



SPEECH BY 1ST VICE PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS

**OECD summit: Inspiration, innovation and inclusion: Shaping
future with the social and solidarity economy
Session 9: Going green with the social economy**

21 March 2023, Paris

Q: The CoR recently adopted an opinion "Creating an enabling environment for the social economy". Why is it important to raise the voice of the regions on these topics of social economy and green transition, and how can public authorities work in collaboration with the social economy to further the green transition and support local development?

The reason is that social economy has a strong local anchorage and it is an important contributor to inclusive and sustainable growth which starts at the local level.

This local anchorage is particularly visible in the circular economy, from organic agriculture to food production, and I refer here in particular to "short circuits",

where local agrifood cooperatives favour the labour integration of vulnerable groups,

and create new business models fighting food waste combining agriculture activity with tourism, leisure, education, work integration and social services.

But the Social economy also provides sustainable housing solutions, thus contributing to local renewable energy production.

As an example, the Navarra region in Spain

has developed an energy community under the cooperative model, promoting public-private collaboration.

It will provide up to the 80% of annual energy to the members of the cooperative.

The Navarra project is a model of effective public-private collaboration that can be replicated by municipalities with less than 500 inhabitants.

Now, what we need is to speed up and accompany the transition to greener and more resilient communities.

The social economy sector is also relevant as far as the green transition and the "climate neutrality by 2050 - objective" are concerned, and this because it helps develop sustainable practices.

From the local level of governance, we can create good conditions for the social economy sector to develop; and we can help with capacity building and knowledge sharing.

This includes:

create financial incentives; green labelling; and encourage innovation and self-regulation.

We can also foster cooperation between enterprises and local green deals so that the social economy can facilitate the green transition of our communities.

From the European Committee of the Regions

we actively promote this approach through our "Green Deal Going Local" engagement campaign.

We also work with the European Commission with the aim to develop "Local Green Deals" in partnership with local administrations, businesses and citizens.

In so doing, we gather and share best practices to encourage their broader uptake.

Moreover, we are also developing a "Green Deal Going Local handbook",

and we do this in order to support local and regional authorities in implementing the Green Deal,

step by step,

together with the local stakeholders.

We agree that we need to step up support and capacity building to our local social economy enterprises, including for those striving to green their practices and operations.

We also help them by putting in place more favourable policy and legal frameworks

with a view to ease access to finance and markets

- as called for in our recent opinion dealing with this topic.

The launch of the new "EU Social Economy Gateway"

for easier access to information on EU funding, policies and training available to social economy actors,

is also a valuable instrument to use.

Ideally, we could build something similar

also at the local and regional level

with a view to sharing the information on all available support.

Let me turn to my region, Central Macedonia in Greece.

Here, we are implementing the green transition by

installing new charging stations for electric vehicles,

and by upgrading energy-efficient homes, hospitals, schools, and sports facilities.

We are upgrading the street lighting in the road network of the region with LED bulbs.

We are supplying municipalities with electric garbage trucks and vehicles.

We are installing new photovoltaic systems.

We are funding the plans of small and medium-sized enterprises to reduce their energy costs.

In other words,

the catalysts for a truly sustainable, green, and fair development are regions and municipalities,

as 90% of European actions to address climate change,

50% of public investments,

30% of public spending, and

70% of all actions of the European Union,

are carried out by regions and municipalities.

In this context, social economy actors help European regions to convert European and national resources into measurable projects for citizens on the ground.

This cooperation between regional authorities and social economy actors is indeed an occasion not to be missed

for providing solutions for those impacted by the green and digital transitions, and so doing,

for providing new job opportunities.

1st Back-up question to all: If tomorrow, following this discussion, a local or national government would contact you to get guidance on how to engage in this area and best support the social economy's contributions to the green transition, what would you recommend should be the first steps or actions to take?

We would recommend seeking partnerships with stakeholders and contacting the local business support agencies and other competent regional authorities to find out what kind of financial or other support was available to facilitate the greening of operations or establishing a new business in the green economy.

Good examples of this approach are, to quote some, the so-called Climate City Contracts being developed by the cities taking part in the Mission of 100 Climate neutral cities.

These cities are developing their Climate City Contracts including an overall plan for climate neutrality across all sectors such as energy, buildings, waste management and transport: this together with related investment plans.

This process involves citizens, research organisations and businesses from the beginning, to kick-start the transition with all stakeholders on board.

I will be visiting Limassol in some weeks, one of these 100 Climate neutral cities, and I will be happy to further continue there this debate with them.

2nd Back-up question to all: what can the mainstream economy learn from the social economy to further propel the green transition?

The social economy has been a pioneer and innovator in the field of ecological transition, incorporating environmental considerations from the outset of its activities and developing them at a local level for decades.

Now that the Green Deal requires changes in both production and consumption, this is what the mainstream economy needs to learn from the social economy.

It can also mean developing products and services that use resources more responsibly and taking corporate responsibility more seriously.

The mainstream businesses could also learn from the value base of the social economy, - the primacy of people and social objective over capital, democratic governance, and reinvestment of profits to carry out sustainable development objectives - and review their value base accordingly.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY