SEEDING

Social Economy Enterprises addressing Digitalisation, Industrial Relations and the European Pillar of Social Rights

Fifth transnational online workshop
Wednesday 14 April 2021 (10:30-12:30 CET)
Zoom meeting
NOTES

The fifth online transnational events in the Seeding project took place on the 14th of April 2021 on Zoom. This event was focusing on France, Ireland and Germany. 43 people had registered and around 30 people attended the online meeting. Overwhelming majority of the participants were representatives from social economy organizations or companies, mainly from the target countries, but also from Italy, Albania, Poland and Spain. As usual, the event was moderated by Melinda Kelemen (project manager of the Seeding project).

The moderator welcomed the audience and said a few words about Seeding project ongoing and previous activities (Background Report, 21 case studies, previous events) and announced the soon-to-be-published Case Study Report.

The first speaker, **Feliciano Iudicone** (researcher, FGB), on behalf of the research partner FGB, just like on the previous event (where the participants' majority were from Poland), presented the key results of the Background Report and the Case Study Report.

Germany:

Hans-Gerd Nottenbohm (innova eG) in his presentation, explained the link between trade unions and social economy organisations in Germany. He has started with the membership (audit federations, consumer cooperatives, association of non-statutory welfare, experts, support organisations) and activities

(creating and helping new and already established cooperatives, creative hubs and research studies) that carried out by external or in-house experts of innova eG in Germany.

Social economy in Germany is heterogenous, the various enterprises have different work and operational methods (main forms are: "sozialwirthschaft", high number of cooperatives and a few worker's cooperatives). He brought a few examples for worker cooperatives: Krankenhous Salzhausen, Assistenzgenossenschaft Bremen AG., or Spastikerhilfe Berlin. He also explained that in Germany works councils are set up only in 10 percent of the cooperatives so works councils and collective agreements are not typical in the sector (collective agreement including digitalization as topic exists only in the banking sector).

A German case study, a farmer's cooperative, *Agrargenossenschaft Trebbin eG* was presented by **Dr. Thomas Gäbert.** The agricultural cooperative is a high performance one, managing large fields and feeding many cows and employs 135 people. The company is very keen on combining economic and environmental goals.

The recent challenges mainly about keeping up with the strict relevant German legislations, updating skills of people (belonging to various age groups), technologies applied, and of course, Covid. Luckily, the challenge is there but employees with the company help can keep up with the new tools.

Data produced by dealing with cows is also have its own questions – not only collect but how to use those data. The frequently changing legal frameworks also push the company to invest into modern tools, scientific programs, and knowledge as well skills of employees.

Ireland:

Tanya Lalor (Method Consultants) first gave a broad overview on the Irish labour market developments and industrial relations (IR). She stressed the emergence of platform work in the country and that legal legislation does not cover platform workers yet. Regarding Irish IR system, the trade union membership is dropping, and the prominent level of collective bargaining is the enterprise level. Unfortunately, in social economy, just like in private companies, trade unions are not really operating.

Regarding digitalization, employees, especially law skilled workers will have an effect on, therefore long life learning will get an important role to overcome on challenges. On the other hand, digitalisation provides opportunities for social economy in terms of employment and social inclusion. Ms. Lalor also mentioned the first legal framework on social economy that was introduced in 2019 in the country. Regarding worker coops, the number is low in Ireland so hard to find links between IR and worker coops for now.

John Evoy from *Grow Remote* agreed with the fact that it is difficult to keep up with the challenges of digitalization. Grow Remote is an initiative in Ireland that operates as community based remote groups. Not only remote areas benefit it locally but also companies hire talents this way. These jobs are not advertised on the traditional ways, but locally and word by word. Grow Remote first helped to build communities – remote workers found a way to communicate with each other – not only in Ireland but in other countries, even Australia and the US.   The largest clients who hire and employ fully remotely are Shopify, Scrapinghub and Automattic and Gitlab. By now, the company have training programs as well. Remote working has its own challenges in terms of management / leaderships, technology, also, culturally.

France:

The first case was presented by **Arnaud Breuil** representing *Groupe Up*. Groupe UP's mother company is a cooperative in France. Mr. Breuil mentioned as an introduction that in France, trade unions are more like an external player so they act outside of the companies. Another particular issue, that social economy is developed, and worker's owned companies are quite widespread by now, ca. 3500 exists covering thousands of jobs. Back to Groupe Up, the primary activity is selling vouchers and this way solving social problems. However, trade union membership is not high at all, but 98 % of the workers in the French mother company is covered by collective agreement. The French mother company play a significant role in collective bargaining, especially on sectoral - but also on company level. Regarding digitalisation, work councils have important role to discuss worker's benefits. In terms of activities of the mother company, digitalization influenced the vouchers – not only paper-based vouchers exist anymore but also digital ones and recently, mobile applications (of which working method was explained) were also introduced.

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Digitalisation also brough many new services, users can pay food in restaurants via mobile applications and it is possible to use from home too. Two new innovative applications are under development too in cooperation with works councils.

The last speaker was **Alexandre Bigot-Verdier** who introduced *ouishare*. ouishare started on Facebook for those who were interested to talk about digitalization and the group become popular soon, so events were organized for the members of the community. Regarding legal form, ouishare become an association then a foundation that turned into a very democratic organization. There are "connectors" from all around the locations, with equal rights and there are no chiefs or subordinates, only administrators. The connectors basically can do whatever they want but need to keep the "brand" and members have veto rights. The community members are typically independent workers belonging to cooperatives. The acts of members are called "missions„ and the way they are working is very much flexible. There are many projects going on but people not working full time for ouishare. There is no official management. The work ethic is also unwritten. Future developments are foreseen but their success is not predictable (e.g. rating system was a failure). ouishare also foreseen to change legal form.

As a conclusion, Melinda Kelemen gave a short summary of the event. The next events are foreseen on 19th of May (focusing on Spain and Italy).

16th of April, 2021