

# The social and solidarity economy towards greater ‘sustainability’: learning across contexts and cultures, from Geneva to Manila

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**Abstract** This article provides a snapshot of social and solidarity economy (SSE) institutions and activities in two differing regions of the world in order to reflect on how the SSE is being conceptualized and practised in varying contexts and cultures. The SSE is a growing social movement that includes a range of activities that share common values, including solidarity and mutual support, with a focus on community level development. We consider the case of Geneva, Switzerland – where the APRES Chamber federates more than 260 SSE enterprises – and that of Metro Manila, the Philippines – where Asia’s solidarity economy council is headquartered. Our main findings are that actors in Geneva are more focussed on putting established SSE guiding principles into practice within their organizations at the community level, while actors in Metro Manila are engaged in a broader vision of achieving solidarity across supply chains and throughout the country. We conclude that the SSE has the potential to become the economy of sustainability, working towards more sustainable community development. For this, greater coherence is needed, not only within organizations, but between activities, communities and regions of the world.

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## Introduction

Known under the acronym ESS (*économie sociale et solidaire*) in Spanish, French and Portuguese-speaking countries, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) emerged as a concept in Western Europe, and North and South America in the latter part of the twentieth century. The SSE builds on the social economy, which traces its roots to the early period of industrialization in Europe. This social economy has been relegated to the status of a 'third sector' in the post-war period, however, at a time when market economies were seen as the primary vector for regulating labour, property and currencies, while the welfare state was responsible for social action through the redistribution of wealth (Laville, 1994). The revival of interest in the social economy in the 1980s and 1990s, in Europe and Latin America, has taken on a more ambitious form, in light of the failure of current forms of 'development,' which have proved to be 'un-sustainable'. Widening inequalities and environmental ails, within countries and at a global scale, attest to the weaknesses of the 'sustainable development' paradigm and, more generally, what has been called a 'crisis of values' (Laville and Cattani, 2006).

Today's SSE theories and practices differentiate themselves from the social economy in that they aim towards the systemic transformation of the economy or are part of a 'counter-hegemonic political economy' (Satgar, 2014). While the SSE includes activities traditionally grouped under the third sector or social economy, such as social entrepreneurship, it distinguishes itself by making explicit a set of values that include solidarity and mutual support towards a new economic paradigm. Increasingly seen as a social movement (Draperi, 2011), SSE escapes any single definition but is generally understood as placing human beings at the centre of economic and social life (ISGC, 1997). SSE is therefore relevant to those interested in more sustainable development, particularly at the community level where many SSE activities originate and take root. The focus of this article is on how the SSE may prove useful, both conceptually and in practice, towards more 'sustainable' communities. Towards this aim, the evolution of the SSE will be explored in two differing cultural contexts: Metro Manila, the Philippines, and Geneva, Switzerland.

First, the research methodology is introduced, followed by the conceptual framework used to define the SSE for this article. Then, two case studies are presented, based on research that took place in both Metro Manila and Geneva. Our aim is to provide a snapshot of SSE institutions and activities in two very different parts of the world in order to understand how SSE is conceptualized and practised in varying contexts and cultures, and learn from this comparison by reflecting back on each context, in the conclusion.

## Methodology

This article draws from qualitative research based on interviews and observations in Metro Manila, the Philippines, and Geneva, Switzerland, between 2012 and 2013. The Geneva case study was developed through exchanges with students in the Geneva Business School; an evaluation of SSE best practice case studies; and the insights of one of the authors, with over twenty years experience as director of an important social enterprise and founder of the city's SSE Chamber. The Metro Manila case study is based on in-depth interviews in January and February 2013 with members of four SSE organizations based in Metro Manila: On Eagles Wings Foundation; the Foundation for a Sustainable Society (FSSI); the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) Asia and the *Sambayanang Muling Pagkabuhay* (SMP) cooperative. Information was also gathered at a *Symposium on Social and Solidarity Economy* that took place at the University of the Philippines on 2 March 2013, and at the Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC) board meeting in August 2013.

## Conceptual framework

Polanyi argued that the economy is 'embedded' in the social realm (2001, originally published in 1944); it has a social purpose and is subordinate to and inseparable from social relations – a framework that is very much at the heart of the SSE movement today. He famously proposed four ideal-type models that have been present in both pre-capitalist and contemporary societies: (i) the market economy; and non-market economies including, (ii) house-holding (relations between family members), (iii) redistribution (usually through government) and (iv) reciprocity. The SSE economy is associated with the notion of reciprocity, which is understood as going beyond duality to giving, receiving and the obligation to give in return that crosses through different subgroups, binding people together in solidarity (Polanyi, 1957). Servet builds on Polanyi to further this definition, beyond a mere transaction: reciprocity also entails complementary relations based on voluntary interdependence (2007, p. 264), or being 'invested with the potential of solidarity, consciously interdependent on others' (2006, p. 18). Conceptually, SSE activities therefore aim to *foster solidarity* by placing more importance on people than on capital and profit, but also by working towards *social benefits for a community or region* through the *engagement of voluntarily interdependent people*.

In practice, a solidarity economy includes more than the reciprocity economy. As Lavielle (2003) has suggested, the different ideal types proposed by Polanyi are interdependent and function together towards *a more plural economy*. Fair trade initiatives, for example, are a form of reciprocity that

engage with the market economy and can benefit from 'redistribution' in the form of state support. How the SSE either confronts or indeed bypasses the neoliberal market economy is a matter of some debate. Fraisse (2003) notes that the SSE is being interpreted in different ways around the world: for some, the SSE is *complementary to the market economy*; it may still be perceived as a third sector that interacts with the public and private sector, including the dominant market economy. For others, the SSE tends towards the *transformation of the economy* as a whole, towards a post-capitalist agenda that calls for a systemic vision of the economy that includes social and political dimensions (Kawano, 2013). In this scenario, the SSE would eventually replace the current form of our increasingly globalized market economy and would also include the State as another economic site of transformation. The SSE can therefore be seen as doing away with the state/market dichotomy, calling for a transformation in 'all of the diverse ways that human communities meet their needs and create livelihoods together' (Miller in Kawano, Masterson and Teller-Elsberg, 2009, p. 30).

The SSE can also promote *democratic processes* within organizations. SSE entities are usually self-managed and self-organized, ranging from 'one person one vote' in certain cooperatives, for example, to participative management systems in certain non-profits. According to Laville, SSE is also about 'the desire to promote democracy on the local level through economic activity' (2003: 396), or the '*democratization of the economy*' based on the participatory engagement of all citizens (Defourny and Develtere, 1999; Fraisse, Guérin and Laville, 2007). The vision is to include all types of people in economic life, engaging them to participate as economic actors, most often at the level of the community. Examples of larger SSE enterprises and regional efforts are less common, raising questions of scalability.

That being said, what have been primarily local SSE actors have begun to federate into regional and international networks of members, including the *Réseau Intercontinental de Promotion de L'Économie Sociale Solidaire* (RIPESS). In the United States, the solidarity economy emerged at the first U.S. Social Forum in 2007, resulting in the launch of the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (SEN) (Kawano, Masterson and Teller-Elsberg, 2009) (Note that 'solidarity economy' is the preferred term by Anglo-Saxons, rather than 'social and solidarity economy', prevalent in French, Spanish and Portuguese languages. This is a matter of historical developments; the social economy was not a strong historical trend in the United States, thus the focus on the 'solidarity economy' in that context). While the SSE has been active in Latin America (Singer, 2002; Arruda, 2004; Hillenkamp, 2011), and increasingly tied to a new 'development' paradigm termed *buen vivir* (Giovannini, 2013), less is known about SSE initiatives in Asia and

Africa (see [Satgar, 2014](#) for an overview of SSE activities and concepts in South Africa).

Finally, the SSE is made up of activities involved with production, distribution and consumption, but also savings and credit services. These activities could take the form of fair trade initiatives; social entrepreneurship; community currencies; and micro-credit programmes; as well worker, consumer and producer cooperatives; community gardens or community-supported agriculture; community-run exchange platforms or do-it-yourself initiatives, among others. As Miller suggests, many of these activities exist as the grassroots level, either marginalized by or hidden within the dominant market economy (Miller in [Kawano, Masterson and Teller-Elsberg, 2009](#)). These activities can be organized institutionally in different ways – from non-profits to mutual societies and cooperatives – depending on differing legal and institutional frameworks. As Kawano notes, this has led to questions regarding the structure versus the content of such organizations: certain organizations may be structured as cooperatives, but their intentions may not be aligned with solidarity economy principles, for example. Kawano therefore argues for a solidarity economy that is multidimensional and includes a spectrum of different types of entities, working progressively towards solidarity economy goals ([Kawano, Masterson and Teller-Elsberg, 2009](#)). In order to understand both the structure and intent of SSE activities, a historical and institutional reading is necessary, as well as a consideration for how current SSE activities are playing out in practice.

## Case studies

### *SSE in Metro Manila, The Philippines*

The Philippines has a strong civil society tradition that gained impetus after the People's Power Revolution, which culminated in the ousting of the Marcos regime in 1986. Various bills are in place to promote civil society and allow for structures such as cooperatives and non-for-profit organizations, which are quite active at the community level. The country has a long history in the cooperative movement, based on experiences gleaned from travel in nineteenth century Europe: national hero José Rizal was said to have been attracted to the cooperative movement of Robert Owen and brought these principles back to the Philippines; Bulacan governor Teodoro Sandiko was allegedly influenced by the Raiffeisen cooperative banking model while in Germany, which he used as an inspiration in designing the first Bill in 1914 to support rural credit associations in the Philippines ([SOEMCO, 2013](#)). According to World Fair Trade Organization Asia Director, Ramona Ramos (interview 6 March 2013), the oldest fair trade organizations in the world are based in the Philippines. For Jeanne Marie Bernardo of On

Eagles Wings Foundation (interview 5 February 2013), representing the Philippines secretariat for the newly formed ASEC, the 'third sector' may be experiencing an 'identity crisis' as of late: profit-seeking entities have taken on a cooperative status to avoid taxation, while small-to-medium social enterprises with the poor as primary stakeholders (SEPPS) are not given sufficient government support. The Social Entrepreneurship Bill (House Bill 6085, *Magna Carta for Social Enterprises*) is currently being proposed before Congress, to further recognize SEPPS and provide fiscal incentives, such as special loans and tax exemptions. While not all social enterprises aim towards solidarity economy goals, this Bill is seen as a window of opportunity for the SSE movement.

Given the issues facing the 'third sector' in the Philippines and more generally in the region, efforts are currently underway to further institutionalize SSE and strengthen networks within and between countries. In 2007, the first Asian Solidarity Economy Forum took place in Manila. Dr Benjamin R. Quiñones from the Philippines currently chairs the recently founded ASEC, part of the RIPPES platform and headquartered in Manila. At a symposium on the SSE at the University of the Philippines – host to the 5th RIPPES Global Forum of SSE in October 2013 – members of different Filipino organizations came together to lend their support to what is, to many of them, not new in practice, but new as a concept: the solidarity economy. The notion of coming together as a community to achieve a common objective is a time-honoured tradition here, as described by the Filipino term *bayanihan*. Literally, this word means people coming together to lift up and transfer a home (traditionally made of bamboo and palm) to another location and is 'a way of life for many people', explained Bernardo. Those advocating a SSE use the term '*bayanihan* compassionate economy' to describe SSE efforts in the Philippines. Dr Quiñones has proposed that the SSE involves an extension to the triple-bottom-line concept, adding the notions of edifying values and good governance, to social, environmental and economic benefits (ASEC presentation). 'Good governance' focuses on inclusive supply chain and collective dynamics, while 'edifying values' is understood as explicitly placing people and planet above profit, as reflected in ASEC's mission (Jayasooria, 2013, p. 108).

Rather than focus on specific enterprises or units of production, the SSE is being conceptualized through what is being called a 'supply-chain approach' that seeks to foster solidarity across different actors. The fair trade movement, for example, works with producer groups, world shops and buyers, and more recently, fair trade financial institutions (interview with Ramos, 6 March 2013). This approach has a certain appeal: for Jay Bertram Lacsamana of the Foundation for a Sustainable Society (FSSI), the solidarity economy must move towards the goal of uniting efforts across supply chains within the Philippines, so that 'niche' markets can gain enough leverage to act as a force to be

reckoned with, as a counterbalance to the dominant market economy (interview 27 February 2013). The five targets defined above are seen as overarching goals that organizations should tend towards as part of a solidarity economy, demonstrating progress along the way. What is less clear is whether any of these principles should be given priority over the others.

As the Republic of the Philippines is highly unequal in terms of wealth distribution, it follows that the promotion of a more democratic economy would explicitly focus on involving the underprivileged. Based on interviews with both Lacsamana and Ramos, this is a distinguishing factor for the solidarity economy here. As Lacsamana explained, 'We need to create a space in the market where the marginalized can be included in economic activities.' The relatively new interest in the SSE is being linked to broader macro-economic trends in the region. For Lacsamana, the current focus on Asia as a hotspot for economic development opens the real possibility that the region's poorest groups might bear the burden of a future economic bust. In 2011, the 40 richest families in the Philippines were said to account for 76 percent of the country's gross domestic product growth; and two of the wealthiest people in the Philippines were worth 6 per cent of the nation's entire economy (AFP, 2013). 'We need to come together to counter-balance this trend and achieve a level of equal wealth distribution in the Philippines' through the SSE, stated Ramos (interview 6 March 2013).

For Dr Quiñones, the poor are an important part of the equation, but the ultimate goal of the solidarity economy is to strive for the transformation of the economy overall through the supply-chain approach. As he explained, 'It is the cooperative synergy of different institutions, not only individuals within a single institution, working together in solidarity that enables them to create SSE and an 'other' world that is more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable' (interview 2 March 2013). In practice, existing efforts towards a solidarity economy still interface with private companies and government agencies, in addition to other social enterprises and NGOs that do not embrace solidarity as their *modus operandi*. As Bernardo explained, 'We used to have the idea that we need an alternative but actually it's impossible, it's not one or the other. It has to be both working together, interacting with the market economy', at least until viable SSE actors are manifest across supply chains (interview 6 March 2013).

In terms of SSE activities in the Philippines, the current focus is on rural programmes and this is well justified, as one quarter of the country's population falls below the so-called poverty line, with a majority of these living in rural areas (NSCB, 2013). Both On Eagles Wings and the FSSI are active in rural areas and in community agriculture projects in particular. WFTO Asia is already engaged in the supply-chain approach, working to connect fair trade suppliers with buyers in the Philippines and abroad. While the FSSI

has traditionally been focussed on supporting social entrepreneurship in the Philippines, more recently they have been working to integrate activities across value chains, such as bringing together organic feedstock farming with dairy farms and organic pesticide production in Leyte, known as the granary of the Philippines. Taking on this more holistic view is a new approach for the foundation, and one that has yet to be evaluated. The FSSI strategy is also to engage with what are known as secondary cooperatives in order to promote the SSE at a wider scale, as their members are composed of a great number of primary cooperatives, involved in raw material production, including rice, corn and coconut. The primary cooperatives are more cutting-edge when it comes to local initiatives and community development, according to Lacsamana, who believes that SSE principles would be well received by these entities (interview 27 February 2013). There is also a long history of cooperative banking in rural areas, offering services similar to regular banks and regulated by the central bank *Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas*; many of these have lost their original social missions, however.

Beyond these examples of organizations actively engaged in the SSE, there are hundreds of additional organizations in the Philippines that work towards social and environmental benefits, in both rural and urban areas. Food, beauty products and crafts are all being approached through the sustainability lens, for example, but not all of these efforts currently see themselves as part of the SSE. Other organizations may work towards environmental and social goals, but may not be on the radar of those involved in the SSE movement here. This is the case for SMP, an urban cooperative in the Smokey Mountain community of Tondo, the capital region's poorest district. As with all cooperatives, SMP adheres to participative decision-making processes and is entirely run by people from this underprivileged community. Values, such as 'integrity, honesty and independence (from the State)', are explicitly communicated to all new members in a pre-membership seminar and discussed at various meetings. Many of the profits from the micro-enterprises set up by the SMP are directed towards community development projects.

ASEC has an important role to play in identifying organizations that strive towards socially just and environmentally sound products and services, such as SMP, and bringing them together under a common goal and more systemic understanding of the economy. While the focus is currently on involving the underprivileged as producers, products that tout organic production (such as organic mountain rice or Civet coffee) or craftsmanship (such as accessories made from recycled products) mostly cater to an elite consumer who can afford these products, in the Philippines and abroad. These SSE products and services should also become accessible to the underprivileged consumer in the Philippines, which would require focusing not only on changing production processes but also on consumption practices. To achieve more

solidarity among consumers, it might be necessary to transcend socio-economic differences and focus more on urban areas (Sahakian, 2012). SSE strength could come in numbers: so many activities are underway in the Philippines but may not recognize themselves as part of the SSE as of yet, which could bring a more multidimensional reading to the SSE than is currently the case. As few product and service categories exist within the SSE, there is also a need to diversify the offer and move beyond the current rural agriculture focus to include financial institutions, transportation methods, insurance companies, real estate developers, among others. Organizations could also work to achieve SSE principles internally, particularly towards more sustainable procurement strategies (e.g. type of energy source for electricity, reduction targets for paper and electricity consumption, travel and transport policies).

#### *SSE in Geneva, Switzerland*

The history of the social economy in Switzerland has followed a similar path to that of Western Europe. At the end of the nineteenth century, laws were created to formalize the legal status of associations, cooperatives and other social organization types. The social economy then merged with the dominant market economy in the period between the Second World War and the start of the twenty-first century, during which time a great number of cooperatives were transformed into capitalist corporations. Those who were able to maintain their legal status as a cooperative often had to relinquish much of their social missions in order to remain competitive (Chaniel and Laville, 2002). Since the 1970s, there has been renewed interest in the social economy and a broadening of its vision to include ecological considerations, towards the SSE, as it is being interpreted in Geneva today.

In the 1990s, new organizations emerged to address a series of issues, including the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the economy; rising unemployment rates in Europe (1980s) and Switzerland (1990s); more women in the workforce and the need for childcare services; an ageing population and the need for socially oriented medical establishments; and negative environmental impacts, such as pollution, resulting from economic development. In the same period, a number of new, not-for-profit organizations emerged as part of a vibrant civil society in Switzerland. The social economy born in the nineteenth century and dominated by cooperatives and mutual societies in Europe (Gueslin, 1998) thus expanded to include other types of legal entities, such as not-for-profits, associations, philanthropic organizations such as foundations, and corporations.

The SSE came into its own in Western Switzerland in the early 2000s through the emergence of work integration social enterprises and the creation of new cooperatives (a type of legal status that had long been out of fashion),

as well as communication campaigns by social and solidarity networks. In 2006, the first 'Chamber of Commerce' for the SSE in Switzerland was founded in Geneva, called APRES-Genève. Understanding to what extent the SSE contributes to the national economy is still difficult to grasp. Very little national data exist on the SSE, although research is currently underway (Swaton, 2011; Swaton and Baranzini, 2012; Gonin, Gachet and Lachance, 2013). In Geneva, an estimated 10 per cent of employment is based in the SSE (APRES-GE, 2010), which matches the rates found in neighbouring France.

Currently, the Geneva SSE Chamber counts 260 member organizations that are engaged in all forms of economic activity, including financial services, adult education, cooperative housing, local agriculture, education, work integration, construction, community services and fair trade. Some organizations are small in size, while others count several hundred workers. The process of federating different organizations in Geneva took place around shared values and concrete practices and was initiated by local actors who participated in the Second World Social Forum in Brazil (2002), where they recognized the importance of networks in supporting SSE organizations towards a new economy. The majority of current APRES-Genève members existed prior to the creation of that chamber, which means that they had already been practising social and solidarity economic activities, sometimes for several decades, without necessarily seeing themselves as part of a movement. The value charter (accessible online in English, French, Spanish and German: APRES-GE, 2005), developed by a group of APRES-Genève members and approved democratically in its general assembly, mentions seven key points (that are further developed in the charter): 1. Social well-being: *to be, not to have*; 2. Participative citizenship and democracy: *each voice counts*; 3. Ecology: *produce to live, don't live to produce*; 4. Autonomy: *autonomous but not individualistic*; 5. Solidarity:  $1 + 1 > 2$ ; 6. Diversity: *rich in our differences*; 7. Coherence: *say what we do and do what we say*.

To become a member of the APRES Chamber, an entity must sign this charter and agree to adhere to these values. A number of criteria have been established to determine if these values translate into operational procedures, including the mission of the organization (e.g. for a common good and not the maximization of profit), democratic or participatory management, the salary difference within an organization (e.g. highest salary no more than five times the lowest salary), a limited interest rate on capital, intended use of profits and the opportunity for employees of incorporated companies to become shareholders. The adherence to certain criteria is obligatory, such as transparency, working towards a social good, autonomy and limited profit making. For other criteria, including the goal of limiting social and environmental negative impacts across value chains, and participative management systems, or

the integration of social and environmental factors in devising a procurement strategy, the member organizations must commit to making progressive improvements (Dunand, 2013).

Members of the SSE Chamber in Geneva are engaged in a diverse set of activities. Housing cooperatives, such as *Inti*, *Polygone* and *Equilibre*, are becoming increasingly active in Geneva, a city that is currently experiencing a housing crisis. These cooperatives aim to build the most socially just and ecologically sound apartment buildings in the country, with future residents involved in the design and construction processes. They dedicate a part of the built structure to community activities, including urban gardening, and are investing in building designs and renewable energy source that would minimize their future energy consumption. Local agriculture, generally organic, is also on the rise around the city. The *Jardins de Cocagne* cooperative pioneered the provision of contractual agreements for organic vegetables, from farm to fork, and is currently delivering hundreds of vegetable baskets to families each week. The focus of their efforts is on favouring high quality, seasonal produce, avoiding intermediary vendors and packaging, and promoting more direct relations between farmers and consumers.

Work integration social enterprises are important actors in the development of SSE in Geneva, including *Réalise*. Each year, this enterprise engages with ~250 unemployed people with limited qualifications in different industrial service sectors, including dry cleaning, gardening and electronic-waste recycling. *Réalise* adheres to the SSE values set out in the APRES charter: cooperatives provide banking and insurance services, local food is privileged at the canteen, waste is recycled and *Réalise* has opted into a 'green' electricity mix. All employees are members of the organization and elect their board members and contribute to both important decisions and everyday organizational issues. Part-time work is encouraged, as well as working remotely in order to limit commuting. Parking is not available on site and all employees are encouraged to 'walk the talk' by getting around either by bicycle or through Geneva's well-developed public transport system.

Many organizations in Geneva that are part of the SSE are living up to the guiding principles of APRES-Genève within their own organization, but not necessarily seeing how these principles might apply to the economy as a whole and their role in 'another' economy. While coherence is explicit in the guiding principles, certain organizations may not always be coherent when it comes to their own procurement strategies. More efforts could be made to bring existing SSE actors together towards a broader reading of the SSE, not only a more plural economy, but towards the transformation of the overall economy.

## Conclusion and discussion

Based on exchanges between researchers and practitioners based in Western Switzerland and the Philippines, this article contributes to a form of learning based on exchanging practices in different settings in order to reflect on local practices. What transpires is that the two regions are in very different stages when it comes to institutionalizing the SSE. Geneva has organized itself into a membership network of SSE organizations, and such efforts are only starting in Metro Manila. The approach in Geneva has been to make a value system explicit through guiding principles and encourage members in the SSE Chamber to progressively put those principles into practice. Efforts have been very inclusive in terms of bringing on board a variety of actors from different product and service sectors, towards a multidimensional SSE landscape, as well as raising awareness around the SSE to elected officials and the general public. While Geneva is a small city, SSE actors offer a range of products and services, which are seen as directly benefiting the community and setting an example in the region.

However, the SSE movement in Geneva seems to focus more on the practice of individual members and could benefit from a more conceptual approach, where the SSE is seen as having the potential to transform the entire economy—across different sectors and moving beyond a focus on the enterprise alone. This broader perspective is very much at the heart of the Philippines SSE movement, conceptualized as an umbrella concept that looks at the economy as a whole but works primarily to engage with the poor as primary stakeholders. Much of the SSE activity in the Philippines is therefore focussed on the rural context and on farmers specifically, with little to no actors identified to date in urban areas, or in service sectors such as insurance, housing or transport. While SSE initiatives based on community initiatives are learning to work across supply chains, what remains to be seen is how this will play out in the coming years. The challenge will be to actually make SSE services and products available across different sectors and in different communities, in order to bring social benefits to broader regions. This would require strong leadership and reaching out to organizations, which do not necessarily understand themselves as part of the SSE today.

The main issue in both Manila and Geneva is that of coherence, not only within an organization, in terms of its mission and how this plays out in everyday operations, but also coherence when working with other organizations. Through our case studies, we have gleaned what may be certain pitfalls in this respect: organizations may not be aware of other SSE offers that could be complementary to their own; such offers may not be available (in terms of quality and quantity), or not affordable. What may be more important is the possibility of moving progressively towards maximum coherence, as

well as the broader issue of whether organizations see themselves as part of a need for wider systemic change across the economy; in Geneva, this may not be the case for all SSE members, who are not necessarily seeking to change the capitalist system; in the Philippines, the current focus on the rural sector may not suffice in the long-term, with more action necessary in urban centres and across sectors.

The SSE is most likely the economy of sustainability, an economy with a market, guided by social and ecological values, with activities that tend to blossom at the community level towards more 'sustainable' forms of development, but where environmental values could be further strengthened. The different social forums and SSE networks are paving the way for more collaboration across communities and regions, yet a link remains to be made between the solidarity economy and environmental forums. The SSE movement might benefit from a systems approach embraced by certain actors in 'sustainability' research, specifically thinkers from industrial ecology who consider how material and energy throughputs might better mimic the efficiencies found in nature (see [Erkman, 1997](#) for a historical introduction to this concept). In turn, researchers in the 'environmental sustainability' community could benefit from the conceptualization of an economy that places people and planet first, and in solidarity as a value that is made explicit both conceptually and in practice in the SSE. Bringing a more systemic understanding of the nexus between society, economy and environment is necessary, towards a transformative 'SSE' culture.

Finally, the SSE is operating in very different realities in Western Switzerland and the Philippines: while democratic processes are taken for granted by Swiss citizens, there is a need to move towards a further democratization of the economy in the Philippines. While in western contexts, certain people continue to press for an overall reduction in consumption and production (also known as the 'de-growth' debate), there are many millions of people in the Philippines for whom the consumption of additional resources is not a matter of greed, but of need. The SSE certainly seems to be a stepping-stone towards more socially just and environmentally sound world but, in order to get there, greater solidarity is needed not only across supply chains and between SSE actors, not only between the SSE movement and those working in the area of environmental sustainability, but also greater solidarity between communities and regions in a highly unequal world.

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editor for their insightful input to an earlier version of this article.

## Funding

M.S. is grateful to the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) for a grant that supported her fieldwork on the SSE in the Philippines.

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