



Réseau des collectivités Territoriales pour une Économie Solidaire

Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) and its public policies in France

As in many European countries, SSE appeared in France in different forms from the middle of the 19th century onwards and co-operatives, mutual companies and associations have developed throughout the 20th century. But social economy only really started to be taken into account in the national policy in the 80's with the creation of an Interministerial Delegation for the Social Economy in 1981 and then, through the establishment of a State Secretariat for Solidarity Economy in 2000.

During the last decade in France, all levels of local authorities have developed SSE policies. A dedicated national Ministry was created in 2012 and a specific law was adopted in 2014. This law was adopted after a two-year consultation and debate with stakeholders and was a turning point for the development of SSE in France. The French law clearly defines SSE organizations: associations, co-operatives, mutual companies and foundations and, under particular conditions, commercial companies (social utility purpose, democratic governance, profits mainly reinvested to achieve the activity). And a SSE axis must be adopted in Regional Economic Development Plans (SRDEII).

Institutional recognition

1981: Interministerial Delegation for the Social Economy (DIES)

2000: State Secretariat for Solidarity Economy

2002: Creation of RTEs (*Réseau des Collectivités territoriales pour une Économie Solidaire*)

2004: Most regions (local authorities' level) set up a SSE policy with a specific delegate

2012: Minister in charge of trade, craft, and SSE

2014: SSE Law

2020: adoption roadmap of State Secretariat for Social, Solidarity et Responsible Economy

1 RTEs

Created in 2002, RTEs is a French network that gathers today over 180 local authorities (regions, municipalities...) that share a common conviction: SSE is an economy which is able to bring some relevant answers to economic, social and environmental needs on the territories. The local authorities, members of RTEs, benefit from an exchange and coordination platform on national level.

RTEs focuses on the relationship between local authorities and SSE and promotes the different means that local authorities can use to support SSE initiatives (promotion, public subsidies, responsible and sustainable public procurement...). RTEs' main objectives are to strengthen the position of SSE in public policies and optimize the role of public policies in the development of the social economy.

RTES supports :

- SSE as an economy which meets social, economic and environmental needs.
- The development of SSE policies co-created with all the stakeholders and actions based on a partnership between communities and grassroots initiatives.
- A broad vision (multiplicity of actors and sectors) and a cross-cutting approach of the SSE.

Through :

- The promotion of local authorities' initiatives for the development of SSE.
- Good practice exchange between members of the network
- Explaining conditions to improve existing policies.

2 Actions

A) Providing visibility

One of the aims of RTES is to give visibility to policies and actions that French local authorities set up to develop SSE. Consequently, the network develops many types of communication medium to inform, highlight the initiatives and raise awareness among other local authorities and institutions.

For example, RTES :

- enhances and contributes to the publication of press articles on SSE topics.
- updates its website with many articles, files and studies on specific SSE topics.
- highlights its members' news in its monthly newsletter ("SSE call for action", "Social innovation policies", "Opening an SSE incubator", "Urban policy and SSE"...).



«Flash Hebdo» newsletter ; interview of Nicolas Schmit, Member of the European Commission in charge of Jobs and Social Rights ; screenshot of the RTES's website homepage.

B) Promoting good practice exchange

RTES organizes national and local meetings on different subjects in order to enable representatives and officers to discuss their experience, to share their assessment and to think about the integration of social economy into public policies. For example, RTES organizes a yearly meeting with local authorities in order to discuss the main issues about social economy.



The 7th National Meeting of local authorities on SSE; Lunch during the «Europe & SSE» meeting.

C) Advising and informing

RTES organizes training sessions for elected officials and civil servants on specific topics (such as sustainable food, public procurement, circular economy, sustainable mobility...), and organizes also free web-conferences on current issues for its members.

Moreover, in order to keep its members informed, the network publishes a monthly newsletter, a quarterly letter and thematic works in relation with the academic world and think tanks specialized on SSE issues. Each week, a selection of articles is sent to members.



Covers of a «lettre papier» : Point de RepèreESS and of the RepèreESS «Europe & ESS».



For example in 2021, RTES organized and participated to :

- a national meeting on SSE in rural areas
- an exchange cycle on sustainable food and SSE
- a workshop during the European Social Economy Summit in Mannheim
- 20 meetings at regional scale for the local authorities on SSE, in partnership with the SSE regional chambers



For example, RTES organizes and publishes :

- 10 times a year : online conferences on different themes (« Accessible and sustainable food », « Solidarity garages », « Reserved contracts », « Civic energy »...),
- training sessions on the « New economic models », co-organized with the National Centre for the Training of Local Civil Servants,
- 12 monthly newsletters, almost 30 news report reserved to members and 3 printed letters,
- almost 10 notes a year focusing on a precise grassroots initiative and its links with local authorities,
- twice a year a Point de RepèreESS (a short focus on different topics, for example « Access to land »),
- twice a year a more developed publication the RepèreESS, for example : « Europe and social economy: issues and means of action for local authorities »,
- kits for politicians from different levels of government : tools, advices and levers for action.

D) Act for a better recognition of SSE by institutions

By capitalizing actions and policies of its members, RTES aims also to carry their voices to national, European and international institutions. In this sense, the network works for a better recognition of SSE by institutions but also advocates the development of policies and regulatory frameworks in favour of SSE at local, national and European levels.

Members of RTES can consult the network on national and European policies (laws, decrees...), and RTES established an internal committee specific to Europe linked with European authorities.

For example, RTES :

- participates to the French High Council of SSE and to the work on European and international issues,
- contributes to the European Social Economy action plan and to the transition pathway consultation,
- makes some concrete proposals on specific topics and laws which can impact SSE,
- and contributed to the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF).



Tribune of local representatives during the 2018's GSEF in Bilbao ;
a meeting of the GECES in Brussels.

3 Organization

RTES works in collaboration with different partners who promote SSE at different levels. It collaborates with local authorities' networks like Régions de France or France urbaine, in order to develop the place of the SSE in public policies. RTES collaborates also with several SSE networks at the local and national (for instance with ESS-France), and European and international levels (REVES, RIPESS and GSEF).

RTES sits on the board of the French High Council of SSE and is also asked by governmental bodies to contribute to laws and measures.

More logistically, RTES is managed by a board of directors composed of 25 elected members: regional, departmental or local councillors. Its head office is located in Lille and includes four employees. These resources are mainly based on the members' subscriptions (that contribute to 80% of the budget) and state subsidies.