

Regional Policy Frameworks of Social Solidarity Economy in South America

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Acronyms

AECID	Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (<i>Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation</i>)
AIN	Auditoría Interna de la Nación (<i>Office of National Internal Audit</i>)
ALADI	Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración (<i>Latin American Integration Association</i>)
ALBA	Alianza Bolivariana para América (<i>Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas</i>)
ANCAP	Administración Nacional de Combustibles, Alkoholes y Pórtland (<i>National Administration of Combustibles, Alcohol and Cement</i>)
BNDES	Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social (<i>National Bank for Economic and Social Development</i>)
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAN	Comunidad Andina (<i>Andean Community</i>)
CELAC	Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (<i>Community of Latin American and Caribbean States</i>)
CONPACCOOP	Confederación Paraguaya de Cooperativas (<i>Paraguayan Confederation of Cooperatives</i>)
COOPERAR	Confederación Cooperativa de la República Argentina (<i>Argentine Cooperative Confederation</i>)
COSIPLAN	Consejo Suramericano de Infraestructura y Planeamiento (<i>Infrastructure and Planning Council</i>)
CPESS	Centros de Promoción de la Economía Social y Solidaria (<i>Centers for the Promotion of Social and Solidarity Economy</i>)
CSDS	Consejo Suramericano de Desarrollo Social (<i>South American Council on Social Development</i>)
CUDECOOP	Confederación Uruguaya de Entidades Cooperativas (<i>Uruguayan Confederation of Cooperatives</i>)
DENACOOOP	Departamento de Cooperativismo e Asociativismo Rural (<i>Department of Rural Cooperativism and Associativism</i>)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCES	Foro Consultivo Económico-Social (<i>Economic and Social Consultative Forum</i>)
FOCEM	Fondo para la Convergencia Estructural del MERCOSUR (<i>MERCOSUR Structural Convergence Fund</i>)
GIP	Grupo de Integración Productiva (<i>Productive Integration Group</i>)
GRESP	Grupo Red de Economía Solidaria del Perú (<i>Solidarity Economy Network Group of Peru</i>)
IIRSA	Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana (<i>Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America</i>)
ILO	International Labour Organization
INACOOOP	Instituto Nacional del Cooperativismo (<i>National Institute of Cooperatives</i>)
INAES	Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social (<i>National Institute of Associativism and Social Economy</i>)
INCOOP	Instituto Nacional de Cooperativismo (<i>National Institute of Cooperatives</i>)
ISM	Instituto Social del MERCOSUR (<i>MERCOSUR Social Institute</i>)
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur (<i>Southern Common Market</i>)
MIDES	Ministerio de Desarrollo Social (<i>Ministry of Social Development</i>)
OAS	Organization of American States
OCB	Organização das Cooperativas Brasileiras (<i>Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives</i>)
ON	Oficina de Negocios (<i>Business Office</i>)
PANES	Programa de Atención Nacional a la Emergencia Social (<i>National Social Emergency Program</i>)
PDVSA	Petróleos de Venezuela (<i>Venezuelan Petrol</i>)
PROCOOPSUR	Promoción de los Movimientos Cooperativos del Cono Sur (<i>Promotion of MERCOSUR Cooperative Movements of the Southern Cone</i>)
RECM	Reunión Especializada de Cooperativas del MERCOSUR (<i>Special Council of MERCOSUR Cooperatives</i>)
RELACC	Red Latinoamericana de Comercialización Comunitaria (<i>Latin American Network for Community Marketing</i>)
RILESS	Red de Investigadores Latinoamericanos de Economía Social y Solidaria (<i>Network of Latin American Researchers on Social and Solidarity Economy</i>)
RIPESS	Red Intercontinental de Promoción de la Economía Social Solidaria (<i>Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy</i>)
RMADS	Reunión de Ministros y Autoridades de Desarrollo Social del MERCOSUR (<i>Council of MERCOSUR Ministers and Social Development Authorities</i>)

SENAES	Secretaría Nacional de Economía Solidaria (<i>National Secretariat of Solidarity Economy</i>)
SSE	Social and Solidarity Economy
UN	United Nations
UNASUR	Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (<i>Union of South American Nations</i>)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICAFES	União Nacional das Cooperativas da Agricultura Familiar e Economia Solidária (<i>National Union of Family Farm Cooperatives and Solidarity Economy</i>)
UNISOL	Central de Cooperativas e Empreendimentos Solidários (<i>Union of Cooperatives and Solidarity Enterprises</i>)
USD	United States dollar
YPF	Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (<i>Treasury Petroleum Fields</i>)

Summary

This paper looks at how the social and solidarity economy (SSE) discourse has been deployed at a regional level by the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and Southern American Common Market (MERCOSUR), and the implications of these new policy frameworks for the advancement of SSE practices. Though civil society groups have presented SSE as a new economic paradigm, regional policy frameworks have implemented it as an add-on—or complement—to dominant capitalist economies. This has happened in two key ways: (i) the SSE sector, and cooperatives in particular, are cast as drivers of regional integration and socioeconomic policy, although a limited involvement in major integration projects represents missed opportunities for SSE to be mainstreamed; and (ii) despite SSE policy being portrayed as a sort of intervention that combines social and economic policies, its implementation almost exclusively by ministers of social development means that it is institutionally limited to the realm of poverty eradication rather than a restructuring of the dominant economy. SSE is also fiscally dependent on dominant industries, which—in the end—does not reverse or challenge the ongoing process of economic centralization in key sectors.

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Introduction

Global financial and ecological crises have exposed the limits of the dominant conceptions of development that underpinned a neoliberal hegemonic order and intensely shaped globalization processes since the 1990s. In South America, these Washington consensus policies focused on privatization of state firms, fiscal austerity, flexibilization of labour markets and deregulation of trade, and financial markets (Edwards 1995, cited in Gwynne and Kay 2000:144). A growing rejection of this model has resulted in a sweeping sociopolitical transformation of national policies where the state was recaptured as a legitimate instrument for development and citizenship rights (as in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela). At the core of calls for alternative economic models is a concern with social injustice caused by unchecked capitalist development. In this context, ideas that seek an alternative to market-based development are well received in current policy debates. This is the case with social development and social and solidarity economy (SSE). In recent years, several governments have set up national institutions and policies to promote this agenda.

A renewed drive for regional integration has also been a key feature of the transformation carried out by popular progressive governments in the aftermath of the failure of neoliberal reforms. The leadership of popular Leftist governments—notably in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela—has helped attain unprecedented levels of cohesive regional governance in South America with the aim of building a regional political bloc. Unlike regional integration under the hegemonic mantle of the Washington consensus, current regionalism seeks diplomatic decision-making procedures in cases of internal as well as extra-regional conflicts. Likewise, it also pursues political cooperation on an increasingly wide range of policy issues. Indicative of these emerging forms of post-neoliberal regionalism is the creation of a Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), expansion of membership of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) with the incorporation of Venezuela and a greater political dimension beyond its market integration orientation, launching of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) and setting up of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).¹

In this context, regional bodies like MERCOSUR have begun to adopt an SSE agenda and have framed organizations such as cooperatives as drivers of integration, specifically in frontier zones. UNASUR has recently adopted SSE as another goal for policy coordination, in addition to defence, infrastructure, energy, health and others.

However, the construction of regional policy frameworks of SSE is far from being a linear and uncontested process. One of the core points of contention is the scope of the SSE agenda and the policy strategies that can be articulated through regional multilateral institutions. In order to explore and evaluate these tensions and emerging political landscapes, this paper looks at origins and political context, types of policy frameworks, sectors in which the SSE is encouraged, the role of cooperatives and financing mechanisms.

One approach sees SSE as a means to create more socially inclusive forms of capitalist development and as part of a region-building effort. The creation of a common SSE language and experimentation with SSE policy options generate new institutional and

¹ Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012; Rodríguez-Garavito et al. 2008; Vivares 2014.

political capacities as well as a sense of common regional identity. The scope of the SSE agenda in each country is nonetheless conditioned by the particular configuration of ideological orientations of member states, political economy conditions and arrangement of socioeconomic actors at play. Where Chile, Colombia and Peru seek to integrate into the process of globalization through export-led market strategies based on extractive sectors, other countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay (and, to some extent, Ecuador, Venezuela and—arguably—Paraguay) pursue a more balanced approach that seeks economic diversification of production and an active role of the state in development policies. The margins to advance substantive SSE agendas at regional levels are related to these cleavages. In this view, SSE is, therefore, one of the discursive policy spaces where a debate on region-building takes place in the context of post-neoliberalism.

Another approach conceives of SSE as a political opportunity to leverage support for the creation of new economic paradigms beyond capitalism. The current regional context is favourable for the scaling up of more horizontal forms of economic and social relations that challenge capitalist organization. The alignment of progressive governments in support of socially inclusive policies and regional integration is unprecedented in Latin America. Similarly, the global financial crisis, manifested in the political disarray facing Europe and the uncertainty that social turmoil may lead to unknown outcomes, creates conditions to explore different agendas that can be implemented both nationally and regionally.

The aspiration of this more ambitious SSE perspective also takes into account that there are structural constraints on how much the SSE agenda can effectively change the economy. Despite the transformation attained in some countries—in terms of expanded citizenship rights through employment generation, access to public services like health and education, and political representation—there is also continued reliance on concentrated economic sectors which, in many cases, have consolidated further. This is the case of extractive industries and agribusiness (Manzanal 2007) as well as some manufacturing and construction sectors, particularly in Brazil. These have played a key role in sustaining economic growth (Stewart 2011; Baer 2008:1), enabling countries to successfully withstand and mitigate the impacts of the global economic crisis. The increased standing of these economic sectors also sets limits to the transformative potential of current progressive governments, which social actors who are committed to alternative forms of economic organizing aspire to overcome.

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