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WORKING PAPER

Political change, change of reference framework, and SSE policy:
Bordeaux in the post-COVID eras

Timothée DUVERGER (France)

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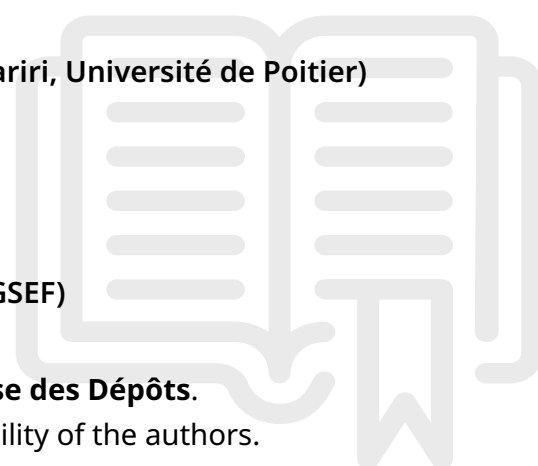
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Political change, change of reference framework, and SSE policy: Bordeaux in the post-COVID era¹

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Introduction

Although political change is often considered a risk factor for social and solidarity economy (SSE) policies, it can also present opportunities. 2020 marked a turning point for Bordeaux. During the Covid-19 crisis, the city experienced a change in government, with a left-wing coalition led by environmentalists after having been ruled by a conservative majority since 1947. This unprecedented situation resulted in a shift in the framework for public policy, particularly economic policy, with the SSE becoming a priority (Muller, 2000).

The public action framework, which was previously focused on territorial attractiveness around the “Magnetic Bordeaux” brand, is now oriented towards transitions. This creates a more favorable framework for the SSE, whose territorial anchoring and contribution to sustainable development objectives are widely recognized. This forms part of a broader shift in the overall framework, moving from a neoliberal approach (Jobert, 1994) to a focus on sustainable development (Muller, 2015), contributing to the revitalization of SSE policies (Chaves and Gallego-Bono, 2020).

In France, the SSE sector accounts for 10.5 % of jobs and between 6 % and 7 % of GDP (Kaminsky, 2009). The law of 31 July 2014 defines it as “a mode of entrepreneurship and economic development suited to all areas of human activity.” It can be defined either from a normative point of view, based on its principles (such as having an objective other than the sole sharing of profits, democratic governance, and a non-profit purpose), or from a legal and

¹ Translated from French: DUVERGER, T., « Alternance, changement de référentiel et politiques d’ESS : Bordeaux à l’ère post-Covid », *Politiques locales d’ESS au service de la transition socio-écologique*, GSEF, 2025.

institutional point of view, based on its legal status (e.g. cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations, and social enterprises).

In order to analyze the changes to the public policy framework, we will observe the ongoing public policy-making process within the context of multi-level governance. The Covid-19 crisis has undoubtedly marked a turning point, providing an opportunity to link the vulnerability of our economic and social systems, which has now been revealed, with the solutions offered by SSE models (Kingdon, 1984). For our study, we will therefore address the question posed by the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the SSE in May 2020: “What role for the social and solidarity economy in the post-Covid-19 recovery?” (UNTFSSSE, 2020a).

In close collaboration with Bordeaux Métropole, the city of Bordeaux will provide the field of analysis to which we will apply the participant observation method. This method is characterized by “commitment often preceding the research process” (Fraisie, 2020). For this study, we will use internal documents such as notes and evaluations, as well as external documents such as deliberations and statements. We will also use information gathered informally in everyday situations, such as meetings and conversations, which could not have been obtained through interviews or questionnaires.

Our focus will be on the political processes of legitimization, problematization and instrumentalization (Smith, 2019) involved in this local SSE policy. First, we will revisit the relationship between the change of government and the inclusion of the SSE on the agenda, examining the resulting changes to institutional frameworks and then we will turn our attention to the implementation of this alternative economic policy, which combines new instruments of public action, coordination of local policies, and participation in an international coalition for the SSE.

1. Alternation and political change in Bordeaux

1. 1. Economic policy framework: from attractiveness to transitions

The SSE does not provide a legal basis for intervention by local authorities. However, due to the diversity of its sectors of activity, it overlaps with most of their areas of responsibility. It is not a lead agency either, whereby one local authority is entrusted with coordinating joint action by the others without exercising any supervisory role. Nevertheless, it is considered a territorial organization (Duverger, 2019).

The 2014 SSE law reinforced the role of the regions, which are required to organize regional conferences with the State every two years and develop regional strategies. The 2015 law on the new organization of the Republic (NOTRe) requires these strategies to be integrated into regional economic development, innovation and internationalization plans (SRDE2I), although this is not exclusive. Nevertheless, the departments remain the primary financiers, pri-

marily through their social and medico-social responsibilities (Tchernonog and Prouteau, 2019), while municipal and inter-municipal levels are involved in the majority of projects.

SSE delegations first emerged in municipalities, which established the Network of Territories for a Solidarity Economy (RTES, by its French acronym) in 2001. However, policies are most effectively implemented at the inter-municipal level, not only because the NOTRe law has entrusted inter-municipal bodies with economic development responsibilities, but also because it stipulates that metropolises must adopt SRDE2I plans in conjunction with the regions, or at least refer to them. Therefore, it is essential to understand SSE policy within the broader context of economic policy and to address municipal and metropolitan policies together without isolating them from other levels of government, particularly the region.

In Bordeaux, the political change in the city center has had significant implications for the Métropole, including a change in the political majority. Although the environmentalist, socialist and communist bloc remains intact, the balance of power has shifted. Pierre Hurmic, the mayor of Bordeaux and first vice-president of Bordeaux Métropole, is an environmentalist, whereas Alain Anziani, the president of Bordeaux Métropole, is a socialist.² The former has a post-growth vision of the economy, whereas the latter - the mayor of Mérignac, a town home to the aerospace and defense industries - is more committed to growth policies. Tensions can therefore be observed on issues concerning major infrastructure projects, such as the airport and the Bordeaux-Toulouse and Bordeaux-Dax high-speed rail projects (LGV, by their French acronym).

This is reflected in the metropolitan project for the 2020-26 term of office (Bordeaux Métropole, 2022a). While support for economic development is reaffirmed, particularly for major sectors and infrastructure, the emphasis is on decarbonizing the economy: Examples include the “development of green industries”, “climate change” in major economic infrastructure and the “ecological transformation of economic actors.” The importance of the residential economy (including the social and solidarity economy, as well as the local economy) is also emphasized, as is the significance of territorial balance and job distribution in terms of economic development, particularly in relation to other territories in the Gironde region.

These guidelines reflect a shift in economic policy, moving away from the previous focus on economic attractiveness and the CAME (competitiveness, attractiveness, metropolization, excellence) model, which contributed to competition between territories around metropolitan areas to attract businesses (Bouba-Olga and Grossetti, 2018). This strategy led to the creation of the “Magnetic Bordeaux” brand, backed by a team of around ten people working on regional marketing, while there was already an economic development agency in Bordeaux (Invest), whose main mission was also to promote the region’s appeal.

² Due to health issues, Alain Anziani has been replaced as president of Bordeaux Métropole by another socialist, Christine Bost, who is also mayor of Eysines and former vice president of Bordeaux Métropole in charge of the social and solidarity economy during the previous term from 2014 to 2020.

The political change marked a turning point. During a debate on economic issues organized by the newspaper *La Tribune* during the municipal campaign, Pierre Hurmic, who was a candidate at the time, declared:

The Métropole is overheating, with traffic gridlock on the ring road (the *rocade*) and public transport reaching capacity. The same is true of housing, as Bordeaux has become one of the most expensive cities in France. The slogan “Magnetic Bordeaux”, promoted by the municipality, is a failure and reflects a selfish policy that is very poorly received by neighboring areas (Déjean, 2020).

Political change led to the suppression of the “Magnetic Bordeaux” initiative and the management team behind it. The economic development agency’s roadmap was modified to such an extent that its name was changed to “*Invest in Bordeaux - Territoires Girondins*” (Invest in Bordeaux - Gironde Territories), reflecting the desire to cooperate with other inter-municipal communities in the Gironde region. For instance, in March 2022 Bordeaux Métropole and the *Communauté d’Agglomération du Libournais (CALI)* signed a New Territorial Cooperation Agreement (CoNECT, by its French acronym) including a section on economic development.

These new priorities are reflected in the Metropolitan Economic Development Plan, which was adopted on 25 November 2021. It aims to support employment, assist businesses in their ecological and digital transition, and restore economic balance across different regions. The business community, initially concerned about the change in government and in particular the rise of environmentalists, ultimately welcomed these guidelines in a pragmatic manner. For instance, Patrick Seguin, president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), confirmed: “We all support controlled and virtuous development” (quoted in Lherm, 2022).

1. 2. A new institutional framework

In this context, the position of the SSE was strengthened. Although it was already taken into account in public policies, it was suffering from a lack of coordination within the city and between the city and the metropolis. In Bordeaux, for example, responsibility for the SSE was divided between two delegations: that of Alexandra Siarri, the deputy for social and territorial cohesion, and that of Yohan David, the councillor responsible for employment. The SSE was therefore divided between the social competences of the City Hall (specifically, urban social development policies) and professional integration policies, which hindered its visibility. At the metropolitan level, co-management also resulted in the SSE being entrusted to a socialist vice-president: Christine Bost, the Mayor of Eysines, whose actions were dependent on Virginie Calmels, Alain Juppé’s first deputy at Bordeaux City Hall and vice-president of Bordeaux Métropole, responsible for economic attractiveness policies.

In the context of the 2014 law, the SSE has thus been the subject of a metropolitan policy, without, however, including the city of Bordeaux. In the absence of a coordinated policy, the

city has focused its efforts mainly on a call for projects for “social and territorial innovation” in line with urban policy, support for microcredit for the creation or maintenance of businesses and jobs (through the local social development fund), and the financing of a few structures for integration through economic activity (IAE, by its French acronym).

In 2016, Bordeaux Métropole adopted a three-year action plan to promote the development of the SSE, focusing on four areas: supporting innovative projects (through support mechanisms and investment aid), considering the SSE in common law (including business incubators and land), supporting cooperation, and providing access to public procurement. The plan also included the awarding of an “SSE favorite” prize, with an annual budget of just over € 400,000 for operating costs and € 200,000 for investment (Bordeaux Métropole, 2016). In 2018, the concept of social innovation appeared in the new name of the department: “Social Innovation, Employment, and Local Economy”, even though only 1.7 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions were dedicated to monitoring the SSE. An evaluation of the action plan emphasized the importance of supporting the ecosystem of assistance and socially innovative projects, which has had a leverage effect on the development of the SSE in the metropolitan area (*Pluricité* and *L’Autre Entreprise*, 2019).

This configuration changed as a result of the political change. In Bordeaux, Stéphane Pfeiffer, a former Génération.s representative who joined *Les Écologistes* after the 2022 presidential election, was appointed second deputy mayor, responsible for employment and the social and solidarity economy. He is assisted by Jean-Baptiste Thony, a city councillor responsible for the circular economy and local currency. Like many elected representatives in the social and solidarity economy (Jérôme, 2007), Stéphane Pfeiffer’s mandate builds on his long-standing commitment to the SSE. This commitment is evident in his creation of the cooperative *Solidarité Étudiante* during his time with the UNEF student union, as well as his roles at the General Confederation of Workers’ Cooperatives (CG SCOP, by its French acronym) and the Resource Center for Employer Groups (CRGE, by its French acronym). This new level of affiliation with the SSE reflects its priority status while clarifying its political focus, which has transferred to economic development in line with the logic of the SSE law (Chabanet and Richez-Battesti, 2021). The economy is not solely the responsibility of the municipal level; it is shared between three deputies. The other two deal with commerce and supporting economic change, respectively. The latter is particularly involved in promoting corporate social responsibility, which has been fully integrated into metropolitan economic policy in order to accelerate the economy’s ecological transition. This represents a shift in focus from attractiveness to transitions.

In Bordeaux Métropole, the SSE is a continuation of the previous mandate, but it benefits from stronger political support with the end of the historic co-management between the right and the left, replaced by a union of the left led by the Socialists. The vice-presidency has been entrusted to Alain Garnier, the Green Party mayor of Artigues-près-Bordeaux, who is also responsible for the local economy. He works closely with the deputy mayor of Bordeaux, as both elected officials belong to the same political group and rely on the same department, which is shared between the city and the metropolitan area. The department has been renamed “Social and Solidarity Economy and Employment.” It has been reinforced with one full-time

equivalent (FTE), while its head of department has been promoted to deputy director of economic development, enabling her to manage four new FTEs, three of which are dedicated to social innovation, the circular economy, and transitions, with the fourth being more traditionally focused on innovation.

1. 3. The SSE: a new priority for public action

SSE policy benefits from this new institutional framework, which is supported by a new alignment between the city and the metropolitan area. Accounting for 14 % of private employment in Bordeaux Métropole (CRESS N-A, 2021), the SSE is presented in both the city's SSE roadmap and the Metropolitan Economic Development Plan as a “driver of transition” and is therefore encouraged to “scale up”. The SSE is thus strongly legitimized within institutions and more broadly across the region. It has been fully integrated into common law, as evidenced by the metropolitan support plan for the local economy, adopted in March 2021 in response to the Covid-19 crisis. The Regional Chamber of the SSE (CRESS, by its French acronym) was involved in the implementation of this plan on an equal footing with the CCI and the Chamber of Trades and Crafts (CMA, by its French acronym).

The city and metropolitan area have ambitious SSE policies, even though these were not developed collaboratively due to limited consultations during the health crisis, when social distancing was required (Fraisie, 2017). Bordeaux was the first city to adopt an SSE roadmap in June 2021 (Bordeaux, 2021b). This policy document outlines the framework for SSE policy, which is being refined through ongoing deliberations. It contrasts an economy that serves the needs of residents with policies designed to attract new ones. Stéphane Pfeiffer and Sébastien Chaillou-Gillette further elaborated on this concept in an essay published a year later: “Together, we are inventing new ways of acting collectively in our neighborhoods, cities and territories.” The two men met through youth movements, and Chaillou-Gillette went on to become director of CRESS Île-de-France. For them, the priority is to “reclaim the economic citizenship” (Chaillou-Gillette and Pfeiffer, 2022).

This new public policy has an operating budget of nearly € 400,000. Depending on the projects, investment budgets may be added, such as the purchase of the premises of a cultural third space, *La Chiffonne Rit*, for approximately € 1 million in 2022, following threats to its future after the owner put it up for sale. Although the city doesn't provide economic aid, a responsibility of the metropolitan authority, it must nevertheless mobilize new instruments, such as public-SSE partnerships, access to land and public procurement. However, it is also playing a leading role in developing SSE policies in the region thanks to the mayor's direct political support. Pierre Hurmic is calling for “the SSE-ization of the economy”, meaning that the SSE should become the norm (Hurmic, 2021).

This is also reflected in the desire to break down the barriers between public policies. In the community life department, for example, this can be seen through the creation of a community life center and an incubator for youth associations. In the culture department, this can be seen in the creation of a cultural resource center that collects materials from artistic or cultural

venues or events for reuse in new initiatives. In the childhood department, it can be seen in the introduction of “reasonable benefit clauses” into public service delegations for nursery allocation, encouraging SSE structures to respond. Thus, sectoral policies are directly affected by the SSE, modifying their reference frameworks.

In July 2022, the metropolitan area adopted its action plan dedicated to the SSE (Bordeaux Métropole, 2022b). The plan incorporates the SSE into the transition framework, emphasizing low-tech approaches, the circular economy, and ecological transition. A study report on these approaches was published by the SSE Lab in partnership with the city and the Métropole (*Labo de l’ESS*, 2022). The action plan identifies three key areas: developing four priority sectors (zero-carbon logistics, the circular economy, eco-construction and housing, and the local economy), strengthening support for SSE development, and supporting public SSE actors. Funding has increased to over € 900,000 for operating costs and almost € 2 million for investment by 2025. This will be divided between direct real estate investment aid and equity strengthening tools, which are currently being implemented in the form of financing and participation funds in collective interest cooperatives (SCIC, by their French acronym).

2. Economic policy in a different way:

2. 1. New public policy instruments

This new framework introduces important innovations that have already been adopted in public policy instruments (Halpern, Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2014). The first change is the emergence of public-SSE partnerships, which take at least three forms. To start with, local authorities are leveraging SCICs. For example, in 2016 the Rennes metropolitan area adopted an intervention framework to become a member of SCICs, and in 2021 the city of Bordeaux followed suit (Bordeaux, 2021c). This has already led to capital investments in car sharing (Citiz) and renewable energy distribution (Enercoop).

These public-SSE partnerships then involve the implementation of a regional employment guarantee, through Bordeaux’s authorization to participate in the national “Zero Long-Term Unemployment Territories” (TZCLD, by its French acronym) experiment for the priority district of the Grand-Parc city policy. The City chairs a Local Employment Committee (CLE, by its French acronym), which brings together SSE actors, in particular solidarity associations and work integration social enterprises. In addition to the creation of one or more Employment-Focused Enterprises (EBE, by its French acronym) responsible for providing work to unemployed people, this experiment heralds a new form of local governance for employment policy. Similar regional dynamics can be found in regional economic cooperation clusters (PTCE, by their French acronym). Two PTCE in Bordeaux were selected in the national call for initiatives: the emerging *Īkos* project, which is developing a solidarity-based “reuse village” project bringing together several actors from the social and solidarity economy to collaborate on production, sales, education, and research activities; and *Fabrique Pola*, which offers artistic and cultural facilities and collaborations.

Finally, Bordeaux has joined *La Gemme*'s complementary local currency (MLC, by its French acronym) association, following in the footsteps of the eco-friendly town of Bègles. The economic aid paid out during the health crisis raised the issue of its impact, or expenditure, on the region. Recognized in the 2014 law, MLCs must be issued and managed by social and solidarity economy organizations whose sole purpose is to do so. Their success, as demonstrated by the Eusko in the Basque Country (Pinos, 2020), largely depends on the commitment of local authorities. *Gemme* membership, priced at € 13,000 (pro-rated according to population size), enables local authorities to participate in governance via a council of local authorities, while also providing financial support for the project to expand, which includes digitizing the currency, professionalizing the association and utilizing the currency in municipal services. Several municipal officials now receive part of their allowances in Gemmes, and the first European local currency meetings are scheduled to take place in Bordeaux in the fall of 2025.

Private-SSE partnerships are also encouraged. Bordeaux Métropole is supporting a trial of the “*ESS Tech*” program, which involves the ATIS, La Ruche and Bordeaux Technowest incubators, and aims to combine social and technological innovation (Bordeaux Métropole, 2022c). Eight projects have received support to promote cooperation between the SSE and tech, the development of SSE and social innovation initiatives within tech structures, and the acceleration of SSE structure development, commercial strategy and financing. The Métropole also encourages partnerships between the SSE and the craft sector, as demonstrated by its support for collaborative initiatives between CRESS Nouvelle-Aquitaine and the Chamber of Trades and Crafts. This has resulted in the publication of a comprehensive overview on the subject (CRESS, 2023).

In addition to supporting SSE ecosystems, such as CRESS, ATIS, and France Active, which were established under the previous mandate, Bordeaux Métropole aims to strengthen support for development and investment in priority sectors, including the circular economy, eco-construction, cycle logistics, and the local economy. The city of Bordeaux has launched several calls for expressions of interest (AMIs) to promote employment, the circular economy, and collaboration among SSE stakeholders (Bordeaux, 2021d). In 2023, it transformed these into a participatory program, “*Financez demain*” (Finance Tomorrow), which, on the one hand, supplements the subsidies granted by the City with crowdfunding via the “*J’adopte un projet*” (I Adopt a Project) platform and, on the other hand, adds funding from the Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region or the Up Group for certain projects.

Above all, both the city and Bordeaux Métropole are making greater use of public procurement as a lever. When renewing the scheme for promoting socially and environmentally responsible purchasing (SPASER, by its French acronym) in 2021, the city and the metropolitan area prioritized support for the SSE and the development of social clauses. These clauses had already been implemented for the IAE, but were increased and extended to new audiences, including people with disabilities (Bordeaux, 2021a). A report by the Nouvelle-Aquitaine Regional Chamber of Accounts indicates a substantial rise in payments to the SSE via public procurement between 2020 and 2023, increasing from € 4.6 million to € 8.5 million (CRCNA, 2025).

The city and Bordeaux Métropole are also concerned about access to land, which is under considerable pressure. They have mainly supported large-scale projects. For instance, they have backed the *Īkos* circular economy project, which plans to create 300 jobs, half of which will be in integration, as well as the renovation of the third space *Le Garage moderne* and the PTCE *La Fabrique Pola*. However, in a tense financial context due to budget cuts imposed by the State on local authorities, the metropolitan area has withdrawn its support for the project to create a solidarity-based real estate company led by ATIS that intended to acquire, manage, and rent offices and business premises for the social and solidarity economy.

Bordeaux has opened ManuCo, a business center dedicated to the SSE in the city center, which houses several SSE structures. Marie Curry, a company that helps refugee and immigrant women enter the workforce, provides café and restaurant services. There is also an events and space rental center. Plans are in place to create a fab lab, or digital workshop, for artisans. Premises can be also made available, as in the case of the “*Maison des livreurs*” (Delivery Workers’ House), which was created in partnership with the cooperative *Coursiers Bordelais*, is now managed by the NGO *Médecins du Monde* and provides bicycle delivery workers with a place to rest and access to hygiene and rights.

Bordeaux Métropole has also experimented with temporary urban planning by making a former school in Artigues-près-Bordeaux available to nearly a dozen social and solidarity economy actors involved in the ecological transition (resource recovery, recycling, textile upcycling, food gardens, energy performance, etc.).

2.2. Coordination of local policies

This policy is part of a local ecosystem that is particularly favorable to the SSE. In 2014, the department adopted a white paper on the social and solidarity economy in Gironde. It appointed a project director attached to the regional development department, whose main responsibility was to support and develop mutualization and cooperation between stakeholders, in addition to raising awareness of the SSE both internally and externally. In 2021, the department appointed Sophie Piquemal as vice president in charge of social emergencies, housing, integration, and the SSE. The department’s president, Jean-Luc Gleyze, known for his basic income experiment, even made social innovation a hallmark of his first term (2015-2021), after co-authoring the white paper as vice president of solidarity-based economic development. He has also equipped himself with a tool for political influence and communication in the form of the *Solutions Solidaires* think tank, which brings together departments, SSE stakeholders, alternative media outlets, and the Jean-Jaurès Foundation in the pursuit of social innovation, even though a rotating presidency between departments has been organized since 2024.

The Nouvelle-Aquitaine region has been committed to the SSE since 2004, when the former regions began appointing SSE delegations. This followed the creation of a State Secretariat for the Social Economy by the left-wing coalition government in 2000. The SSE has its own department comprising nearly twenty staff members, and a regional strategy based on four ar-

eas (support for the creation of SSE enterprises, the structuring of appropriate financial tools, support for cooperation, and recognition of social innovation) has been integrated into the SRDE2I since 2016. In 2021, the region appointed Maud Caruhel as Vice President responsible for the SSE, integration, the circular economy and waste management.

It was in this context, even before the departmental and regional assemblies had been renewed, that an agreement on the SSE was signed in spring 2021. Unique in France, it extends the already established agreement between the Region and the Department to include the city of Bordeaux and Bordeaux Métropole (Bordeaux et al., 2021). Four levels of local government are thus involved in coordinating their public policy. The SSE is already approached from a multisectoral perspective and is now also being addressed from a multiscale perspective.

Once again, the pandemic is highlighted as the basis for the agreement: “The health crisis we are experiencing and its impact on the economy reinforce the need to support the social and solidarity economy, which offers a new economic, social, democratic, and ecological model for businesses and residents, serving the regions.” Six main areas of focus have been defined: supporting the assistance and financing ecosystem, providing direct support to SSE and social innovation structures, improving access to land, supporting collective dynamics, developing responsible purchasing, and promoting momentum and awareness of the SSE and social innovation.

After a year in existence, a new form of “territorial governance” for the SSE has been implemented, revising “the institutional arrangements for decision-making on the mode of territorial development through [...] the production of public policies” (Demoustier and Richez-Battesti, 2010). Although the agreement is still in its infancy, it has already paved the way for the transfer of the General Secretariat of the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF) from Seoul to Bordeaux, following a joint application and co-financing by the four institutions.

In addition to merging their respective roadmaps, it encourages the collaborative management of significant projects, such as the *Ikos* initiative and the renovation of the *Garage Moderne*. For the former, which has an estimated real estate program of over € 18 million, local authorities are being asked to provide investment aid or loan guarantees. The latter involves the expansion, renovation and upgrading of a third space located in a hangar that became the property of the city of Bordeaux in 2010. Through its association of 14 employees and 300 active volunteers, the *Garage Moderne* offers repair workshops (for cars and bicycles), artistic creation workshops, cultural programming, community catering, workspaces, spaces for expression (for seven resident artists), solidarity initiatives (such as food aid) and resource spaces (such as a resource center and a tool library). It is estimated that the program will cost € 6.7 million, with funding coming from the city of Bordeaux, Bordeaux Métropole and the Region.

Other actions are also being taken, such as the regional socially and environmentally responsible purchasing program (PRASER), which Grand Poitiers has also joined. Led by

CRESS Nouvelle-Aquitaine, this program offers guidance, sourcing support, the organization of industry meetings, assistance with responding to public procurement tenders as a group, and awareness-raising events.

2.3. An international coalition for the cause

The city of Seoul was behind the creation of the GSEF in 2013. The cooperative sector emerged alongside the city's growth in the 1960s, and the social economy developed during the 1980s and 1990s. These developments were driven by the social movements that marked South Korea's transition to democracy. Against this backdrop, Park Won-soon, a human rights lawyer and social entrepreneur, became mayor of Seoul in 2011. A strong advocate for the development of the social economy ecosystem, he created the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF) in close collaboration with representatives of local and regional governments from several countries, as well as with SSE networks (e.g., the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* in Quebec) and research communities (the Karl Polanyi Institute, Concordia University in Montreal). It is a global social economy network based on public-civil society partnerships (UNRISD, 2018). With 86 members from 37 countries on five continents, including 32 local governments, 38 SSE networks, and civil society organizations, the GSEF's missions include training, knowledge exchange, research, network facilitation, and advocacy. It is best known for organizing a biennial Global Forum that brings together between 2,000 and 3,000 participants from around the world.

Following Mayor Park Won-soon's death the previous year, a political shift in favor of conservatives in 2021 led to the departure of the GSEF. The ties maintained by its secretary general, Laurence Kwark, with France, where she had studied, were decisive in determining the organization's new location. Although Bordeaux had recently lost out to Dijon in the bid to host the headquarters of the International Organization of Vine and Wine (OIV, by its French acronym), which was previously based in Paris (Sota, 2021), the city viewed the transfer of the GSEF as an opportunity to regain its position on the international stage. Taking on the GSEF project meant that the collective of local authorities faced two challenges: on the one hand, the co-financing the GSEF, as membership fees do not cover operating costs; and on the other hand, its new governance structure, which only allowed one local authority to be involved in the presidency, rather than four.

Funding of € 260,000 per year, shared between the four institutions, was secured, and the governance structure was finalized at the GSEF General Assembly on 5 October 2021. The Assembly also approved the transfer of the headquarters. The city of Bordeaux took over the GSEF presidency, exercising it in accordance with the statutes alongside CRESS Nouvelle-Aquitaine by delegation from SSE France. Since the GSEF is organized by continent, the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region assumed the co-presidency for Europe. This position became even more strategic following the European Commission's December 2021 announcement of an action plan in favor of the social economy. The Metropolis and the Department sit on the GSEF steering committee as deputies for the City and the Region, respectively. The establishment of the French association resulted in the closure of the Seoul headquarters and

the appointment of a new secretary general: Aude Saldana, who comes from the humanitarian sector and was previously the Aquitaine regional coordinator for *Médecins du Monde*.

By hosting the GSEF, the city of Bordeaux is able to present itself as the “world capital of the social and solidarity economy” (Ruiz, 2022). Alongside other institutions, Bordeaux has equipped itself with a tool for influence and political communication, enabling it to assert its position on transitions and propose a new economic narrative. By chairing the “economic transitions” commission of the International Association of French-Speaking Mayors, the city has strengthened its ties with Africa, as demonstrated by its organization of the World Forum in Dakar in May 2023. This represents a comeback after losing the 2021 Africa-France summit, which was initially planned for Bordeaux but ultimately held in Montpellier (Mayer, 2020). Bordeaux also chairs the SSE commission of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) through the GSEF.

Bordeaux’s involvement in the GSEF also marks a turning point in the international recognition of the SSE, accelerated by the Covid-19 crisis (UNTFSSSE, 2020b). In June 2021, the 110th International Labor Conference adopted a resolution and conclusions on decent work and the SSE. Meanwhile, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) adopted a recommendation in favor of the SSE and social innovation. Through its presidency of the GSEF, Bordeaux finds itself at the heart of an advocacy coalition (Sabatier, 1998), bringing together public actors (international institutions, states and local authorities) and civil society actors (SSE networks, researchers) who share a common framework for collective action to guide public policy.

The advocacy function has been pooled through the creation of an International SSE Coalition, with a rotating secretariat. Its members include the International SSE Forum, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies (AIM, by its French acronym), the International Cooperative and Mutual Insurance Federation (ICMIF), and the GSEF. This led the Mayor of Bordeaux to speak at the European Social Economy Summit in Strasbourg on May 6, 2021, and at the “side event” launching the resolution process on the role of the SSE in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations headquarters in New York, at the invitation of the Spanish government, which led to the adoption of a General Assembly resolution on April 18, 2023, on “Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development” (UN, 2023).

At the crossroads of local governments and civil society organizations, the GSEF plays a key role in the process of disseminating the SSE internationally through its continental policy dialogues, as well as its research programs, capacity building, and support for networking and public policy development. The city of Bordeaux is now preparing to organize the World SSE Forum, which it is due to host in the fall of 2025 on the theme of “just transition.”

Conclusion

The political change has prompted a shift in public policy in Bordeaux. A new framework is needed for the city in transition, one that gives local experiments a key role in institutional change (Germain, 2022). While this shift represents a break with Bordeaux's past, it can also be analyzed as an alignment with the global framework. Thus, territorial well-being has replaced growth as the objective, and transitions and cooperation have replaced territorial attractiveness and competition, favoring the SSE.

No longer understood solely in its response to unmet needs, the SSE is now recognized for its transformative potential through social development and integration policies. Fully integrated into economic policies, the SSE policy aims to develop sectors, create new businesses, and scale up. New instruments are being put in place, notably to co-produce public action with socio-economic actors (Vaillancourt, 2015), of which the capital investments in SCICs are a perfect illustration, but also to better regulate the economy by providing access to land or activating public procurement as a lever for local development. However, while attractiveness implies "*laissez-faire*" market practices, transitions require cooperative public management (Emerson et al., 2012).

Like the territory, the rise of the SSE is a sign of a rethink of the sectoral approach to public action. Characterized by processes of cooperation and citizen participation, the SSE affects all areas of human activity and contributes to the restructuring of public action. This is evident in the emergence of new areas of public action, such as the circular economy and food resilience.

While the cross-cutting nature of SSE policies may have hindered their development in the past, it is now a lever for transforming public action.

This local civic space is far from being inward-looking; it reflects "local/global public action" (Faure and Muller, 2016). Multi-stakeholder and multi-scale interactions result in strong scale overlap. An example of this can be seen at the local level when the four levels of government agree to coordinate their SSE policies. The same applies to the state when the city of Bordeaux is authorized to conduct the national zero-long-term unemployment experiment or supports the *Ikos* project, or when it responds to the national permanent AMI on territorial economic cooperation clusters (PTCE, by their French acronym). This phenomenon is particularly evident in the commitment of communities within the GSEF to disseminate the SSE on a global scale.

Finally, the sharing the narrative is crucial; discourse matters. In his speech at the UN, Pierre Hurmic drew a connection between the fires ravaging 20,000 hectares of the Gironde region, global warming and the necessity of creating a new development model based on SSE. He declared: "Our house is burning, and we must stop looking elsewhere [...] We must change direction and course to lead the ecological and social transformation of our economy. The SSE must become the standard that will regulate the economy of tomorrow" (Hurmic, 2022). This narrative of the common good links the multisectoral framework of the SSE to the global framework of the SDGs and has a performative dimension (Fontaine and Hassenteufel, 2002). Once understood by social housing landlords, real estate developers, planners, investors, busi-

nesses and so on, it will produce effects on socio-economic actors regardless of the decisions taken.

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ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

Founded in 2013 in Seoul, the GSEF – Global Forum for Social and Solidarity Economy – is a global organization of local governments and civil society actors committed to promoting and developing the social and solidarity economy. Its 90 members, present in 35 countries, represent the diversity of SSE stakeholders: local governments, networks of actors, associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, universities, etc. The GSEF supports the development of the SSE around the world by promoting dialogue between public authorities and SSE actors in order to jointly develop local public policies that contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the emergence of ecosystems conducive to the SSE.

The GSEF thematic working groups (WGs) were voted on at the General Assembly on May 5, 2023. The WG on “The Impact of SSE Public Policies on the Achievement of the SDGs” brings together some fifteen researchers from all continents. It is led by Marguerite Mendell (Karl Polanyi Institute) and Timothée Duverger (Chair Terr’ESS, Sciences Po Bordeaux) and supported by the GSEF General Secretariat employee working on his CIFRE thesis.

Following on from research already conducted by the GSEF in partnership with UNRISD, which led to the production of guidelines for local SSE policies, in January 2024 the Research WG launched a call for contributions to gather proposals for working papers focusing on three recurring processes in public action: development, implementation, and evaluation. Through the analysis of these processes of SSE public policy development, the authors of the papers (both researchers and SSE actors) were asked to examine two fundamental dimensions: the contribution of these local policies to the achievement of sustainable development goals, and the paradoxes associated with the institutionalization of the SSE.

A reading committee composed of GT members evaluated more than forty proposals, including the seventeen working papers now published under the title *Local SSE Policies enabling the Socio-Ecological Transition*. Each paper is available on the GSEF website, free of charge, in its original language (English, French, or Spanish) and in English. This publication and the English translations were made possible thanks to financial support from Caisse des Dépôts.

The concrete examples provided by these working papers will feed into programs to strengthen the capacities of local authorities and support the development of public policies favorable to the SSE.



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