

Beyond growth: the role of the Social and Solidarity Economy in process of just transition

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Vulnerability and social exclusion in rural areas are critical challenges, deepening social inequalities by limiting access to resources, essential services and opportunities. Marginalization and environmental challenges further reinforce systemic exclusion and weaken community resilience. Addressing these issues requires a social and ecological transformation that empowers rural communities to active participation in a just and regenerative future, ensuring both social well-being and environmental resilience.

The Horizon Europe project SERIGO advances this vision by providing evidence-based insights into how the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), driven by Social Innovation (SI), fosters social inclusion, well-being, resilience, and sustainability in rural Europe. This study presents the initial conceptual framework of SERIGO, which provides the theoretical foundation and shows the interconnections between these concepts, based on a comprehensive literature review.

Vulnerability and social exclusion form the basis of this study, which are closely linked, particularly in rural areas where limited access to resources and opportunities can exacerbate both. Vulnerability often arises from a diversity of sources, which can make individuals or communities more vulnerable to adverse events or conditions. On the other hand, social exclusion is a non-participatory, multidimensional, dynamic, and multi-level phenomenon that affects both the individual's quality of everyday life and the degree of rural marginalization in a collective sense, which might increase due to geographic isolation, discrimination, and unequal distribution of resources.

SSE has the potential to drive equitable and sustainable development in rural areas. By prioritizing so-cial and environmental objectives, SSE aims to address the causes of poverty, exclusion, and unsustain-able development linked to market-driven growth and power imbalances. As drivers of SI, SSE initia-tives address societal challenges, meet community needs, and foster a resilient, sustainable society. It is linked to the promotion of empowerment through SI and capability, which is preconditioned for em-powering individuals to tackle vulnerabilities, combat social exclusion, and engage in community de-velopment. At a collective level, SI serves as an emancipatory force that emphasizes processes and practices that create more inclusive societies. It can function as a collaborative framework for ad-dressing social-environmental injustice. Bottom-linked governance requires bridging roles in the com-munity, including networks facilitators, knowledge and resource mediators, as well as agents of trans-parency and conflict resolution. By fostering these capabilities, SI enhances community relations and strengthens the foundations for equitable, resilient and sustainable future for rural areas.

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