



Cooperative business for social inclusion in rural areas

Research Report



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Abstract: This report summarizes the findings of the desk and field research emerging from the analysis carried out in Italy, Spain and within DIESIS' network. The Coop4In research is included within WP2- Business model design and it consists of a preparatory activity for the effective elaboration of the business model aimed at the social and professional inclusion of people with disabilities in rural/remote areas.

This result will be attained by carrying out desk and field research activities that will be needed in order to observe the needs and potential of diverse areas in partner countries and also in other EU countries reached by the DIESIS network.

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More Info and contact

Gaia Terenzi gaiat@basetre.com

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The Coop4In project

The general objective of COOP4IN is the **creation of a cooperative business model** in which the role of **people with disabilities** (PWDs) is pivotal and at the same time the **elaboration of policy recommendations** aimed at promoting the importance of creating and supporting social enterprises and cooperatives in rural areas, as a means for sustainable local development thus also increasing the quality of services provided to PWDs.

The creation of job opportunities and the enhancement of services provided to disadvantaged groups are expected to create not only the enhancement of the quality of life of PWDs but also positive impact to remote/rural areas that are suffering from migration and depletion of communities and local economy. In order to support this process, the design of a specific business model is crucial in allowing local stakeholders to take action and understand the potential of social entrepreneurship for local areas. We think that the role of disadvantaged groups must be central so as to produce a mutual benefit: active participation of PWDs and design of the model based on real needs.

Project results

- a. Business model for inclusion of PWDs with an active role in shaping social enterprises/cooperatives in rural areas
- b. Policy recommendations for promoting the participation of PWDs in social entrepreneurship as a means for employment and rural development

Project activities

WP1 Project Management and evaluation

WP2 Business model design

WP3 Elaboration of policy recommendations

WP4 Promotion and exploitation of results

1. The Research methodology

The Coop4In research is included within WP2- Business model design and it consists of a preparatory activity for the effective elaboration of the business model aimed at the social and professional inclusion of people with disabilities in rural/remote areas.

This result was attained by carrying out desk and field research activities needed in order to observe the needs and potential of diverse areas in partner countries and also in other EU countries reached by the Diesis Network.

Phases:

A2.1 Definition of the research framework and tools

A2.2 Field/Desk research

A2.3 Elaboration of Research report

Project partners will lead the research activities developing tools and a joint report that will be made public through the partners websites and social media, thus providing relevant stakeholders and local authorities relevant data regarding the quality of life, employability and inclusion of people with disabilities in the community. Thanks to the findings emerging from the research, project partners will have collected meaningful data necessary for the elaboration of an open business model.

Target groups

The target groups of the research phase will be social economy enterprises, people with disabilities, families, local stakeholders and communities in rural areas, that will also be involved in the research phase through the methodologies and tools contained in the research framework.

The research will be based on a mixed methodology including **desk and field research**.

Desk research

Taking advantage of the extensive experience of project partners in social entrepreneurship/working with/for people with disabilities, as well as according to the institutional and geographical scope of each partner organisation, the desk research will consist of the detailed analysis of:

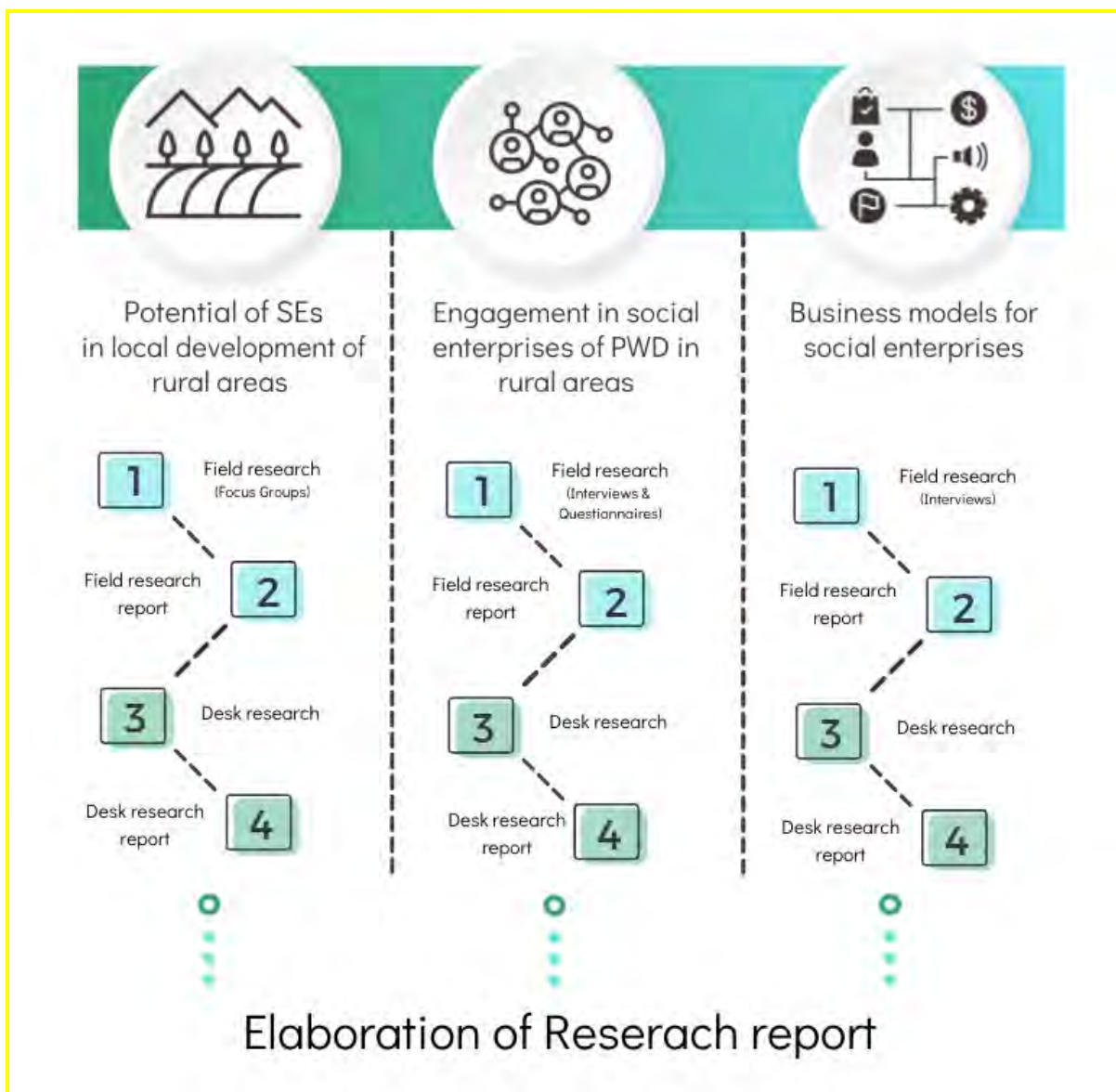


Field Research

Each partner, according to the topic and target group of its research activity, chose one or more tools to conduct the field research.

- 1) **Base3** has chosen the Focus group as its desk research tool. It has been supported by the associated partner AGCI in the selection of participants (coming from social enterprises active in rural areas) and in the organisation of the focus group.
- 2) **PREDIF** has chosen both interviews and questionnaires as its desk research tools, addressed to PREDIF's members in Spain. At the end of the research phase, questionnaires answers were not considered relevant to our research, therefore they will not be included in this report.
- 3) **DIESIS** has chosen the interviews as its field research tool. Mostly the questions were addressed to Diesis' members since they included several hundreds of enterprises working in the social field or employing people with disabilities.

The tasks leading to the production of the final report are graphically represented below:



2. The Desk Research

2.1 The concept of social enterprise

A traditional enterprise is commonly known as an enterprise producing goods and services, involving financial, commercial and industrial aspects, focusing on the market and with profit as the main objective and main performance indicator.

Before defining what social enterprises are, it is worth recalling what social and solidarity economy (SSE) is, as they are both, obviously, interlinked. The SSE is “an approach to business used by organisations seeking to reconcile the aims of serving society, achieving a viable business model, democratic governance, and profitability in support of their social purpose.”¹ Social economy represents 2.8 million organisations and entities in Europe, with more than 13 million paid jobs. It stands for 6.3% of the work force, between 0.6-9.9% of all jobs across Member States.² However, “the number of estimated social enterprises ranges from tens of thousands in Belgium, France, Germany and Italy to a few hundred in Croatia and Cyprus, and the degree of reliability of data ranges also, from very high in Italy and high in Poland to very low in Cyprus. It is no coincidence that data tend to be more reliable where the social enterprise has been acknowledged and regulated.”³

Regarding social enterprises, also called social businesses, there is no global agreed definition. They are still conceived in significantly different manners by national legislations, policy strategies, academics, and social entrepreneurs across the European Union and in the rest of the world. However, in most EU Member States, the predominance of social goals over profits is a distinguishing feature of social enterprises and characterises their different legal entities.⁴ There are some convergences and common elements that several institutions and stakeholders highlight when giving a definition of the term.

For the European Commission, a social enterprise is “an operator in the social economy whose main objective is to have a social impact rather than make a profit for their owners or shareholders. It operates by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative fashion and uses its profits primarily to achieve

¹ AVISE, The social and solidarity economy and rural communities – identifying and supporting rural social innovations to reinvent the local economy, September 2020, https://www.avise.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20210212/avise_mde_ess-et-ruralites_2021_english.pdf (Accessed 14 April 2022)

² European Commission, Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy, 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1537&langId=en> (Accessed 14.04.22)

³ European Commission, *Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe – Comparative synthesis report*, 2020

⁴ European Parliament (2017b), *A European statute for social and solidarity-based enterprise: Study for the Juri Committee*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

social objectives. It is managed in an open and responsible manner and, in particular, involves employees, consumers and stakeholders affected by its commercial activities.”⁵

The OECD definition is relatively similar but highlights more the entrepreneurial and innovation perspective. The organisation identifies the social enterprises as “any private activity conducted in the public interest, organised with an entrepreneurial strategy, whose main purpose is not the maximisation of profit but the attainment of certain economic and social goals, and which has the capacity for bringing innovative solutions to the problems of social exclusion and unemployment.”⁶

Diving deeper on what a social economy enterprise is, the Social Business Initiative (SBI), launched in 2011 and commissioned by the Executive Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises (EASME) gives the following definition in a report: “organisations that trade for a social purpose and can adopt a variety of different legal forms within the social economy sector”. Moreover, still according to the SBI, “SEEs combine characteristics of traditional, primarily profit seeking enterprises and non-profit organisations and this hybrid nature is reflected in their ownership structure and operating models. They may pursue growth and scale in order to increase their societal impact.”⁷ The SBI report also states that many countries, including Belgium, Italy and Spain still lack measures enabling SEEs and traditional enterprises to match. Despite willingness to collaborate, SEEs find difficult to identify suitable business partners.

There are then three main characteristics that differentiate a social economy enterprise from a traditional business. A social economy enterprise:

- serves members of the community rather than simply generating profits;
- includes a democratic decision-making process, allowing users and workers to participate;
- places greater emphasis on individuals and jobs than on capital when distributing surpluses and income.

Moreover, “social enterprises aim to respond to local socio-economic and environmental challenges while creating sustainable jobs that are safe from relocation and increasing social cohesion. They are founded on a social purpose, expressed through their operations, their employees, their customers and beneficiaries, or their structure.”⁸

The tables below present the main differences between a business entrepreneurship and a social entrepreneurship, and between traditional and entrepreneurial social organisations⁹:

⁵ European Commission, Social Enterprises,
https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/proximity-and-social-economy/social-economy-eu/social-enterprises_fr (Accessed 14.04.22)

⁶ OECD, Social entrepreneurship & Social enterprises,
<https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/social-economy/social-entrepreneurship.htm>, (Accessed 14.04.22)

⁷ Technopolis group, *Social Business Initiative (SBI) follow-up: Co-operation between social economy enterprises and traditional enterprises – Final report*, 2018 (Accessed 14.04.22)

⁸ AVISE, *op.cit.*

⁹ Oscar Santos Goes, A., Regina Ferreira Frere Guimaraes, C., Vianna Brugni, T., New business opportunities in social entrepreneurship: a case of Portugal, January 2012,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257200841_NEW_BUSINESS_OPPORTUNITIES_IN_SOCIAL_ENTREPRENEURSHIP_A_CASE_OF_PORTUGAL (Accessed 14.04.22)

Business entrepreneurship	Social entrepreneurship
1. Is individual	1. Is collective
2. Produces goods and services	2. Produces goods and services for the community
3. Is focused on the market	3. Is focused on finding solutions for <i>social problems</i>
4. Its performance measure is profit	4. Its performance measure is social impact
5. Seeks to satisfy the needs of customers and expand the potential of the business	5. Seeks to respect people at social risk and promote their betterment

Source: Adapted from Melo Neto and Froes (2002: 11)

Table 2 – Traditional and entrepreneurial social organizations

Traditional	Entrepreneurial
1. Hierarchic	1. Team/work oriented
2. Centralized control	2. Decentralization/empowerment
3. Focus on what is best for the organization	3. Focus on improvement of the client
4. Emphasis on programs	4. Emphasis on core competencies
5. Depends on outside resources	5. Financially self-sufficient
6. Attempts to be all things to all people	6. Niche orientation

Source: Adapted from Oliveira (2004: 13), based on Thalhuber (2002)

As shown in the table, and also recalled in the SBI report, another distinctive characteristic of social enterprises is their orientation to identify social needs. They mostly come from the public sector or market failures. Social Enterprises search and mobilise resources to fill them, in other words, they find solutions with a social impact. This aspect is remarked under the label of social and solidarity-based economy enterprises. For example, one major type that became dominant across Europe from the 1990s is the namely “work integration social enterprise” (WISE) with a core mission of integrating disadvantaged people.¹⁰

While profit generation is not the performance indicator for a social enterprise, it is still very important. Earnings are indeed important “to sustain the livelihood of the venture but the important difference is that instead of using its profit to distribute among shareholders, the profits are used to reinvest in the enterprise to help it achieve its social mission.”¹¹ In addition, social enterprises often adopt participatory values and decision-making processes, involving not just employees but clients and the community in which they are embedded or that they serve, and the social mission they pursue. In other words, decision-making can involve all the stakeholders affected by an organisation’s business activities.¹²

Following the idea that the social mission sits at the core of a social enterprise business model, it is important to underline that “social entrepreneurs’ activity is not a charity, as pursuing a social mission does not exclude having

¹⁰ Technopolis group, *op.cit.*

¹¹ Corporate Finance Institute, Social Enterprise, <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/other/social-enterprise/> (Accessed 14.04.22)

¹² Eurofund, Cooperatives and social enterprises: work and employment in selected countries, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019, <https://euagenda.eu/upload/publications/untitled-230361-ea.pdf>, (Accessed 14.04.22)

a financial independence or professional development.”¹³ Their motivation and what drives them is “the satisfaction of bringing added-value for the community they live in, from having brought a positive change in the society”.¹⁴

2.2 The potential of SEs in local development in rural areas

Whereas the traditional forms of social economy organisations (notably cooperatives) seem to be more frequently established in rural areas, it appears that the new form of social enterprise is more frequent in urban areas. But this may be changing rapidly for the reasons mentioned above. Social enterprises are often developing and operating new solutions to societal challenges, and assuming a pivotal role in driving social innovations, by re-designing and re-engineering business models and value chains, developing new clusters and networks, or establishing new relationships or collaborations between public, private and third sector organisations. They can play a decisive role in social innovation fields of high relevance for rural areas such as social care and health services, retail, education and training, environmental products and services, food production, distribution and consumption, culture, tourism, and many more.

2.2.1 *Rurality in Europe*

According to Eurostat, the majority of European territory is considered rural and approximately 29% of the European population lives in a rural area¹⁵. Within Europe, the experiences of rural regions are not, however, homogenous with some rural areas experiencing growth and development (in terms of GDP, access to services, infrastructure and population growth) whereas others are facing significant challenges. These challenges are often characterized by ongoing processes of economic restructuring, depopulation, an aging population, lack of access to services and permanent unemployment¹⁶. The interplay between these different challenges can create downward spirals which are often difficult to overcome. One such spiral is the ‘demography circle’¹⁷. This spiral is activated when, due to the low population density and the aging profile of rural areas, economic activity is low. A lack of employment prospects causes younger people to move to other areas, worsening the demographic profile and bringing the area into a downward loop. In such cases, complex interplays between geographic, demographic, social, political, economic and institutional factors combine to create significant challenges. It is against the backdrop of these often-persistent rural challenges that social enterprise, as a potential solution for long-term inclusive and sustainable rural development in peripheral Europe, has emerged.

¹³ Tigu, G., Iorgulescu, M-C., Sidonia Ravar, A., Ramona, L., A Pilot Profile of the Social Entrepreneur in the Constantly Changing Romanian Economy, February 2015
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282233521_A_Pilot_Profile_of_the_Social_Entrepreneur_in_the_Constantly_Changing_Romanian_Economy (Accessed 14.04.22)

¹⁴ Tigu, G., Iorgulescu, M-C., Sidonia Ravar, A., Ramona, L., *op.cit.*

¹⁵ Eurostat, 2019 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20200207-1>

¹⁶ Bock, B, Kovacs, K, Shucksmith, M (2015) Changing social characteristics, patterns of inequality and exclusion. In: Copus, AK, de Lima, P (eds) Territorial Cohesion in Rural Europe. London: Routledge, pp.193–211.

¹⁷ Bertolini P, Peragine V (2009) Poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. Report to Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Brussels: EU

It is rarely mentioned further possibilities for social entrepreneurship in rural areas, since most enterprises are related to agriculture. In fact, most of the European Funds dedicated to rural development are dedicated to agriculture (e.g. European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The fund itself mentions the importance of diversification of rural entrepreneurship.

Many rural areas face the harsh reality of closure of local stores and services, which can exacerbate a situation of decline. Such trends are driving more people to leave, while those who remain risk greater isolation and vulnerability. Rural areas frequently face challenges of limited economic development due to low profitability, the withdrawal of public services seen as economically unviable, and challenges to community cohesion caused by demographic and geographical factors. Economically, rurality is frequently associated with the inaccessibility of goods and services¹⁸. This specific geographical context affects the activities of businesses and the process of entrepreneurship¹⁹.

However, new trends are emerging that could reverse this decline, notably through new forms of community action: one form of practical response has been the creation of social enterprises, i.e. commercial operators that offer goods and services in an entrepreneurial manner, but whose objectives are social or environmental. Instead of generating profits for owners or shareholders, social enterprises reinvest the revenue in order to achieve the agreed objectives.

In this sense, social enterprise could represent a means of **tackling rural challenges of providing sustainable economic development**, addressing the withdrawal of public services and promoting community cohesion.

Also, in rural areas, people with disabilities tend to face more challenges than their counterparts in urban areas. They are less likely to have attended school, less likely to be employed, less likely to be attended by a skilled health worker and less likely to own a mobile phone. Similarly, they are often left behind in rural development interventions. People with disabilities are frequently seen as objects of charity, medical treatment and social protection, not as individuals who are capable of exercising their rights, making decisions based on their free and informed consent and being active members of society and the economy. Also the lack of specialised support services for people with disabilities can be one of the major barriers to their living independently in rural areas. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 crisis is deepening pre-existing inequalities and exposing the extent of their exclusion. Despite being at greater risk for contracting COVID-19 and for experiencing severe complications, persons with disabilities are nevertheless particularly disadvantaged by its socio-economic consequences as well, including job losses and lockdown measures to control the spread.

¹⁸ P.J. Smailes From rural dilution to multifunctional countryside: some pointers to the future from South Australia Aust. Geogr., 33 (1) (2002), pp. 79-95

¹⁹ Korsgaard et al., 2015. The Best of Both Worlds: How Rural Entrepreneurs Use Placial Embeddedness and Strategic Networks to Create Opportunities

2.2.2 Rural challenges could be transformed into opportunities for social enterprise and community development

Rural economic and social challenges might also offer opportunities. Although geographical distance creates an obstacle to many economic or social activities²⁰, community cohesion deriving from a historical commitment to self-help born from necessity has led to high levels of trust and active civic participation within rural communities²¹. Rural communities are often characterised by strong social networks, embeddedness and social movements²² as well as possessing strong mutual knowledge, sense of community and social cohesion²³. Rather than competing, many rural businesses embrace the concept of co-opetition (i.e. collaboration between business competitors in the hope of mutually beneficial results), and draw upon rural strengths to specialise particularly within niche markets²⁴.

Rural social enterprises could help communities to take control of and **tackle complex social, economic and environmental challenges**. Similar to those located in urban locations, rural social enterprises might co-operate, pool and share resources, buy and sell from each other and jointly bid for contracts. This would help to unlock resources, provide scale where needed, minimise costs, and stimulate innovation, while keeping money circulating within social enterprises. Drawing on available resources, rural social enterprises could potentially create locally responsive services that fit the rural context better than top-down initiatives.

2.2.3 Impact created by social enterprises in rural areas

Rural social enterprises are found to deliver a broad range of products and/or services, often fulfilling needs that are not otherwise met²⁵. In undertaking these activities, social enterprises have a positive impact on different aspects of the rural areas in which they operate. One facet of this is that rural social enterprises have been acknowledged to positively impact the economy of rural places.

Economic benefits produced by social enterprises in rural Europe have been affordable housing, the attraction of tourists, the retaining and/or creation of infrastructure and the promotion of business development²⁶. Different

²⁰ T. Pateman Rural and urban areas: comparing lives using rural/urban classifications Reg. Trends, 43 (1) (2011), pp. 11-86

²¹ S. Skerratt, J. Atterton, C. Hall, D. McCracken, A. Renwick, C. Revoredo-Giha, A. Steinerowski, S. Thomson, M. Woolvin. Rural Scotland in Focus 2012. Scottish Agricultural College, Edinburgh (2012)

²² S.L. Jack, A.R. Anderson. The effects of embeddedness on the entrepreneurial process J. Bus. Ventur., 17 (5) (2002), pp. 467-487

²³ A. Dale, J. Onyx. A Dynamic Balance: Social Capital and Sustainable Community Development UBS Press, Vancouver (2005)

²⁴ A. Steiner, J. Cleary. What are the features of resilient businesses? Exploring the perception of rural entrepreneurs J. Rural Community Dev., 9 (3) (2014), pp. 1-20

²⁵ Calderwood, E, Davies, K (2012) The trading profiles of community retail enterprise. International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management 40(8): 592–606.

²⁶ Dayson, C (2013) Understanding the place based social value created by new-start social enterprises: Evidence from ten rural UK communities. People, Place and Policy 7(1): 30–45

studies have also highlighted their contribution to local job creation (Dayson, 2013; Jacuniak-Suda and Mose, 2014; Lorendahl, 1996; Steiner and Teasdale, 2019), in several cases specifically for disadvantaged groups²⁷.

Rural social enterprises also produce social impact. The reviewed studies show their importance in delivering social services to rural populations, such as healthcare, eldercare, childcare and transportation²⁸. Additionally, the way in which these services are delivered has promoted the empowerment of vulnerable social groups, has given them a voice, has increased their independence and has promoted capacity building²⁹. Rural social enterprises have furthermore impacted the quality of the relationships among social groups, strengthening trust, solidarity and community cohesion³⁰, i.e. enhancing social capital within rural communities³¹.

2.2.4 Social entrepreneurship in rural areas in Italy and in Spain

According to the IV Iris Network report (2021)³², social enterprise **in Italy** is growing and resisting, responding to the new needs dictated by the pandemic. There are more than 22,000 de facto social enterprises that employ almost 650,000 employees, equal respectively to 6.3% of institutions and 71.0% of employees in the non-profit sector. Of these, more than half (57.5%) are social cooperatives, precisely 12,956, followed by associations (15.4%).

However, in Italy, when we talk about social entrepreneurship in rural areas, we generally talk about **Social Agriculture (SA)**- which also includes agriculture enterprises with the involvement of people with disabilities.

In the Italian experience, social agriculture is an expression that can refer both to entrepreneurial experiences (non-profit agricultural enterprises, for example) and to those promoted by subjects of the third sector, but which do not have entrepreneurial connotations - such as associations - or even of the public sector, as happens in some mental health services of local health agencies. All these realities are united by the pursuit of social goals through the realization of agricultural activities, understood in the broadest sense (cultivation, breeding, business processing of products, agritourism, sale of business products, etc.), with the explicit purpose of involving people with special needs.

²⁷ O'Shaughnessy, M (2008) Statutory support and the implications for the employee profile of rural based Irish work integration social enterprises (WISEs). *Social Enterprise Journal* 4(2): 126–135.

Róbert, T, Levente, A (2017) Social innovations for the disadvantaged rural regions: Hungarian experiences of the new type social cooperatives. *Eastern European Countryside* 23(1): 27–49.

²⁸ Róbert, T, Levente, A (2017) Social innovations for the disadvantaged rural regions: Hungarian experiences of the new type social cooperatives. *Eastern European Countryside* 23(1): 27–49.

²⁹ Macaulay, B, Mazzei, N, Roy, MJ, et al. (2018) Differentiating the effect of social enterprise activities on health. *Social Science & Medicine* 200: 211–217.

³⁰ Steiner, A, Teasdale, S (2019) Unlocking the potential of rural social enterprise. *Journal of Rural Studies* 70: 144–154.

³¹ Morrison, C, Ramsey, E (2019) Power to the people: Developing networks through rural community energy schemes. *Journal of Rural Studies* 70: 169–178.

³² Carlo Borzaga, Marco Musella (a cura di) (2020), *L'impresa sociale in Italia. Identità, ruoli e resilienza*, Rapporto Iris Network

The Law 141 of August 18, 2015, which promotes Social Agriculture (SA) as an aspect of the multifunctionality of agricultural enterprises, the development of interventions and social, sociomedical, educational and socio-labor insertion services is initiated, in order to facilitate adequate and uniform access to essential services to be guaranteed to individuals, families and local communities throughout the national territory and in particular in rural or disadvantaged areas. In particular, as stated in art. 2, paragraph 1, the term "SA" refers to the activities carried out by agricultural entrepreneurs for the social and employment insertion of workers with disabilities, disadvantaged workers and minors inserted in rehabilitation and social support projects.

The phenomenon of SA, in recent years has begun to take off on the national territory with many agricultural enterprises, which show an increasing interest in the organization of innovative paths of reception and social-work inclusion, responding to the crisis of traditional social assistance systems and the need of the health sector to find new methodological approaches not medicalized. A correct vision of SA allows the possibility of creating rehabilitative and inclusive paths in which the individual is not so much a passive beneficiary of social service, but becomes himself an active subject of his own well-being.

In Spain, 'The Analysis of the Socio-economic Impact of the values and principles of the Social Economy in Spain' presented by The Spanish Business Confederation of the Social Economy (CEPES), confirms the greater relative presence of the Social Economy in intermediate cities and rural areas, and its significant contribution to the creation of the business and employment fabric, to the competitiveness of local economies and to the fixing of population in this area:

1. The Social Economy is mostly located in municipalities with less than 40,000 inhabitants (60.2% of companies and 54.6% of their workers). In commercial companies these percentages are inverted and both they and their workers are mostly located in the urban environment.
2. It has important effects on the rural economy and a significant part of it is linked to it.
 - a. Creation of activity and employment: 7% of rural enterprises and institutions and 5.2% of rural employment belong to the Social Economy.
 - b. The Social Economy contribution to intermediate cities and rural areas is also channeled through entrepreneurship. If only the youngest companies are considered, 47.4% of Social Economy companies are located in intermediate cities and rural areas and 52.6% in large cities.
 - c. The sectoral distribution of social economy companies also shows greater dispersion, thus favoring the diversification of the rural economy.
 - d. It improves the competitiveness of rural economies through the development of certain branches that allow a better use of potentialities or bring an offer of social and educational services that is vital to stop the loss of population. The importance of the Social Economy in agrifood branches stands out (53.2% in the manufacture of vegetable and animal oils and fats, 28.9% in the manufacture of animal feed products; 21.9% in the manufacture of beverages and 13.6% in the processing and preservation of fruits and vegetables). Also, in education and in dependency services.

e. Combat depopulation. The contribution to rural areas is supported by other aspects that have a positive impact on the decision to maintain residence in these areas, such as employment stability, which is also greater in social economy companies³³.

³³https://www.cepes.es/noticias/595_valores-empresas-entidades-economia-social-aportan-sociedad-6-229-millones-euros-anuales&Ing=en

2.3 The involvement of people with disabilities in social enterprises in rural areas

2.3.1 People with disabilities in Spain- focus on people with disabilities in rural areas

According to the Survey on Disability, Independence and Dependency Situations made by The National Statistical Institute of Spain, in 2008 there were 3,85 million people with disabilities which represented almost 9 %t of the population³⁴.

In Spain, almost one million people with disabilities live in rural areas, which represents a quarter of the disabled population. The distribution by gender and age indicates an older population than in urban areas, with a higher proportion of women³⁵. The rural environment is characterised by some significant conditioning factors that often make it difficult for the inhabitants of this territory - with respect to those living in urban environments - to access the services to which they are actually entitled as citizens. These difficulties are related when they don't respond to the phenomenon of depopulation, job insecurity, the shortage of services, the reduction of emotional and family ties, and isolation at different levels. These factors are determined by the exclusion situation and they are presented as a risk factor for people with disabilities.

The situation of the disability came from the interaction between the person with limited capabilities and their context. This context includes personal issues as well as the physical, social and attitude characteristics of their environment that could be a facilitator or a barrier to activity, participation and inclusion (WHO:2001). Therefore, the rural area could have advantages with regard to the cities for people with disabilities, although in general it has remarkable difficulties and risks of exclusion³⁶.

The results report "The needs of people with severe physical disabilities and their families in rural areas" states that in general, people with disabilities want to live where they usually do and the main advantages of living in a rural environment are the peaceful environment and social support but the main disadvantages are the lack of services and the problems of accessibility to some of them. (María Cristina Jenaro Río; Noelia Flores Robaina; PREDIF, Plataforma Representativa Estatal de Discapacitados Físicos, 2006; The needs of people with severe physical disabilities and their families in rural areas).

2.3.2 Labour inclusion of PWDs in Spanish rural areas and in social enterprises

In 2019, there were 1,876,900 people of working age (16-64 years) with disabilities, which represented 6.2% of the total working age population. The employment rate of people with disabilities was 25.9% (66.9% for people

³⁴ Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2009). Boletín Informativo del Instituto Nacional de Estadística. Panorámica de la discapacidad en España. Encuesta de Discapacidad, Autonomía personal y situaciones de Dependencia. 2008 10/2009. <https://www.ine.es/revistas/cifraine/1009.pdf>

³⁵ Observatorio estatal de la discapacidad (2019) Las mujeres y niñas con discapacidad en el medio rural en España <https://www.observatorioladiscapacidad.info/tag/medio-rural/>

³⁶ Observatorio estatal de la discapacidad (2017) Las personas con discapacidad residentes en el Medio Rural: situación y propuestas de acción. https://cendocps.carm.es/documentacion/2018_Personas_Discapacidad_MedioRural.pdf

without disabilities)³⁷. The most remarkable fact about people with disabilities is their low participation in the labour market. In 2019, their activity rate fell by half a point to 34.0%, more than 43 points lower than non-disabled population.

In Spain, the percentage of employed people with disabilities in rural areas is very low, even lower than urban areas (19.9% compared to 21.4%, age range 6-64).

Complying with the legal obligation to hire is the main reason for the recruitment of people with disabilities in companies that fulfill the rate of people with disabilities recruited (50.7% of companies indicate this as the main motivation). In the second place, they mentioned that grants and/or tax reductions linked to the recruitment of people with disabilities are another reason for recruiting people with disabilities. (27.5%)³⁸.

Within social enterprises, 87% of the companies have people with disabilities on their own staff or in group companies according to the fifth report of the social impact of the companies made by SERES and Deloitte³⁹.

According to the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, the Social Economy has lost 6.5% less employment than other companies and contributes significantly to social inclusion as more than 128,000 people with disabilities or at risk of exclusion work in the Social Economy sector⁴⁰.

In Social Economy companies and organisations, 6.2% of workers have a recognised disability, a much higher percentage than in business companies (1.7%). The higher number of people with disabilities in the Social Economy than in business companies, is maintained in all types of activity except in agriculture.

53.9% of Social Economy companies and organisations meet the rate reserved for people with disabilities, in other words, these workers represent at least 2% of their staff⁴¹.

The services sector once again concentrated the largest number of contracts signed with people with disabilities, almost 80 % of the contracts. Although the third sector of the entire labour market is a reality, it is even more pronounced in this group, as in the rest of the population, contracts in the services sector account for around 70%. The activities of social services without accommodation, is the one with the highest proportion of people with disabilities hired, with a rate of more than 6.5 %⁴².

The most important enabling factor for compliance with the reserve quota is the previous employment of people with disabilities in the workforce. Other factors also considered relevant by Social Economy organisations to facilitate the recruitment of people with disabilities are: contact with employment integration agents, internships

³⁷ INE (2019). El Empleo de las Personas con Discapacidad https://www.ine.es/prensa/epd_2019.pdf

³⁸ Fundacion ONCE (2015). Las empresas de la ECONOMÍA SOCIAL como palanca de creación de EMPLEO para las personas con DISCAPACIDAD https://base.socioeco.org/docs/las_empresas_de_la_economia_social_como_palanca_de_creacion_de_empleo_para_las_personas_con_discapacidad_-_resumen_ejecutivo_2015_.pdf

³⁹ SERES, valor social 2018. V Informe del impacto social de las empresas https://www.fundacionseres.org/Repositorio%20Archivos/Informes/20190118_V%20Impacto%20social%20empresas%20DEF.pdf

⁴⁰ Revista Española del Tercer Sector; Reflexiones y Análisis sobre el Emprendimiento Social y la Empresa Social; N º 35;2017

⁴¹ Fundacion ONCE (2015). Las empresas de la ECONOMÍA SOCIAL como palanca de creación de EMPLEO para las personas con DISCAPACIDAD

⁴² Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal (SEPE) presenta;2020; Informe del Mercado de Trabajo de las Personas con Discapacidad; ; Estatal; Datos 2019

in the organisation or company by people with disabilities and knowledge of positive experiences in the recruitment of this group by other organisations in the sector.

The Social Economy companies and organisations that still don't comply with the quota basically attribute this result to two causes: the scarcity or difficulty of finding candidates with disabilities and a lack of knowledge about the implications of hiring this group. In addition, a still considerable percentage continue to find ignorance of disability a barrier to hiring, so that, in any case, it seems necessary to bring the Social Economy and the field of disability closer together⁴³.

2.3.3. Challenges and needs of people with physical disability towards social business start-up in rural areas

Previous studies on individuals with disabilities have shown that their human capital, such as work experience and training, are lower due, in part, to unequal access to education for this group (Dakung, Orobia, Munene and Balunywa, 2017; Park and Bouck, 2018). Thus, 43.1% of the Spanish disabled have primary or lower education, and 77.3% have a high school secondary education. As a result, only 10.5% of people with disabilities have university studies in Spain, compared to 28.8% of the non-disabled (White Paper on access and inclusion in public employment of people with disabilities, 2014). This situation justifies their low levels of work experience and training, which puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to entrepreneurship (Renko, Harris and Caldwell, 2016).

Therefore, experts stress the importance of social support (friends and family) the disabled individual may undertake, as this supports conditional access to the financial capital of entrepreneurs (Brüderl and Preisendorfer, 1998; Jammaers and Zanoni, 2018; Rizzo, 2002). However, social support is more than just financial aid (Esquivel, 2010; Saxena and Pandya, 2018). For the disabled entrepreneur, the moral support of the family or the people in their social environment is considered even more influential than the fact of having the financing for the project. So it is because most of them have low self-esteem, and this type of support is fundamental (Esquivel, 2010). However, their social network tends to be smaller, where family members interact, the paid staff that works for them in their businesses and those with whom they reside (Lippold and Burns, 2009). Also, disabled people are more likely to have fewer families (Olsen and Clarke, 2003) or to question having children. Taking into account that social relationships are valuable to support the entrepreneurial process, the social situation of the disabled individual is a disadvantage compared to the non-disabled (Renko et al., 2016).

Moreover, it is advisable to use self-employment more frequently to help integrate people with disabilities, as it would provide them with paid work and be self-sufficient, overcoming widespread socioeconomic situations such as unemployment, underemployment or counting only with income from a disability pension/subsidy (Ashley and Graf, 2018; Ostrow, Nemec and Smith, 2018; Wiklund, Hatak, Patzelt and Shepherd, 2018).

Therefore, the group of disabled people has a higher difficulty when it comes to staying financially; since it is more complicated for them than for others to find a job. Consequently, they decide to create a company with

⁴³Fundacion ONCE (2015). Las empresas de la ECONOMÍA SOCIAL como palanca de creación de EMPLEO para las personas con DISCAPACIDAD

which, in addition to obtaining the necessary resources to survive and maintain themselves economically, they feel useful, and realized in the society in which they live.

Hence, the main problem faced by people with disabilities, like any other individual, is to obtain the necessary economic resources. But not only is it necessary that individuals have resources with which they can start a business, but also have a considerable margin of time for the company to start giving benefits. Consequently, aid to entrepreneurs should not only be economical at the time of starting the company but should also consider the reduction of taxes in the first years of activity when the company is not yet profitable.

Finally, it has also been found that being an entrepreneur with a disability offers a social status of recognition for being able to generate wealth and be self-sufficient. Therefore, the disabled not only undertake for reasons of need but can also be a way for this group to get out of the situation of discrimination that they have in most countries of the world.

Regarding whether training favors entrepreneurship, in general, it is considered essential for the development of economic activity, despite a discrepant respondent who considered that training does not always promote attitudes related to entrepreneurship, but the search of work for others⁴⁴.

2.4 Business models for social enterprises

2.4.1 Different kind of social enterprises

Social enterprises, which operate in all sectors of the economy, can take different legal forms: non-profits, cooperatives, mutual companies, foundations, or social enterprises with trade status.⁴⁵ These kinds of enterprises operate according to the principles of solidarity among members, and their participation in the governance of the business.⁴⁶

On the legal form, the European Parliament states that a specific law to establish a clear identity of social enterprises that preserves their essential features is required.⁴⁷ “In the meantime, some legal forms include private companies limited by shares or guarantee, mutuals and non-profit organisations such as associations, voluntary associations, charities and foundations.”⁴⁸ The key principle at the core of their structure and mission is based on a social impact for the community. Despite the significant differences in the legal forms of social enterprises in the EU Member States, some countries have specifically tailored legal forms. In France, there is the so-called *société coopérative d'intérêt collectif*. In Italy, the legal form of social cooperative. “Alternatively, some EU Member States have adapted criteria within existing laws (such as cooperative law), for which social

⁴⁴ Inocencia Martínez-León, Isabel Olmedo-Cifuentes; Catalina Nicolás-Martínez; Entrepreneurship of people with disabilities in Spain: Socioeconomic aspects; 2019; SUMA DE NEGOCIOS, 10(22), 42-50, Edición Especial 2019, ISSN 2215-910X

⁴⁵ AVISE, *op.cit.*

⁴⁶ Eurofund, *op.cit.*

⁴⁷ European Parliament (2017b), A European statute for social and solidarity-based enterprise: Study for the Juri Committee, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

⁴⁸ Eurofund, *op.cit.*

enterprises can qualify, in the form of a social purpose company in Belgium, for example. Indeed, many social enterprises operate in the legal form of a cooperative.”⁴⁹

(Social) Cooperatives

From an external point of view, a cooperative looks like any other type of business. It is the internal functioning that differentiates them. As defined by the European Commission, “a cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united to meet common economic, social, and cultural goals. They achieve their objectives through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.”⁵⁰ There is a democratic control and economic participation of partners. Even if it can share the goal of a social mission, a cooperative should not be mistaken as a non-profit organisation (NPO). The main difference would be the target each of these serves: a cooperative serves its members, while an NPO serves the community. “The members of a co-operative usually make regular use of its goods or services. They may be users or customers of the goods or services offered, or work in the co-operative. There are different kinds of co-operatives: workers, producers, consumers, solidarity, or worker-shareholders. NPOs are more flexible and tend to have a less formal structure.”⁵¹ Cooperatives do business and trade, but they share equally and reinvest their profit.

According to the European Commission, there are 250,000 cooperatives in the EU, owned by 163 million citizens (one third of EU population) and employing 5.4 million people. On the market shares, cooperatives hold 55% in the agriculture in Italy, 21% in Spain and 18% in Belgium in the Pharmaceutical and health care sector.⁵² This shows how strong and already deeply integrated in the economy the cooperatives are. However, cooperatives that do not pursue general interests cannot be defined as social enterprises. For this reason, we refer to social cooperatives when they have a social goal. The main difference from a “classic” cooperative is the “public interest” as their main purpose. Among other activities, they aim to meet the needs of disadvantaged people, including persons with disabilities, to include them in the labour market. Also, according to European Commission’s report “A map of social enterprises and their eco-systems in Europe”, in 15 out of 29 countries, the “cooperative is among the three most commonly used legal forms for social enterprises (excluding countries with legally recognised adaptations of the cooperative legal form that provide for some of the specific circumstances of social enterprises)”.⁵³ The second most used is the share company with 18 countries, and the top used non-profit legal form is the Association with 23 countries.

Moreover, cooperatives can now also be developed as a new digital business model. They are an example of “participatory-governed businesses which use digital platforms to facilitate citizen engagement and the selling of

⁴⁹ Eurofund, *op.cit.*

⁵⁰ European Commission, Cooperatives, https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/proximity-and-social-economy/social-economy-eu/cooperatives_en (Accessed 07.04.22)

⁵¹ PME MTL, Social economy enterprise, <https://pmemtl.com/en/tools-and-resources/social-economy-enterprise> (Accessed 07.04.22)

⁵² European Commission, Cooperatives, https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/proximity-and-social-economy/social-economy-eu/cooperatives_en (Accessed 07.04.22)

⁵³ European Commission, A map of social enterprises and their eco-systems in Europe – Synthesis report, 2015

locally produced goods and services, aiming to achieve better working conditions for their members.”⁵⁴ The platform cooperatives represent an alternative to the classic venture-capital funded platforms as they are owned by the workers, users and other people who are actually the ones using the goods and services offered. Various examples of platform cooperatives active in different sector and of different sizes already exist around the world: Coopcycle (France), Platform Coop (Belgium), Fairbnb.coop (Italy and Europe), Platform Cooperativism Consortium (United States) which advocates on the topic.

WISE

As mentioned above, a WISE is a Work Integration Social Enterprise. According to the European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE), “WISEs are defined by three identifying pillars: they are enterprises whose main objective is the social and professional integration of disadvantaged people, that are at the core of the economic system, and which presents a strong pedagogical dimension.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, WISEs are a special type of social enterprise that display the following minimum characteristics⁵⁶:

- Private and autonomous enterprises operating on the market
- Where the disadvantaged workers have employee rights under national labour law
- whose core mission is the integration through work of disadvantaged people
- And which comply with a minimum threshold of disadvantaged workers over total workforce.

A variety of legal forms across EU countries can be characterised as WISEs, “provided that at least 30% of the workforce is represented by disadvantaged individuals or persons with disabilities”.⁵⁷ The WISE status can then only be given to companies that include work integration as a permanent and significant aspect of their scope and mode of functioning. “In a significant number of EU countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Spain, statuses recognising WISEs specifically have been introduced to facilitate especially the integration of disabled people.”⁵⁸

On the income generation, social enterprises that facilitate the integration to work of disadvantaged people are characterized by a turnover of private and public resources. Part of the costs linked to the integration of disadvantaged people is covered by the sale of goods and services to individuals and to commercial companies. “The remaining part of the cost is covered with public subsidies, although public resources can also be allocated to WISEs through contracts with public agencies that are not related to social services (for instance, for cleaning public offices or for the maintenance of parks and public green areas). This type of resource mix characterises most of the CEE countries (but also Finland and Italy).”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ European Commission, Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy, 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1537&langId=en> (Accessed 14.04.22)

⁵⁵ ENSIE, What are WISEs, <https://www.ensie.org/wises-data/what-are-wises> (Accessed 20.04.22)

⁵⁶ European Commission, A map of social enterprises and their eco-systems in Europe – Synthesis report, 2015

⁵⁷ European Commission, Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe – Comparative synthesis report, 2020

⁵⁸ European Commission, Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe – Comparative synthesis report, 2020

⁵⁹ European Commission, Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe – Comparative synthesis report, 2020

2.4.2. Social business model

Classis business models of traditional enterprises are usually defined with “reference to markets, product or service offers and the willingness of customers to pay for goods and services.” As described above in the research, social enterprises have different performance measure and objectives. They are not driven solely by commercial goals, therefore “profitability becomes less important as a conventional metric of the business model.”⁶⁰

A social business model could be defined with the following elements⁶¹:

1. The mission should be defined around a social purpose. It creates a long-term mind-set. The trade-off between the social and the economic benefits could be tackled by creating a synergy between them.
2. The relationship between the organization and the stakeholders is crucial.
3. The social hybrid organizations do not seek growth by dominating the industry and the market but are aware that a certain growth and the ability to scale is needed to create social change. Also, these organisations can act as examples for others.

These elements are also recognizable in those that characterize social enterprises.

Moreover, business models of social enterprises have important elements that create value, compared to a traditional enterprise. Indeed, “in the area of value proposition, it is a unique offer of products and/or services and a partnership of entities responsible for the idea and establishment of a social enterprise.”⁶² In addition, social enterprises create value via cooperation and collective action, multi-stakeholder governance, assets socialization and the motivation of its initiators and employees.⁶³ All the different actors are involved in the solution of the chosen social problem. The value creation and how the problem is solved are related to human capital, meaning with a social approach. While there are similarities with traditional commercial enterprises for the creation of value, social enterprises have specific features: “the ability to combine economic activity with social activities and, in many cases, also ecological activity in order to generate value at these levels.”⁶⁴

Regarding how social enterprises generate income (rather than profit per se), as WISEs, they are engaged simultaneously in various and plural activities. They combine “market and non-market, public and private resources and often access multiple markets applying different rules and methods.” As part of the innovation that can characterize social enterprises, they also create and develop new markets and develop the existing markets. For example, in new social and health services, in upcycling and recycling, in renewable energy and business-to-business services. In the specific context of rural areas, the role of social enterprises can be significant.⁶⁵ They contribute to the growing attractiveness of and demand for locally based products and organic

⁶⁰ European Commission, A map of social enterprises and their eco-systems in Europe – Synthesis report, 2015

⁶¹ Neessen, P., Lelia Voinea, C., Business Models of Social Enterprises: Insight into Key Components and Value Creation, 2021, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356344553> (Accessed 20.04.22)

⁶² Otolá, I., What constitutes the value in business model for social enterprises?, 2021, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357717320> (Accessed 15.04.22)

⁶³ Neessen, P., *op.cit.*

⁶⁴ Otolá, I., *op.cit.*

⁶⁵ European Commission, Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe – Comparative synthesis report, 2020

food. They can also be seen as actors preserving and sharing knowledge, practices and traditions for their regions and local products. Moreover, some tools exist that can help social enterprises to refine their business models.

Social Business Model Canvas

In 2008, Alexander Osterwalder developed a one-page, business model design template: the Business Model Canvas.⁶⁶ “A Business Model Canvas is a visual representation of an organization’s business model. [...] it describes the way the company creates, delivers and captures value. Based on a visual language, the Canvas enables anyone to understand pillars and key components of a certain business model.”⁶⁷ It is a useful tool to talk about business model and present business to external stakeholders in a quick and understandable way, while not oversimplifying the complexities.⁶⁸ The main limit of Osterwalder’s canvas, and the ones developed by other stakeholders, was that they were focusing on profit-oriented organisations, and not socially-oriented ones. There are now several canvas dedicated to social enterprises, taking into account both social and economic sustainability.

The main reasons to use Social Business Model Canvas, are the ability to bring the team together to discuss using an easy-to-use and to share visual language. It also “fosters both creativity and analysis, as teams can use it for both sketching new business models or analyzing existing ones,”⁶⁹ structures discussions and shapes business ideas. It is easy to share as it is a one-page business plan, to get feedback, and to be continually refined. It also helps describing to external stakeholders the key components of the business model in a concise and effective manner. Below, two examples of Social Business Model Canvas.

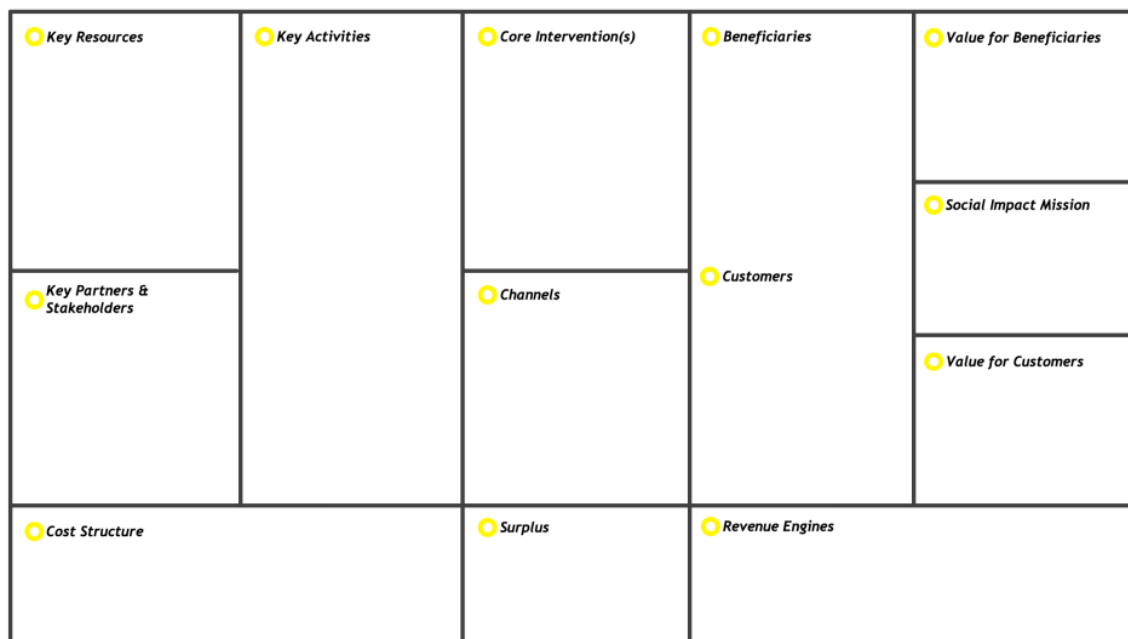
⁶⁶ Interaction Consortium, Alex Osterwalder’s Business Model Canvas template: why use it and how, <https://interaction.net.au/articles/business-model-canvas-template/>, (Accessed 13.05.22)

⁶⁷ Social Business Design, Social Business Model Canvas – What it is and how to use it, <https://socialbusinessdesign.org/what-is-a-social-business-model-canvas/>, (Accessed 13.05.22)

⁶⁸ Qastharin R., A., Business Model Canvas for Social Enterprise, 2015, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323393037_Business_Model_Canvas_for_Social_Enterprise, (Accessed 13.05.22)

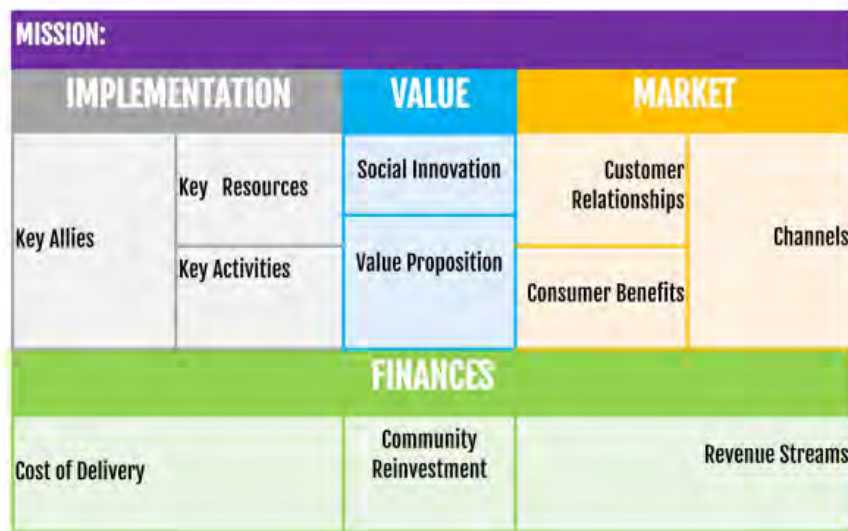
⁶⁹ Social Business Design, Social Business Model Canvas – What it is and how to use it, <https://socialbusinessdesign.org/what-is-a-social-business-model-canvas/>, (Accessed 13.05.22)

Social Business Model Canvas



© Social Business Design

Social Business Model Canvas. Template adapted form Social Innovation Lab and Tandemic⁷⁰



Social Enterprise Institute, Social Business Model Canvas⁷¹

⁷⁰ Social Business Design, Social Business Model Canvas – What it is and how to use it, <https://socialbusinessdesign.org/what-is-a-social-business-model-canvas/>, (Accessed 13.05.22)

⁷¹ Social Enterprise Institute, Social Business Model Canvas, <https://socialenterpriseinstitute.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Social-Business-Model-Canvas.pdf>, (Accessed 13.05.22)

2.4.3. Social business model case studies

There are examples of successful business transfer to employees and that improved company level social dialogue. Case studies were developed by Diesis Network in the framework of the In4BTE project. They are available here: <https://in4bte.eu/casestudies/> . Several of these case studies include companies that are now working in the legal form of cooperatives, such as Pirinoli (Italy)⁷², Niva-93 (Bulgaria)⁷³, Wigwam eG (Germany)⁷⁴.

The two cases selected for the Appendix 1- Case studies, have been chosen due to their proximity to the production of the business model of the Coop4In project. They are registered and functioning as cooperative in different sector of activity: agriculture, textile and clothing. They are based and active in rural areas, working with and/or employing people with disabilities. They are also in constant search of new opportunities to achieve their respective social missions and to stay competitive. The following cases were developed for the Seeding project, for which Diesis Network was a partner and prepared some of the case studies. More cases are available here: <https://seedingproject.eu/category/case-studies/> .

2.5 Desk Research conclusions

The desk research suggests that innovations brought by social entrepreneurship can represent a means of tackling rural and social challenges and providing sustainable economic development, addressing the withdrawal of public services and promoting community cohesion.

Rural businesses are generally related to agriculture in all EU countries. Especially in Italy, when we talk about social entrepreneurship in rural areas, we usually refer to social agriculture or enterprises related to the agriculture value chain. However, research shows that rural enterprises can develop in very different areas of very different activities, according to the specific needs and characteristics of the territory. Targeted investments in local opportunity sectors can create jobs, increase purchasing power and generate sustainable economic growth in rural areas.

This is particularly relevant for people with disabilities: in general, those who live in rural areas don't have the usual services provided in large cities such as employment services, education and leisure activities. Therefore, people with disabilities who live in rural areas have more chances to be at risk of social exclusion.

In general, social enterprises have a higher percentage of workers with disabilities than business companies. Also, these social enterprises provided more services to this target group. The obstacles that people with disabilities face are that usually they don't have a degree, and they have a low participation in the labour

⁷² <https://in4bte.eu/pc4nk5/uploads/2021/07/IN4bte-Pirinoli.pdf>

⁷³ <https://in4bte.eu/pc4nk5/uploads/2021/07/IN4bte-Niva-93-1.pdf>

⁷⁴ https://in4bte.eu/pc4nk5/uploads/2021/08/Wigwam-eG_1.pdf

market. A solution to change this situation is social entrepreneurship to help integrate them in the labour market and be self-sufficient and independent from their families, overcoming widespread socioeconomic situations, especially in rural areas.

With cooperatives being one of the most common types of social enterprises, the importance of a strong democratic decision-making process appears to be at the centre of the people's motivations. The economic participation and the autonomous association of people committed to the functioning of a cooperative are other reasons that this model is attractive. Moreover, cooperatives are among the top organizational types when it comes to inclusiveness of people with disabilities, on similar levels as conventional enterprise pursuing explicit social aims, associations running economic activities, or WISE status. Social cooperatives and social enterprises in general have important elements that differentiate them from traditional enterprises. The social mission is central, along with the creation of value via cooperation and collective action, multi-stakeholder governance and the motivation of the initiators and employees.

Social economy and social enterprises are getting increasing recognition across Europe and the European institutions. What is still work in progress and still needed, is an effective, efficient, and balanced ecosystem for social enterprise development.

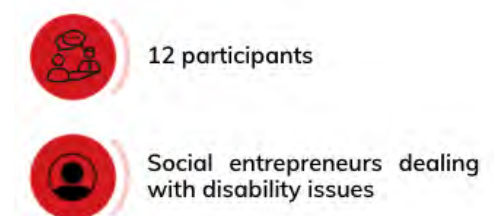
3. The field Research

Each project partner has carried out Desk research in each of the sectors as stated in the Methodology section.

Each partner, according to the topic and target group of its research activity, chose one or more tools to conduct the field research.

3.1 Field Research Italy

Base3 has conducted an online focus group with Italian participants to complete the desk research.



3.1.1. Results from the focus groups

From the focus group carried out by Base3 it emerges that the **needs of people with disabilities in rural areas** are:

- 1) Need for a specific tool to get around, to avoid isolation in rural areas. For example, Ass.ne Egalit  is working on the prototype of  -GT, the intelligent wheelchair. To date, wheelchairs are simple medical aid, not suitable for use on uneven terrain. The  -GT chair is a chair with four-wheel drive, suitable for rural routes.
- 2) Need to overcome social discomfort and isolation, increased during Covid-19 pandemic. Social agriculture can very often be a tool to limit discomfort, to recover from traumas and difficult periods.
- 3) Lack of inclusion of people with disabilities as workforce in rural areas. Businesses in rural areas are not inclusive, e.g. it is easier to accept an immigrant than a disabled worker. Therefore there is a need to create social enterprises aimed to promote inclusion of this type of workers in these areas.
- 4) Lack of services dedicated to people with disabilities in rural areas: it was stressed the importance of offering services (at the municipal/regional level) on the spot

The main obstacles for social enterprises in rural areas- and the possible solutions emerged are:

1) One of the major difficulties for SE in rural areas is linked to **institutions**: they do not have the capacity to promote startups that can be self-financing and self-sustaining. The only activities implemented are those created by the will of the individual cooperatives in order to make young people socially and economically autonomous.

It is important to underline the centrality of culture: it is fundamental, in every sector, to develop a culture of inclusion, for example by carrying out activities involving local businesses.

2) One of the major problems of SE in rural areas is the **depletion of rural areas** and the need to fully understand the role of these areas, also from an economic point of view. New strategies and logics must be introduced, since with today's market logic it is not possible to fully analyze the potential of these areas.

3.2 Field Research Spain

PREDIF has conducted interviews with Spanish participants to complete the desk research:



5 interviews



People with physical disability
(spinal cord injury) living in
rural areas in Spain

3.2.1. Results from the interviews

According to people interviewed, in terms of **needs of people with disabilities in rural areas**, accessibility is really important in rural areas because the basic services such as the town hall, the health centre, or leisure areas are not fully accessible, even the streets of the village are not accessible (they are narrow and do not have space for a wheelchair).

They think that social enterprises should provide advice and serve as a link between the people with a disability and society and vice versa, taking into consideration all types of disabilities. Therefore, the society understands the needs that they have as people with disabilities and they can be included in the society. It shouldn't have economic benefits and should focus on the basic needs of people with disabilities.

Most of the people interviewed think that **social enterprises can have a positive impact on rural areas** because they can improve the inclusion of the people with disabilities, the services provided for them and the accessibility in rural areas. Also, social enterprises can provide a job in rural areas so they don't have to go out of the town to work and they can adapt the job offer to their needs and skills so they match the market needs of

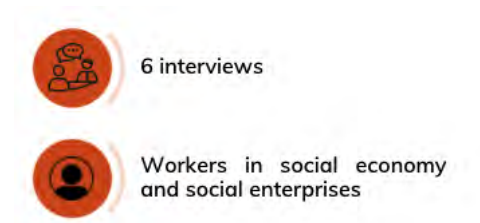
town with the abilities of the people with disabilities, and benefits both the town and the people with disabilities. Also, they think they can provide more services that are provided in cities but not in rural areas.

For example, improve the life of people with disabilities in rural areas by making it easier to live there and have the same services as there are in the cities or providing services to the people that lives in rural areas such as elderly people, with the help of personal assistance, do activities with them or talk to them about the personal assistance. Most of the jobs and market needs of the rural areas are related to agriculture, livestock farming, construction, manufacturing sector, so they are very physical work not suitable for people with disabilities.

The **challenges** that people with disabilities faces related to the creation of social enterprises is the lack of knowledge, skills, competences about running a business, also technical and economic resources, for example in rural areas there is no wifi and the discrimination of the people living in rural areas. Most of them believe that if they receive a training about the creation of a business they would create their own business.

3.3 Field Research Belgium and Europe

Diesis has conducted interviews with participant coming from different countries in Diesis Network to complete the desk research:



3.3.1. Results from the interviews

According to people interviewed, there is a **need** to improve employment and economic position of marginalized groups, including PWDs. The overall goal is to give them the opportunity to work. They want to improve the quality of life and working conditions of these people, and they estimate that social economy is the way for this. For this, there is the need to build resilience, combat inequalities in opportunity and promote inclusive and sustainable social growth.

Main **obstacles** for social enterprises in rural areas are:

- social entrepreneurship is marginalized in the countryside.
- lack of services provided to more vulnerable populations and to the new societal needs that are emerging.
- lack of systematic and regular funding being the most important obstacle, not allowing their organization to define a long term Action Plan, including a set of activities to be implemented, and forcing them to adapt to the specifics and objectives of the various calls published by international donors.
- transfer of know-how and experience among the different project team members could be improved, along with the identification and serving of the capacity building needs of the organisation's staff members.

Also, according to the people interviewed, social enterprises are completely related to the **engagement of PWDs** and can play an important role in this. Social service providers for PWDs, particularly in the form of SEE, are keener to experiment and tend to organise employment around activities with the potential to affect the society as a whole. The social dimension of their operations makes them more sensitive towards general interest and therefore more interested in operating in a way that takes into consideration social impact, also in difficult areas.

Social enterprise provides the first step to employment for people with disabilities, who would historically be less likely to be in employment than able-bodied people. In rural areas there are significant levels of **isolation** for people with disabilities, especially when there is poor transport. Social enterprises are likely to be more supportive and accommodating of someone's needs, i.e. they may not be able to start work as someone with their own transport.

Some also state there are plenty of jobs for PWDs, hospitality and tourism sectors for example. This is contributing to their social inclusion, not only economic improvement, but also to be socialized through these social enterprises. SEEs have the capacity to both offer targeted services to PWDs and to include them in their organizational structure and provide employment and social opportunities for them.

They believe that social enterprises can indeed facilitate the **engagement of people with disabilities**, including those in rural areas, as for people with disabilities it is easier to relate to a legal entity with a social footprint as opposed to a mainstream enterprise. Engagement would be even stronger in the case of **social enterprises run by people with disabilities**, which could appear as role models for the whole community, especially for rural areas, where the integration of people with disabilities is even harder.

3.4 Cross country analysis

From the field research, common points from different countries emerge on the analysis of the role of social entrepreneurship for the inclusion of people with disabilities in rural areas.

In particular, in terms of **needs**, people with disabilities require:

- 1) More accessibility in all kind of services and workplaces
- 2) Overcome social discomfort and isolation
- 3) Promotion of the inclusion of people with disabilities as workforce, in order to improve employment and economic position of PWDs
- 4) Development of services dedicated to people with disabilities in rural areas (also through social enterprises)
- 5) Training and possibility to start their own (social) business

In terms of **challenges** we have identified the following common points:

- 1) Lack of interest in Social Entrepreneurship and PWDs from institutions

- 2) Lack of culture of inclusion: people with disabilities are usually considered as “weak” members of the society and rarely considered as active workforce, especially in the agriculture sector
- 3) Depletion and depopulation of rural areas
- 4) Lack of knowledge, skills, competences in PWDs about running a business

In terms of **opportunities**, the field analysis led to the conclusion that social enterprises seem to be the better business model for the inclusion of people with disabilities in rural areas. This can be achieved through the democratic processes that characterize social businesses (in particular cooperatives) and through the promotion of a change of mindset where PWDs are recognized as active members of the society. Also, the promotion of training and self-entrepreneurship can be an effective tool to promote the work and social inclusion of PWDs in rural areas.

4. From the Research to the Coop4In business model

The Coop4In initial research showed that in order to respond to the needs of the people with disabilities in rural areas, exploiting the opportunities offered by social entrepreneurship, the best business model should be the form of a **(social) cooperative or WISE** as defined in the chapter 3.4.1.

The reason why we chose these specific kind of social enterprises is because not only they aim to promote the social and work integration of disadvantaged people, but also because they are usually characterized by participatory-governed systems of decision-making processes.

Therefore we believe that these kind of businesses can actually support PWDs through:

In agreement with the European Commission Social Business Initiative (SBI) these kind of enterprises can have a positive impact on vulnerable or disadvantaged people through two types of action:

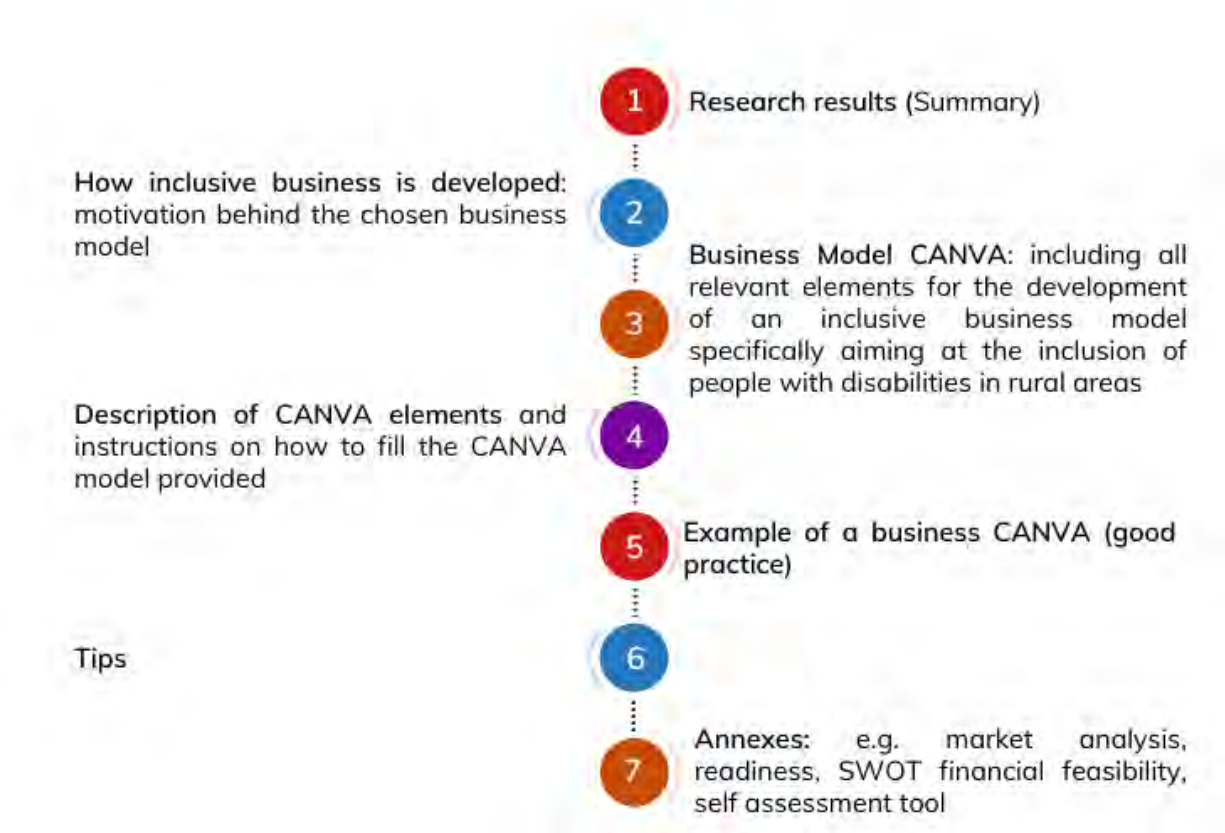
- a) The provision by social enterprises of **social services and/or goods and services to vulnerable people** (access to housing, health care, assistance to the elderly or disabled, inclusion of vulnerable groups, childcare, management of dependency, etc.);
- b) Enterprises with a methodology of production of goods or services with a social objective (**social and professional integration through access to employment for disadvantaged people**, particularly due to insufficient qualifications or social or professional problems leading to exclusion and marginalisation); but whose activity may be beyond the scope of the provision of social goods or services (e.g. Special Employment Centres or insertion enterprises in Spain, some social cooperatives in Italy, the WISE in the UK).

Research also showed the lack of competences in people with disabilities in starting their own businesses and the lack of inclusion culture in rural areas. This is why the Coop4In business model will be structured as a **training**

tool aimed to develop open and inclusive social enterprises. The Coop4In Business model will support the following project objectives: ·

- 1) Provide guidance and support for rural entrepreneurs in integrating social models and cooperatives into their business models.
- 2) Develop a social cooperatives business model in which people with disabilities have an important role in rural development.
- 3) Make aware rural entrepreneurs of the benefits and impact of social and labour inclusion of people with disabilities.
- 4) Ensure full participation of persons with disabilities in rural environments.
- 5) Develop materials and tools to strengthen social cooperatives and business models in rural areas.

4.1 Coop4In Business model structure



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