

Hungarian Solidarity Economy Network: Towards an Integrated Cooperative in Hungary

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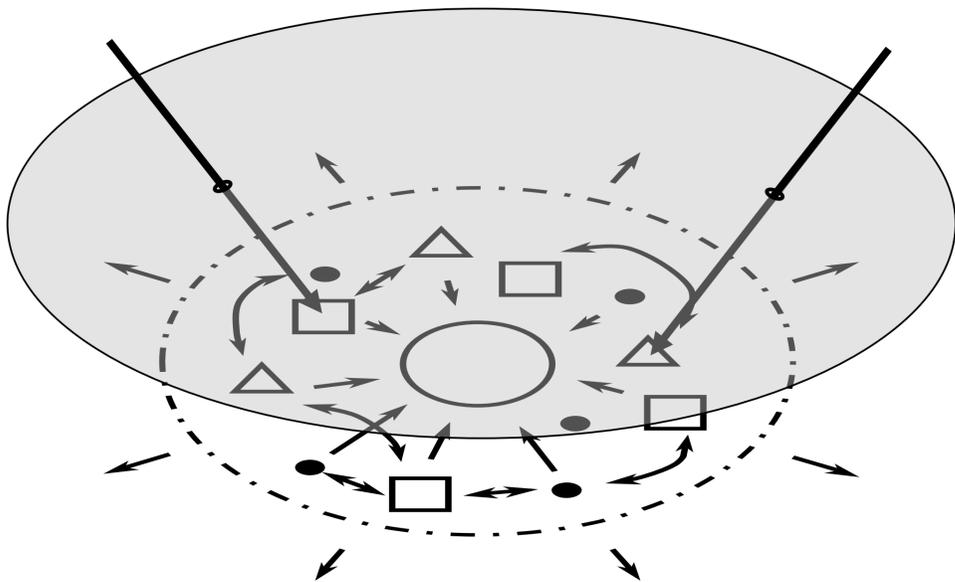
I.) conceptual framework

The cost of social reproduction is an unpaid, yet essential component of the global accumulation of capital. In times of capitalist crisis and falling profits this contribution becomes even more crucial in upholding profitability of extractive dynamics and thus intensifies. At the bottom level this results in enlarged sectors of informal work and communalistic solutions for basic needs. These forms of institutionalization are, and have historically been, created primarily as defensive responses, especially in peripheral positions, but they are prone to make capital actually more capable of extracting value from the most impoverished. The aim is to detach these institutions of social reproduction from extractive dynamics by strengthening horizontal economic relations and in turn keeping as much of the generated value within as possible.

How? By actively building the frameworks for a solidarity economy network.

II.) aims

We aim for an Integrated Cooperative: a horizontally organized, democratically governed ecosystem of economic activity partly sealed and protected from market volatility, extraction and commodification. Ideally it should include everything from housing to production and services, from financing to accounting, all with extensive community participation in decision making. Additionally it should conform to growth that does not exclude and encircle and it should be readily able to draw and keep in external wealth for circulation within.

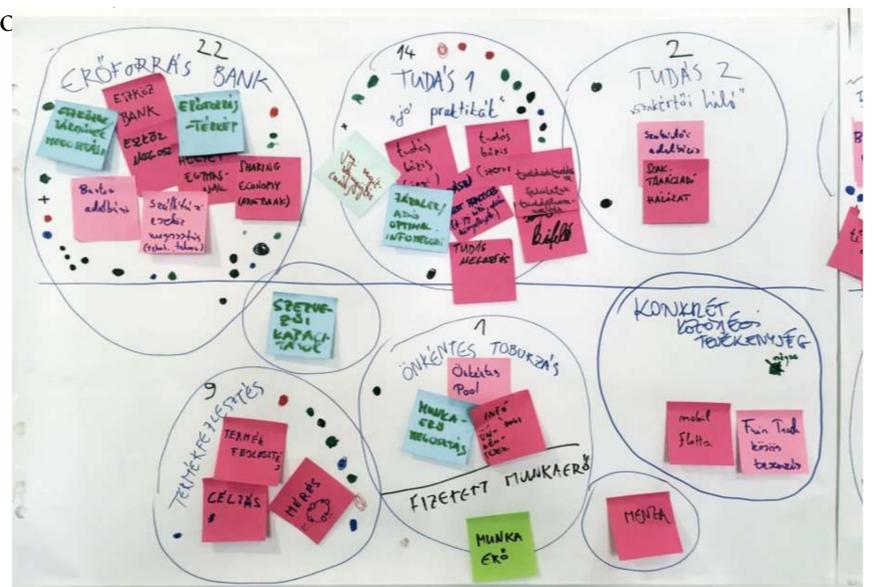


Currently under the working title Hungarian Solidarity Economy Network our initiative consists of a facilitating group (the Metacooperative) and solidarity economy organizations from Hungary focusing on economic democracy, economic justice and ecological awareness.

III.) what we have accomplished so far

We have conducted extensive field interviews with about 40 organizations spanning a range of activities including housing, community based maternal care, community centers, cooperatives and independent food producers among others. What we have learned from these discussions is that many initiatives of this sort face very similar difficulties, such as an unpredictability in finances, overwork, lack of allies and isolation.

This led us to organize a two-day meeting of about 25 organizations in November 2018 focusing on building trust, discussing common issues and potential solutions and to pitch the idea of a future Integrated Cooperative to invited organizations and experts. During the meeting a common understanding was reached on future directions, and principles and methods of further cooperation. Additionally, a preliminary roadmap was agreed upon that forms the basis of current and future work aimed at the formation of the Integrated Co



IV.) current directions and working groups

With mandate to work on the preparatory phase the facilitating group has initiated the formation of common working groups with participation of all interested members of the network. One large working group is now tasked with an exploration of all the various resources and services the network as a whole has from goods produced through un- or underused spaces to expertise and knowledge. The results of this work is to be organized into a manageable and useful directory which will serve as an interface of exchange as well. Another working group has started to gather knowledge about the relevant legal framework in Hungary and the EU, while a third is looking into the possibility of cooperation with trade unions.

In order to keep the organizing transparent and accessible to all members a network-wide forum of discussion and coordination was launched. The facilitating group has also started preparations for the next plenary meeting due to take place in summer 2019.