

EXPLANATORY NOTE FOR THE WORKSHOP “THE ROLE OF SOCIAL ECONOMY AS A PARTNER IN POLICY ECOSYSTEMS”-Bratislava, December 1st 2016

By Samuel Barco Serrano (SOKIO COOP)

Preliminary issues

The workshops in the conference are intended to bring together different experiences, theoretical and practical knowledge and points of view on a subject of significant interest for the development of Social Economy and for the goals pursued by this type of entrepreneurship. The choice of speakers has been deliberately made to reflect a diversity of perspectives; whether sectoral (i.e. research, public administration, social entrepreneurs, etc.), geographies; and the type of social entrepreneurship involved (mutuals, cooperatives, social businesses, etc.).

In this workshop the speakers are encouraged to address complex issues and draw upon not only their practical experiences or initiatives they may have been engaged with, but also by using other assets such as research they are familiar with, points of view, their own analysis or even counter-examples. The aim is to try to facilitate a vivid and participatory debate after their initial interventions.

A few words about Policy Ecosystems and partnerships

In the mid-80s and 90s an increasing numbers of scholars, international organisations and leading innovators in public administrations started to use the term Governance to refer to a new approach towards policy development and implementation. In this case we can say that this term, albeit contested in nature, addresses the increasing complexity encountered by the action of public actors in attempting to solve problems within their communities and territories.

The basic assumption behind the development of this concept could be that the activities of governing require the participation of different sorts of social organisations (states, companies, NGOs, etc.). Furthermore, this was also and precisely the moment where the concept of Social Economy regained a new life in some relevant countries in Europe and in the EU itself.

Along its development other complementary concepts were also analysed and entered the theoretical proposals for complex policy action. One of the most relevant in this case is the Policy Network approach. This approach proposes a governance model based upon the network and opposed to others based upon hierarchy or market. Since this approach is far from being unitary and there are what can be called different “strands”¹, we defend that the most accurate one for policy ecosystems is the strand understanding these networks from a constructivist perspective: where not only explicit norms and rules are to be taken into account, but also other elements such as traditions, social capital, path dependency, culture, personal relations, etc.

From these two concepts, we can move on to the idea of ecosystems or the systemic approach. As mentioned elsewhere², despite the scarce literature on the issue of territorial systems “there are

¹ See Börzel (1997) for an extensive explanation of this.

² Alessandrini, Barco and Battilani (2015), THE CO-OPERATIVE MODEL IN TRENTO (ITALY) A CASE STUDY. OECD. Trento.

some relevant exceptions such as the works of CRISES, a French-Canadian research centre on Social Innovation where we find the proposal of the territory as system producer. Thus, the territory would produce systems of various types:

- **political systems** where being part of the territory inspires alliances and coalitions between social and political actors providing the basis for the territorial governance
- **production systems** where proximity induce the networking of actors involved in the production of a good or service
- **territorial systems** of innovation where some groups of actors create the conditions either to generate innovation or to disseminate it.

Furthermore, they also propose that “these systems of actors produced by the territory can build on the sense of identity, of belonging, on the geographical proximity that nuances social distances and therefore favours forms of consultation and partnership”³.

In line with this systemic approach we suggest that “another line of development can be found in the literature about legal framework assessment and the idea of enabling environment which is in the origin of the proposal of entrepreneurial/entrepreneurship ecosystems”⁴.

Another relevant practice and concept is partnerships, i.e. stable and somehow formal relations between social economy actors and public ones with a view to producing certain pieces of policies. This is usually linked to territorial and/or political systems and, depending on the political or administrative culture of those systems, it can be more/less open (corporatist vs pluralist) and/or more/less structured (like social partners and social dialogue vs informal consultations).

We can see now how some of those most evolved partnerships have achieved what has been defined elsewhere as “organizational empathy”⁵, i.e. a situation in which social economy understands what are public actor constraints and needs, and vice-versa. This could also be the prelude to a “post-corporatist” type of partnership or ecosystem where, on the one side, social economy and other highly relevant actors from civil society perform their lobby actions going beyond the defence of narrowly defined self-interests, meanwhile public actors engage on co-production of policy beyond the narrowly defined policy object (i.e. going beyond policies for the development of Social Economy as sectoral policies).

Thus, the current situation and its potential development present a unique opportunity for the establishment of partnerships and even strategic alliances to fight the most appalling challenges faced by our societies. This, in turn, legitimises any positive action to actually strengthen partnerships for its own sake and also those initiatives which aimed at increasing the capabilities of some partners (or potential partners) in order to improve their outputs in the policy processes. One example of the latter is the the Scottish ‘Supporting Social Enterprise Partnership Strategy’ (2011).

³ “Ces systèmes d’acteurs générés par le territoire relèvent de l’identité, du sentiment d’appartenance, de la proximité géographique qui nuance les distances sociales, ce qui induit des formes de concertation et de partenariat”.

⁴ This approach has developed in the past thirty years to highlight the environmental factors that up to 1985 has been neglected in the literature about entrepreneurship.

⁵ Barco Serrano, Samuel (2011) “Las políticas públicas de economía social y el diálogo entre los poderes públicos y la sociedad civil: Estudio de casos españoles”, Case study prepared for the International Forum on the Social and Solidarity Economy (FIESS) organized by the Chantier de l’économie sociale, the Ministère des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l’Occupation du territoire and by the City of Montréal, Montreal (Québec) Canada, October 17-20 2011

According to a soon-to-be published paper by Dr Michael Roy, Senior Lecturer at the Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health at Glasgow Caledonian University, this is a multi-level support framework designed and supported by the Scottish Government to develop the capacity of social enterprise national intermediaries, principally Social Enterprise Scotland, SENSCOT and Social Firms Scotland, and also partners such as CEiS, to provide a holistic ‘peer support’ network, recognising that social enterprises require access to such provision. (...) **There is also a secondary objective to encourage greater influence and contribution to policy development by the sector**, and to ensure that capacity is strengthened both in terms of the membership base and in relation to the sustainability of the partner organisations. This concept was also behind the support provided by Andalusian regional government to umbrella organisations under the denomination “Associationism” during the first decade of this century.

On the other hand, and in order to fully fulfil its promises the Social Economy should get closer to the challenges of the territories/communities they belong to. This does not mean that, using a metaphor taken from politics, Social Economy should become a “catch-all party”, but that, for example, and similar to what happened in Quebec⁶ in 2012, they are able to engage in initiatives to fight complex problems such as exclusion, poverty or the economic and environmental crisis, alone or in wide alliances.

The GECES Report and policy ecosystems

The ambitious initiative of the expert group on Social Economy of the European Commission is unique in its scope and proposed lines of action. This, combined with the equally ambitious conclusions of the Luxembourg summit last year, present an unequalled opportunity from the point of view of a partnership approach to policy ecosystems.

Furthermore, our intention is not to limit it to a discussion of the GECES Report, but to use its powerful content to facilitate the identification of tangible opportunities and threats.

In order to also guide the interventions of the speakers we include here some elements which could be used by them on their own accord.

We also understand that these elements may require much more than the expected time of this workshop, so we only provide them as a guide not only for the interventions of speakers but also for the subsequent debate after those interventions. Again, this is only a proposal.

Coming back to the GECES report, we must admit that there is no specific chapter addressed to this issue in the GECES report. Therefore, and in order for it to nourish the debate in our workshop, the proposal is to use the three initial chapters as a basis for discussing our own practice, knowledge and experiences.

Each chapter is aimed at an specific policy field:

Awereness raising/identity: CHAPTER 1: TOWARDS INCREASED VISIBILITY, RECOGNITION AND IDENTITY

⁶ The Chantier de l'Economie Sociale in Quebec launched an initiative called “Pour un changement de logique économique” (For a change of economics logic) in 2012 trying to engage with other actors, including public ones, to address complex solutions to the current economic crisis.

Financial policies: CHAPTER 2: IMPROVING ACCESS TO FUNDING

Legal framework: CHAPTER 3: IMPROVING THE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

However, chapter one, while addressing visibility, recognition and identity, includes two highly relevant recommendations for the issue at stake in this workshop:

“Recommendation nr. 2: The European Commission, the Member States and social enterprise organisations should nurture a more assertive and coordinated social enterprise community.
Recommendation nr. 3. The European Commission and Member States, as well as their local and regional authorities, should mainstream the social enterprise dimension in relevant policies, programmes and practices. They should consult with and engage social enterprises as much as possible in the creation of new policies and actions. Social enterprise organisations should actively promote and use these opportunities”.

Regarding the Luxembourg council conclusions⁷ we must also acknowledge that, in relation to the issue at stake (the role of Social Economy within Policy Ecosystems) there is a long list of issues that could be appropriate for the workshop. In trying to select some of them, it is worth mentioning that a systemic approach pervades the whole document and the focus on the constructive dialogue between social economy and public actors:

“14) The Luxembourg Presidency's Roadmap on boosting social economy enterprises in Europe is focusing in particular on the development of social economy enterprises, whilst highlighting the importance of a comprehensive "ecosystem" for the social economy in Europe. (...)

15) Establish, implement and further develop, as appropriate, European, national, regional and/or local strategies and programmes for enhancing the social economy, social entrepreneurship and social innovation. The various strategies and programmes should be based on a constructive dialogue between European, national, regional and/or local authorities and all relevant stakeholders.

16) Where appropriate, promote capacity-building initiatives to enhance the knowledge and awareness of policy-makers, civil servants and practitioners of the specific features of the social economy and social economy enterprise and of the opportunities that exist at the European, national and local levels, particularly in countries where the social economy remains under-developed. (...)

39) Support concrete proposals for setting up peer reviews on the social economy and social entrepreneurship policies and measures. Peer reviews could support experience-sharing and foster best practices among Member States, including where relevant on national action plans supporting the social economy, always taking into account the national specificities.

40) Become actively involved in the development of Europe-wide policies and strategies promoting their sector of activities. Social economy enterprises and social entrepreneurs should themselves take further initiatives to develop awareness and visibility of their sector and its impact as well as direct co-operation between themselves, with public authorities and with other stakeholders”.

⁷ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13766-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

Line of analysis

Here we will try to propose some lines of analysis which can be taken by the speakers on their own accord.

As we signalled before, the evolution both in terms of concepts and practices and the growing attention to social economy is opening a unique opportunity both for Social Economy and local communities. Since the workshop cannot address all the issues which could facilitate the fulfilling of this potential, we propose to engage on an analysis of the **needs, threats and opportunities** in terms of what we have called “post-corporatist” type of partnership or ecosystem.

In order for it not to be an exercise of pure theoretical analysis, **we propose to assess from the point of view of your own personal/organisational experience and knowledge, what are the key elements to increase the capabilities of those ecosystems to engage in collaborative co-production of policies.**

If we try to formulate some of the key issues as questions, some examples could be:

- What can Social Economy actors do in order to facilitate the role of Public Actors in engaging in such collaborative co-production?
- What can public actors do in order to increase the capabilities of Social Economy actors to fulfil a significant role in such collaborative co-production?
- Which kind of relations (formal or informal) should both types of actors have with other key stakeholders such as research? What could be the role of committed research in these ecosystems?
- Which are the main threats ahead for such collaboration?
- Do our ecosystems enjoy sufficiently encouraging environmental conditions to work on these capabilities?