribution of SSE policy financing and, more broadly, its place in the budgetary arbitrations of the local authority are little discussed. At best, co-construction attenuates, without cancelling it, the "who pays decides" principle often invoked by official policy makers public decision-makers by allowing better information and budgetary transparency on the actions financed.

Moreover, the participatory approach is often more intense in the policy development phase than in the implementation phase. Finally, the participatory process often remains limited to SSE actors and networks (elected officials, entrepreneurs and activists) including with difficulty the inhabitants and citizens. The association to the deliberation of elected officials and technicians from other delegations or other levels of local authorities is often undertaken but unevenly achieved. The participation of local representatives of economic and social circles is often sought but remains partial. The risk of a partnership management of an action plan mobilising essentially, if not exclusively, the networks and enterprises that benefit from it must be taken into account. Co-construction approaches ultimately target "mini-publics" and "prove incapable, for lack of a possible generalization of these approaches, of concretizing a deliberation on a large scale and what could be likened to a participation of the greatest number" (Blondiaux and Fourniau, 2011).

As in the case of the analyses of the experiments of participatory democracy, the views the possible assessments of the co-construction of local policies in SSE oscillate between a critical approach that denounces its illusory character and a possibilistic approach that underlines its advances and potentialities. It is easy to point out the dangers of corporatist excesses, peripheral deliberative processes that have little influence on the main decisions and budgetary arbitrations of the community. It is easy to notice how the search for consensus tends to overlook the unequal treatment between "classical companies" and those of the SSE. Co-construction may be appreciated less in relation to an ideal of deliberation or political transformation but in relation to French local public action, which remains characterized locally by the supremacy of local executives leaving little room for deliberation and counter-powers (Lefebvre, 2011, p. 155). Without being irreproachable, SSE policies are characterized by a capacity to inform, consult and coordinate with SSE actors in order to frame and carry out an action plan, where other local policies proceed in a more top-down approach by relying on the expertise of the administration or notable networks. Comparatively, SSE policies are more co-constructed and participatory. Above all, they have had the merit of promoting a population of initiatives and enterprises that was underestimated in the economic representations of the local elites and poorly reflected in development policy instruments.

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