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Transmuting solidarity: hybrid-economic practices in the social economy in Greece

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the consequences of fusing market-based and social principles for how ‘the social’ and solidarity is understood. To do so, I turn to the recently formalized ‘Social and Solidarity Economy’ (SSE) in Greece. I conceptualize the SSE as a governmental mode of power that attempts to render social and market-based principles as commensurate. I claim this occurs through the codification and proliferation of what we may call ‘hybrid-economic practices’ – such as social impact measurement, and social innovation. Hybrid-economic practices fuse a utilitarian, efficiency-maximizing logic that weighs costs and benefits, with narratives of solidarity and collective social purpose. Based on a qualitative analysis of the SSE law in Greece and interviews with practitioners and policy-makers, I claim that fusing market-based and social principles come at the cost of depleting the political and ethical components of solidarity and ‘the social.’ Yet, rather than depoliticizing them, I argue hybrid-economic practices more appropriately transmute how solidarity and ‘the social’ is understood through three mutually constitutive processes: economization, entrepreneurialization, and communitarianization.

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Introduction

Against the backdrop of austerity, COVID-19 and the crisis of the welfare state, policymakers have viewed the social and solidarity economy (SSE) as a key sector for tackling the impacts of these crises on economy and society. This is because SSE organizations are assumed to contribute to crisis recovery by delivering social needs provision, while also taking on a pioneering role in developing inclusive and sustainable economic models (Borzaga and Tallarini 2021). Indeed, literature on this sector can be broadly divided into two strands. On the one hand, market-based approaches have argued that combining social needs provision with an ‘economic style of reasoning’ (Berman and Popp 2022) and socially ‘responsible’ enterprising activities can alleviate market failures and generate growth (Beaton and Kennedy 2021). Anti-capitalist research, on the other hand, advocates that the SSE can disrupt and radically transform state-market-subject relations altogether (Malamidis 2020), thus breaking with the reproduction of the socio-economic status quo that makes alleviative measures necessary in the first place (Marques 2014).
The empirical reality of SSE policy and practice, however, often incorporates both alleviative and transformative elements, which scholars claim may be reconciled (Johanisova, Crabtree, and Franková 2013). Indeed, both alleviative and transformative strands tend to valorize what we may refer to as hybrid-economic practices, such as ‘social impact measurement,’ ‘social innovation,’ or ‘social profit’ (Amanatidou, Tzekou, and Gritzas 2021; Arampatzi 2022; Dash 2016). Hybrid-economic practices attempt to pacify the distributive rationalities of market-based and social principles (Palacios 2021), by fusing a utilitarian, efficiency-maximizing logic that weighs costs and benefits, with narratives of solidarity and collective social purpose. In so doing, they conceal the contradictions of aspiring to social equality by incorporating market-based methods, the latter of which are, by definition, based on inequality. The valorization of hybrid-economic practices is often grounded in the claim that they address social problems in an inclusive, collaborative, efficient and effective way (Castro-Arce and Vanclay 2020).

Critics have challenged the use of market-based principles to address social issues, pointing to how they reproduce neoliberal rationalities (Davies 2014; Montgomery 2016). Recent works have conceptualized how this reproduction is expressed in a ‘neoliberalizing social’ (Clarke and Parsell 2022), and more ‘calculative’ (Lynch and Kalaitzake 2020) or ‘depoliticized’ (Lee and Cheol 2020) forms of solidarity. Similarly, cultural economy accounts have drawn from zombie (Peck 2010) or mutant (Callison and Manfredi 2020) metaphors to highlight the parasitical ways in which neoliberalism encroaches upon competing principles, and render meaningful ‘the reproduction, transformation, and continual reconstitution of neoliberalism’ in the past decades (Theodore, Peck, and Brenner 2011, 24).

While these thoughtful studies point to the transmutations of neoliberalism, less attention has been paid to the transmutations afflicted by neoliberalism. In other words, what remains understudied is that the interplay between alleviative and transformative elements in hybrid-economic practices neither fully reproduces neoliberal rationalities, nor does it entirely overcome them. This article addresses this gap, by mobilizing transmutation as a metaphor for capturing the trade-offs and unintended consequences of fusing market-based and social principles in the space between reproduction and transformation. Here, the attempted cooptation of social principles by neoliberal rationalities unwittingly produces novel understandings relating to ‘the social’ and solidarity.

To develop this argument, this article explores the consequences of hybrid-economic practices for how ‘the social’ and solidarity is understood in the SSE in Greece. In its Durkheimian conception (Durkheim 1960), solidarity in modernity signifies not a mode of compulsion and societal obligation (mechanical solidarity), as much as a reflexive act of mutual empathy grounded in the complementary differences and interdependencies created by the division of labor (organic solidarity). Solidarity here is a fait social that is less the result of instrumental considerations, than an affectively charged reciprocity based on an a priori ‘common morality’ (Durkheim 1960, 386) that transcends the individual conscience. More contemporary theorizations attend to the relationship between crisis and solidarity, where the latter signifies a ‘segmentary’ (Papataxiarchis 2016) and ‘antidotal’ (Rakopoulos 2016) response to the former. In austerity Greece, solidarity has been a mode of necessity for navigating the precarizing consequences of neoliberal reforms in the near absence of state-based forms of care and welfare, yet the experience of solidarity also gave rise to congeal into the emergence of meaningful guidelines as (politicized) subjectivity (Soudias 2023). Similarly, Rakopoulos (2016, 143) shows that solidarity has been understood as an imagined community of equals ‘wherein mutual aid emerges as at once a material concern and a cosmological bond.’ Here, solidarity is a bridge between sociality and subjectivity, yet it is precisely during crises that tensions arise as to the (taboo of the) gift, reciprocity, and affectivities associated with ideas of the receiving and providing of solidarity.

I argue that the SSE in Greece is an analytically insightful case to investigate the transmutation of such understandings of solidarity, as it signifies the conjuncture between a top-down institutionalization of market-based principles, and a bottom-up experimentation with solidarity in times of extreme austerity. Formalized under law 4430/2016 by the then recently-elected left-wing SYRIZA
government, the SSE sector is the partial result of SYRIZA’s electoral pledge to support the anti-austerity mobilizations and the subsequent solidarity movement in Greece, both of which championed solidarity practices as a radical alternative to the neoliberalization of state-market-subject relations. At the same time, the making of the SSE law coincided with ongoing efforts by the European Commission to harmonize social enterprise legislation and procurement procedures in line with the EU’s market-oriented requirements and definitions (Lipton 2021).

I claim that in order to negotiate and pacify these competing developments, the SYRIZA government effectively institutionalized the SSE as a mode of power that attempts to render social principles ‘from below’ and market-based principles ‘from above’ as commensurate. My analysis will show that this commensuration transpired primarily through the legal codification and proliferation of hybrid-economic practices. Because hybrid-economic practices are marked by their immanent tension that ‘neither social nor market rationalities of valuing are hegemonic’ (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 333), they effectively transmute ‘the social’ and solidarity by way of three interrelated processes: economization, entrepreneurialization, and communitarianization. To render these processes empirical, this article builds on a qualitative analysis (Webley 2010) of law 4430/2016 and its explanatory memorandum, and in-depth interviews with 16 SSE actors who have been recruited through snowballing methods. The task here is neither about showing whether hybrid-economic practices are ‘truly’ about solidarity, nor is it about whether comparing and fusing social and market-based principles is meaningful (see Raz 1986). Rather, it is about making visible the uncontested assumptions upon which the acceptance of hybrid-economic practices rest, and how these transmute understandings of ‘the social’ and solidarity.

To do so, this article is structured as follows: First, I discuss the literature on SSE practices in conjunction with the sociological study of commensuration. This allows for conceptualizing the SSE as a mode of rendering social and market-based principles commensurate. Second, I showcase the political and epistemological tensions that emerge empirically from commensuration. By scrutinizing the context of the SSE law 4430/2016 in Greece under SYRIZA, I explore the conflicts of trying to commensurate EC-requirements ‘from above’ and solidarity actor expectations ‘from below’, whether the SSE should be an alternative economic model or an active labor market policy, and the consequences of scarce funding for the sector. I argue the SSE law attempts to pacify these conflicts through the codification and proliferation of hybrid-economic practices. While the commensuration of competing goals and principles in the law serves to negotiate contradictions, I claim they also condition the possibility for the transmutation of understandings of the social and solidarity. My claim is grounded in the assumption of governmentality studies that the law structures the potential field of action of others (Foucault, as quoted in Dardot and Laval 2017, 169). Third, I show how hybrid-economic practices economize, entrepreneurialize, and communitarianize the ‘social’ and solidarity, by building on the pragmatist assumption that meaning is best traced in practices and their conceivable consequences (Cherryholmes 1994). I will show that economization is a process of depleting solidarity and ‘the social’ of its ethical and political components to commensurable indicators of utility-maximization. On this basis, entrepreneurialization exploits the fact that these components are depleted, to (socially) innovate services and products in the name of solidarity. In other words, entrepreneurialization capitalizes on and brands the affective appeal of solidarity and the social, precisely because these are now devoid of their ethical and political components. While scholars point to the depoliticizing consequences of such processes (Clarke and Parsell 2022), what we arguably observe in the SSE is not a depoliticization, as much as a communitarianization of solidarity. Here, there are no a priori political or ethical principles defining solidarity and ‘the social.’ Rather, the SSE community defines them: the ethical and political qualities of solidarity are radically contingent upon the practices and beliefs of the members of the SSE community, rather than ontological and universally applicable to all people. In effect, communitarianized solidarity is informed by the indexical nature of market signals that shape what counts as solidarity, and who is deserving of it. In this sense, hybrid-economic practices do not fully coopt or destroy solidarity and ‘the social,’ as much as they radically redefine them.
The SSE between market-based alleviation and social transformation

Referring to a wide organizational array of enterprises, cooperatives, associations, mutuals, foundations, and paritarian institutions of social needs provision, SSE organizations are assumed to prioritize socio-ecological purposes and collective interest over capital accumulation (Mook et al. 2015).

On the one hand, the fields of economics, business, management and entrepreneurship studies have shed light on the ways in which ‘socially responsible’ organizations can alleviate market inequalities. Here, entrepreneurial forms of organization are assumed to facilitate the production and distribution of ‘socially useful’ and ‘ethical’ goods and services (Sepulveda 2015), while also boosting growth-based economic development (Cooney and Williams Shanks 2010). Subsumed under the popularized mantra of ‘doing well by doing good,’ these approaches draw from market-based principles of intervention and valuation to correct issues ranging from health (Amini, Arasti, and Bagheri 2018), to work integration (Battilana et al. 2015) and poverty (Zaeefarian, Tassavori, and Ghauri 2015). Overall, these alleviative approaches assume the need to ‘invest’ in individuals to find gainful employment, govern themselves more resiliently in uncertainty and ‘prepare’ for future risks, rather than merely ‘react’ to crises.

On the other hand, anti-capitalist conceptualizations pay attention to how the SSE can radically transform the neoliberal status quo. As austerity diminishes the quality and reach of social needs provision, this strand of literature attends to how the SSE can create socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable post-capitalist futures, e.g. via reconnecting producers and consumers (Rakopoulos 2016), alternative currencies (Dini and Kioupkiolis 2019), commonsing practices (Arampatzi 2022), and anti-capitalist value practices (Daskalaki, Potaki, and Sotiropoulou 2019), amongst others. Here, the ‘alterity’ (Amin, Cameron, and Hudson 2003) of the SSE is grounded in non-coercive ideas about self-organization, and labor practices based on solidarity, cooperation, social inclusion, and direct democratic control of their organization (Bauwens and Mertens 2017). In a word, these transformative approaches advocate for a radical break with current forms of economy-making in favor of solidarity and collectivity, rather than competition and individualism.

At the same time, studies show that the realities of SSE policy and practice are often diverse (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016), incorporating both alleviative and transformative elements (Cieslik 2018) that some scholars claim may be reconciled (Johanisova, Crabtree, and Franková 2013). This is indicated by the varying conceptualizations of ‘third sector,’ ‘social economy,’ or ‘solidarity economy,’ and fusions of the two major ‘francophone’ and ‘anglo-saxon’ traditions (Moulaert and Aileen 2005). These realities brought forth what we may call hybrid-economic practices, such as ‘social impact measurement,’ ‘social innovation,’ or ‘social profit’ (Amanatidou, Tzekou, and Gritzas 2021; Arampatzio 2022; Dash 2016) and are manifested in the valorization of the figure of the ‘social entrepreneur’ (Dey and Steyaert 2012). Albeit in different ways, both alleviative and transformative strands attend to the socially innovative potential of entrepreneurial creation (Kokkinidis 2015) and the ‘visionary’ role of social entrepreneurs, because of their capacity to envision and enact creative solutions to complex and persistent social problems (Waddock and Steckler 2016).

While social entrepreneurship has successfully become a grand narrative of ‘harmonious social change’ that promises quasi-universal solutions to social problems (Dey and Steyaert 2010), critics challenge the use of market-based principles to address social issues, by demonstrating the repercussions for democratic accountability and public interest (Spicer, Kay, and Ganz 2019), as well as the erosion of boundaries between the market and collective welfare provision (Garrow and Hasenfeld 2014). This points to the fact that hybrid-economic practices partly reproduce, rather than overcome, neoliberal rationalities. In the words of Glynos and Voutyras (2022, 580), ‘for all the good intentions and results’ produced by those who employ market-based principles to address social issues, ‘they are complicit in reinforcing problematic neoliberal tendencies.’ Yet, because hybrid-economic practices operate in the space between alleviation and transformation, they neither fully reproduce neoliberal rationalities, nor do they entirely overcome them. This indicates
the conflicts between the disparate logics that guide market-based ideas about competition, and social ideas about solidarity, the consequences of which remain understudied in SSE literature.

To address this gap, I suggest turning to the sociological study of commensuration. This allows for framing the social and solidarity economy as a mode of power that attempts to render market-based principles and social principles as comparable. Commensuration studies has attended to how different, and oftentimes competing values have been rendered comparable (Berman, Popp, and Hirschman 2018; Espeland and Stevens 1998; Mennicken and Espeland 2019). By aggregating aspects of social phenomena in (quasi-)numerical terms, and then evaluating them in accordance with a constructed common evaluative logic or metric, commensuration is a way of negotiating the inherent contradictions of disparate phenomena by reducing complexity and ambiguity. Examples range from the gross domestic product, to the UN’s Human Development Index, national competitiveness rankings, or social impact measurements, and include plenty of economic and non-economic data, which are often based on competing epistemological precepts. Commensuration therefore requires discarding certain aspects, particularly those that cannot be quantified: ‘Everyday experience, practical reasoning, and empathetic identification become increasingly irrelevant bases for judgment as context is stripped away and relationships become more abstractly represented by numbers’ (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 317). Commensuration is a key condition for the possibility of economic calculation and action (Mennicken and Espeland 2019). But because commensuration requires reducing and abstracting information, it is never precise and in fact changes the empirical world it allegedly seeks to capture and represent. Going further, cultural studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg (2010, 322) convincingly theorizes that commensuration is the very condition of possibility for colonizing social phenomena that otherwise would remain uncaptured by economic calculation.

First, commensuration is the articulation of a particular kind of relationality, always on top of already existing relations, an articulation of an articulation. Second, commensuration is not the production of value but the adequation of values; it is the condition of possibility of appropriation. And third, commensuration is not (necessarily) a matter of meaning ... It is more ... a matter of weighing, of measuring without necessarily being enumerated or quantified.

This points to the fact that instead of being ‘neutral’ representations of knowledge, processes of commensuration are inherently political modes of power that subject actors and structures to particular rationalities (Foucault 2008). Indeed, as Will Davies (2014) shows, the success of neoliberalism partly lies in how it mobilizes economic (esp. econometric) commensuration techniques to evaluate and coopt social issues in accordance with Benthamite modes of utility and efficiency-maximization. In the words of Elizabeth Popp Berman (2022, 10), this is not least because ‘rethinking competing values in the language of economics comes at the cost of some violence to the originals.’

What this violence entails precisely with regards to ‘the social’ and solidarity is that the consequences of hybrid-economic practices are not the mere reproduction of neoliberal rationalities through solidarity, as much as the transmutation of solidarity. In the context of its etymology, mutation’s Latin origins, mutatio, simply denote ‘change,’ however, cultural connotations of mutation often carry undesirable suggestions of ‘monster, ‘freak,’ and ‘mutant’ – notions of unwanted change (McLean 2019) that occur not through a conscious or biologistic process, but as emergent consequences that are difficult to anticipate and control (Haas and Olsson 2014). For gender studies scholar Nael Bhanji (2013), the prefix trans- does not just signify movement across or beyond a schism, but also evokes the disruption of established norms. Yet transmutations have also been signified as adaptive responses to dissonance (McLean 2019), such as the consequences of attempting to render competing values commensurate. In the context of this study, transmutation can therefore be signified as the quality of the unanticipated changes in understandings of solidarity and ‘the social’ emanating from fusing market-based and social principles.
The (making of the) social and solidarity economy in Greece as a process of commensuration

The making of the SSE sector in Greece ought to be seen within two conjunctural developments. On the one hand, when the financial crisis hit Greece, a large-scale anti-austerity movement took the country by storm from 2010 onward. This movement was demonstrating against the neoliberal reform agenda demanded by the troika of International Monetary Fund, European Commission, and European Central Bank, while prefiguring radically alternative political and socio-economic imaginaries. These were broadly based on such principles as collectivity, equality and mutual respect, self-governance and autonomy, self-organization, and solidarity. In the protest’s aftermath, the movement mushroomed into various initially informal solidarity spaces, ranging from collective kitchens and time banks, to anti-middlemen markets, exchange bazars and social clinics. Other initiatives institutionalized into legally recognized cooperative and social enterprises. The year 2013 alone witnessed a 219% increase of the total number of such enterprises to 2012, and the growth rate remained steadily above 20% until 2016. In 2019, there were around 1,148 legally recognized cooperative and social enterprises in existence in Greece (Varvarousis and Tsitsirigkos 2019). The majority of these organizations emerged after the financial crisis and did not develop ties with traditional SSE actors in Greece, namely agricultural cooperatives, as these were considered to be state-facilitated and heavily influenced by the politics of the country’s major political parties, particularly conservative New Democracy, and social democratic PASOK (Adam and Kavoulakos 2020). Instead, the politics of both informal solidarity initiatives and institutionalized social enterprises can be be broadly understood as a radical departure of the clientelistic politics of Greece’s party system prior to the ascent of SYRIZA, but also as antagonistic to the state en large, though to different degrees. When left-wing SYRIZA assumed power in the 2015 national elections, in part assumed to be a result of anti-austerity mobilizations (Karaliotas 2021), the party made good on their promise to support this movement, by further formalizing and institutionalizing the SSE under law 4430/2016, which superseded law 4019/2011 on ‘social economy and social entrepreneurship’ formulated by the social democratic PASOK government. That SYRIZA was politically committed to further institutionalizing and making visible the SSE needs to be seen against the fact that many of its party members were actively involved in the anti-austerity and solidarity movement and therefore had first-hand knowledge of both.

On the other hand, these developments overlapped with the ECs already ongoing objective to improve the legislative environment applicable to social enterprises within the EU, and aiming to foster the development of a more comprehensive approach in policy and legislation regarding social enterprises’ (Argyrou and Lambooy 2020, 58). As early as 2012, the EC and the Ministry of Labor under the previous PASOK government appointed a group of experts to develop a comprehensive strategy and action plan for a social economy ecosystem, resulting in the 2013 ‘Strategic Plan for the Development of Social Entrepreneurship.’ Against the backdrop of the unfolding crisis and the lack of welfare funding in Greece, the plan’s goal was to foster economic growth and strengthen social cohesion by combining ‘profitability with solidarity’ (Andreou et al. 2013, 3), which points to the market-based principles guiding this effort, and the devolution of previously state-held responsibilities onto the SSE.

The challenge for SYRIZA was to try and pacify both developments and reconcile their disparate types of expertise in the making of law 4430/2016. Indeed, in the words of a SYRIZA policy-maker involved in the legal process, the 2016 law ‘was a hybrid-model from the beginning’ (interview, March 2021). From the outset, the Ministry of Labor included multiple activist stakeholders in formal and informal consultations. In this vein, employees of the ministry traveled through the country to discuss solidarity conceptions and social economy goals with activists and small-scale SSE practitioners in various cities and rural regions. The goal was to further democratize the drafting of the law, and to include the visions and expectations of solidarity actors, who put solidarity and social well-being before economic profit (Adam and Kavoulakos 2020). Yet the making of
the law was also assisted by EC bodies such as the European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (GECES), the Directorates-General DG Growth, DG Finance, and DG REGI, in addition to the International Labor Organization; and drew its inspiration from Spanish cooperative law, and ‘social benefit’ ideas deriving from the French SSE tradition. Moreover, the EC approved funding ‘technical support for the development of social and solidarity economy’ in 2016 under the Structural Reform Support Programme, provided by the British Council to the Greek Ministry of Labor (EC2020). This multiplicity of stakeholders allowed both activist knowledges ‘from below,’ and expert knowledges ‘from above’ to contribute to the making of the law. As one policy-maker involved in this process remarks:

We wanted to do something that is an umbrella, that will re-interpret what ‘third sector’ means in the country. We want it to be as inclusive as possible … we also want groups that do not work [in an] institutionalized [manner] … — which creates various problems to their progress — to stand on their own feet, to take decisions … We want to welcome these groups too, and potentially for them to have a field in which they can institutionalize their actions. … Of course, we wanted to include moneyless structures. So we wanted it to be as broad as possible. (interview, July 2021)

In trying to pacify both developments and reconcile their disparate types of expertise into law 4430/2016, SYRIZA policy-makers effectively rendered the SSE as a governmental mode of power that assumes social and market-based principles to be commensurate. Yet the inclusion of market-based knowledges and strategies arguably undermines some of the transformative aspirations of SSE actors in favor of alleviative solutions. This is illustrated by three developments. First, GECES, which consulted the SYRIZA government on the SSE, for example, consists of social entrepreneurship organizations like Ashoka, and academics with expertise predominantly in neoclassical and behavioral economics, entrepreneurship, impact measurement, social innovation, ‘smart development,’ and corporate social responsibility (EC2018), all of which indicate a fervor for market-based solutions for social issues. Second, the fact that the EC’s technical support for the development of the SSE in Greece was assisted by the British Council, and partly provided by Social Enterprise UK, must be seen against those critiques that scrutinize the UK social economy paradigm as ‘neoliberalization by stealth’ (Nicholls and Teasdale 2017), in that it camouflages the marketization of social needs provision. Indeed, this may come as little surprise as the EU, since the Treaty of Lisbon, has reconfigured the ideal of any third-sector actor ‘as self-reliant, risk-taker, entrepreneur, and innovator, who has no need for dependency relations with funders or state support and who take responsibility for finding and adapting themselves to the market opportunities’ (Kurki 2011, 357). The third development pertains to SYRIZA’s ambiguous position on whether the SSE is a radical attempt to transform the current economic model, or an active labor market policy that alleviates sky-rocketing rates of unemployment. In the words of Rania Antonopoulou, a heterodox economist and former Alternate Minister for Combatting Unemployment under SYRIZA, the SSE law is not another welfare policy measure addressing the most vulnerable. For the government, the SSE presents a new model for work as well an alternative production and consumption model. The Social and Solidarity Economy is an overall horizontal priority for us. (as quoted in Greek News Agenda 2016)

Greece’s precarious economic reality nudged policy-makers towards viewing the law primarily as an active labor market policy which is, by definition, based on market-based principles. As one policymaker illustrated, there was

… a constant battle within the SYRIZA government about what the social economy is to accomplish actually … that it includes unemployment makes me believe that … in the end, we are talking about an active labour market policy, and not about another model of production … So [the law] includes vulnerable groups - where it is very contested what vulnerable … means in a period of economic crisis and with so much active unemployment … Although I want to declare that … the party is about ‘another model’ and … what space it can include between public sector and private economy, [the government] … took a choice that is a bit in turbid waters. (interview, March 2021)
The tension between the party and the government as to what the SSE is to achieve points to the competing goals vis-à-vis the political vision of the party base of SYRIZA, and the demands of the austerity program (Douzinas 2017). A problem that exacerbated the tension between alternative economic vision vs. active labor market policy, and whether social or market-based principles should be hegemonic, was the scarcity of funding. While law 4430/2016 facilitated access to public procurement for organizations with an SSE legal form, the establishment of an envisioned Social Economy Fund never took place (Geormas and Glaveni 2019). This has led to a situation where the only major sources of subsidies and funds available for SSE organizations were those offered by the Greek Partnership Agreement (ESPA) co-funded by the EU structural and investment funds. In effect, the law’s assumption that the SSE can be both, an active labor market policy and an alternative mode of production, but without providing meaningful funding for the sustainable development of the sector, comes at the cost of undermining the transformative ambitions of the SSE law. Indeed, my interlocutor’s metaphorical use of ‘turbid waters’ in the statement above points precisely to the obscuring and confusing consequences of unifying disparate goals based on competing principles in a common legal framework. On the one hand, pursuing these disparate goals conditioned the possibility for the emergence of hybrid-economic practices de jure. This is because hybrid-economic practices reduce ambiguity by rendering market-based and social principles and goals as commensurate. On the other hand, the virtual absence of SSE funding proliferated the use of hybrid-economic practices de facto. This is because SSE practitioners are themselves in an ambiguous position. They become wardens of mitigating the precarizing consequences of economic uncertainty, by managing certain forms of social needs provision. In this sense, practitioners are profiting from the deregulation of previously state-held responsibilities. Yet by participating in a precarious labor market, they are themselves subject to economic uncertainty and in need of protection. As one interlocutor summarizes adequately,

in a cooperative, you sometimes have more exploitation than in noncooperative conditions. Because the members become micro-entrepreneurs and exploit themselves as much as possible to make ends meet … and we experience this every day, the market always creates pressures. It’s really this that asphyxiates you and limits the social impact you could have created otherwise. (member of employee cooperative B, October 2021)

Commensuration in the SSE therefore produces morally ambiguous situations in which practices of solidarity and care are intermingled with the need of making a living in precarious circumstances, the consequences of which are the subject of the following section.

The consequences of hybrid-economic practices

For former Alternate Minister for Combatting Unemployment, Rania Antonopoulou, law 430/2016 is about

... solidarity between members and how it is achieved, about equality and parity and how they are ensured, about the development of economic activities that will not have the purpose of profit, but will meet the livelihood needs of members and employees of enterprises, as well as the needs of the local community (as quoted in Pantzou 2016).

From a linguistic standpoint, the goals are stated by way of enumeration, which ‘is to attribute an equal level of importance to entities’ (Pascual as quoted in Luc et al. 1999, 271). In this sense, the minister’s words can be read as an attempt to reconcile the tensions explored in the previous section, and render disparate goals as commensurate. The one hierarchical relation that stands out is the precedence of needs over profit. Indeed, the law defines the SSE as ‘the sum of economic activities which are founded on an alternative organization of the relations of production, distribution, consumption and reinvestment, based on the principles of democracy, equality, solidarity, cooperation and respect to the human being and the environment’ (emphasis added, Law 4430/2016). Within this framework, the law introduces a variety of criteria to operationalize SSE organizations, and specifies three legal forms. The goal is for these organizations to achieve ‘social
benefit,15 which is defined as serving the social needs of the local or wider community in a socially inclusive manner. The means to produce social benefit are hybrid-economic practices, such as ‘social innovation,’ ‘sustainable development’ activities, and performing ‘social impact measurements’ to monitor the produced social benefit. Although the law broadly assumes that economic activity is to be based on social principles, the fact that the means of economic activity consist of hybrid-economic practices render social principles and market-based principles as commensurate. This is further indicated by the notion of ‘sum’ in the law’s definition of the SSE. In what follows, I will explore three processes through which the transmutation of solidarity and ‘the social’ takes place: economization, entrepreneurialization, and communitarianization.

**Economization**

Law 4430/2016 defines a constitutive relationship between ‘social benefit’ as an end, and ‘social innovation’ and ‘solidarity’ as means. Here, social impact and its measurement are intended to audit this relation and the ‘social benefit produced’ and, in so doing, construct it as observable and commensurable (Law 4430/2016, Explanatory Memorandum). The law requires organizations that are included in the SSE registry to submit yearly impact surveys through the ‘Social Impact Measurement Tool’ government website. The official guidelines for submitting impact measurement reports clarify that ‘quantitative approaches’ are required ‘to measure the change’ of social impact, and that ‘you may need to create your own indicators … to demonstrate a change that has taken place … ’ (Gov.gr 2021).

In a classically utilitarian sense, the commensuration requirements of social impact monitoring replace critique with technique, and qualitative judgement with quantitative measurement (Davies 2014). Social impact measurement, therefore, effectively economizes questions pertaining to solidarity, and reduces them to formalistic acts of evaluation. Importantly, this economization allows for rendering competing ethical and political spheres, and the tensions outlined earlier vis-a-vis social and market-based principles, as now commensurate. This is not least because economization has an incentivizing and normative, rather than ontological, effect on those who practice it (Brown 2005). As one policy-maker clarifies, ‘we need to measure [impact], because we cannot change the world if we do not change ourselves’ (interview, June 2021). This enunciation corresponds to research showing that quantification enforced upon organizations externally, is replicated as a mode of evaluation internally (Chun and Sauder 2021). What is more, the fact that SSE actors are encouraged to ‘create’ their own indicators to measure social impact, constructs, rather than represents, an economized reality that is held together by the quasi-scientific legitimacy and affective appeal of metrics (Porter 1995). One practitioner points to the normative effect, but also the perceived ‘fakeness’ of this process:

I re-read an impact survey we did … and sure, there were some things that were important. But the way we usually write them, is the way they’re supposed to be read: incredibly overestimated. I think it’s fake … the direct impact is accepted by those who want to accept it. Some people at an event, for example, might understand some things … But you cannot count this. You cannot quantify this. (member of employee cooperative A, August 2021)

Quantifying aspects pertaining to solidarity and ‘the social’ comes at the cost of devaluing what is not visible in measurements. This firstly underlines that impact surveys prioritize those indicators that can be quantified, leading to a kind of autotelic ‘criteria reductionism’ (Schimank as quoted in Mau 2019, 11). Secondly, quantification reduces the complexities and uncertainties of relations of solidarity to commensurable and manageable aggregates of – in this case exaggerated – social impact. Analogous to utility, impact integrates and embodies the relativity of all value (Espeland and Stevens 1998). In effect, this commensuration transforms current and produces new power relations (Berman, Popp, and Hirschman 2018) that transmute understandings of ‘the social’ and solidarity in terms that weigh costs and benefits.
The inclusion of social innovation in the law further illustrates this claim. Defined as the ‘production of products and the provision of services,’ social innovation ‘aims at the satisfaction of social needs, the reconciliation of production and consumption, the harmonization of supply and demand,’ and the formation of a new type of social relations based on collectivity and parity, and not on competition’ (Law 4430/2016, emphasis added). The demarcation from competition highlights the law’s valorization of the ‘antidotal’ effects of solidarity to economic uncertainty (Rakopoulos 2016). Codifying social innovation in this way, however, merely camouflages the reality that the SSE is indeed a market sector which, by definition, is based on forms of competition. More crucially, the fact that the law defines social innovation through the ‘reconciliation’ and ‘harmonization’ of ‘supply and demand’ is reminiscent of economic equilibrium models and Pareto efficiency (Beckert 1996) and, in turn, the competitiveness of SSE actors. Here, it appears solidarity is formed by socially conscious market practices that efficiently allocate resources and needs provision, thus reinvigorating ordo-liberal principles of fairness and social justice. In this conception, ‘social innovation’ economizes meanings of ‘the social’ and solidarity, in that it positions them ‘within a commodified frame and an emphasis on ‘supply and demand’ as well as the potential for increased efficiency and savings’ (Montgomery 2016, 1985).

This points to the importance of a ‘social return on investment’ (Hall 2014) as a way to define the perceived value created in the SSE. Arguably, solidarity and ‘the social’ are deemed valuable in so far as they contribute to the production of social benefit – as the law would have it:

You know, what I have come to understand … is that at times of movement outbursts, social solidarity is there and truly produces results. But, in times of movement [hibernation], like the one we are living now … there is no consistency in solidarity. The solidarity that is released by non-institutionalized structures is very ad-hoc. Ultimately, it functions as crisis-management … So you don’t help maximizing it … So for me, I think, what has a lot of importance is that solidarity is consistent. That it is more universal and can represent more people and all that. But I think that, if nothing else, it secures a salary for people who want to deal with this, this is indispensable. (Policy-Maker, March 2021)

This response is instructive for how the SSE law incentivizes the economization of ‘the social’ and solidarity, and the conceivable consequences of this process. First, law 4430/2016 evaluates social benefit as the sum of an equation made up of solidarity, social innovation, social impact and its measurement. As the statement above implies, this formalization signals a skepticism about procedures that are not mechanically universalizable (Muller 2018) and assumes a need to create ‘consistency’ by substituting trust and qualitative judgement with control and quantitative measurement. Second, social innovation, social return on investment, or social impact measurement are not epistemologically neutral: their underlying utilitarian modes of valuation subtly foster a Benthamite (1876) ethos and effectively reduce questions of solidarity and social needs to issues of efficiency-maximization. This is also problematic because, third, SYRIZA’s valorization of these practices camouflages the devolution of previously state-based social needs provision on SSE actors through the incentive to ‘secure a salary.’ Conceivably, the consequences of the economization of solidarity and ‘the social’ may well be that issues pertaining to inequality and precarity are treated as aggregate costs (in a Coaseian sense), which ought to be evaluated by impact methodologies, and mitigated not by the welfare state, but by the entrepreneurial innovations of SSE organizations.

**Entrepreneurialization**

Though law 4430/2016 transformed the sector’s conceptualization from ‘social economy and social entrepreneurship’ to ‘social and solidarity economy,’ entrepreneurship has been central for SYRIZA’s agenda from the outset. Indeed, the party’s founding declaration stated that ‘creative entrepreneurship, operating for the public good and under stable and fair rules, will not be damaged, but will be helped’ (SYRIZA 2013). The notion of social innovation outlined earlier therefore is not only indicative of the economization of solidarity and ‘the social,’ but arguably also testimony to the entrepreneurial ethos assumed to be required for SSE practice.
I really believe, and this is why I chose this very consciously, in social innovation, social entrepreneurship. Because innovation is part of entrepreneurship. You turn an innovation into entrepreneurship. But… you can do social innovation without entrepreneurship… because an innovation may not lead to an entrepreneurial activity, necessarily. You may not make money, but it changes and influences society: I am obviously a lot more affiliated with and positive toward the solidarity sector, due to ideology, and because of purpose, rather than the capitalist sector. (social entrepreneur A, January 2021)

In identifying with the SSE and critiquing conventional commercial enterprises, my interlocutor acknowledges the entrepreneurial dimension of innovation, but insists that social innovation can be mobilized for non-entrepreneurial ends, which they view as synonymous with non-monetary ends. My interlocutor’s statement resonates with the dominant narrative of social entrepreneurship that imparts an ‘optimistic script of social change’ (Dey and Steyaert 2010, 86), and valorizes the universalizing aspirations of social innovation to that end. Here, we observe a harmonious kind of entrepreneurship that naturalizes social innovation, while invisibilizing the conflicts over social change, as well as the market-based utilitarian assumptions inherent to innovation and entrepreneurship.

At the same time, however, the reality of scarce funding outlined earlier has precarizing consequences for my interlocutors. Signifying the bulk of SSE organizations as predominantly ‘necessary entrepreneurship,’ Geormas and Glaveni (2019) point to the fact that these often have no better alternatives for employment. According to my interlocutors, this has led initially non-SSE actors to encroach upon the newly formed sector and compete for EU funding.

You had the ESPA kides, as we call them, who wait and lurk for an ESPA to be announced for the social and solidarity economy. And they then set up a KoinS Ep (Social Cooperative Enterprise), just to be able to get an ESPA. So, for me, lots got lost there. (social entrepreneur B, April 2021)

Limited funding, as well as years of austerity in Greece, signify social entrepreneurship as a livelihood strategy that is Kirznerian (1973), rather than Schumpeterian (1980), in that these entrepreneurs have little means and are in a permanent state of alertness to opportunity, rather than ‘natural talents’ that create market opportunities (Plehwe 2020). These realities not only further competition between SSE organizations. They also reduce the transformative potentiality of the SSE to the adaptation to donor requirements.

We started with a lot of ‘social’, we then took it a lot to ‘urban’… Now, imagine a program comes up, for example, which gives us 45.000 EUR, only for ‘environmental’. Hence, we now turn it to ‘environmental’ only … This is adaptability. (employee of civil non-profit company A, January 2021)

On the one hand, the notion of ‘adaptability’ to market signals is grounded in an entrepreneurial ethos that places agency, responsibility, and success firmly on SSE practitioners, rather than on structural constraints. Here, ‘the social’ is assumed to rest on entrepreneurial ‘skills and capacities,’ and ‘flexibility’ in light of uncertainty (Amanatidou, Tzekou, and Gritzas 2021), all of which further the Beckerian (1962) human capital agenda that essentially commodifies knowledge and human abilities. On the other hand, my interlocutor’s somewhat playful use of such categories as ‘social’ or ‘urban’ effectively reduces their complexities to mere labels and is instructive for the politics of branding (Katsinas 2019). In uttering these terms in English, rather than Greek, the interlocutor above mobilizes the performative qualities of branding so as to reinforce an optimistic and catchy narrative that matches donor expectations. Verifying this finding, another interlocutor agrees ‘yes, the marketization happens. It becomes more market-y, more commercial, it is more of a profession now. But it is more conscious’ (social entrepreneur C, July, 2021). Indeed, branding questions pertaining to ‘the social’ and solidarity renders the complexities of and conflicts over social issues manageable and professional, while overcoming ‘the flabbiness and amateurishness casually attributed to the third sector’ (Dey and Steyaert 2010, 89). Here, narratives of ‘consciousness’ allow my interlocutors to justify their conduct despite the ambiguities and latent skepticism that surround their entrepreneurialized style of intervention. But the market-mediated nature and performative quality of these practices runs danger of ‘empty moralizing’ (Butcher 2003, 97), where ‘the social’ is turned
into a field for entrepreneurial exploitation, by innovating services and products in the name of solidarity.

**Communitarianization**

If economization is a process of depleting solidarity and ‘the social’ of its ethical and political components to commensurable values of utility-maximization, entrepreneurialization mobilizes and exploits the fact that these components are depleted, to (socially) innovate services and products in the name of solidarity. While scholars have pointed to the depoliticizing consequences of these processes (Clarke and Parsell 2022), what we arguably observe in the SSE in Greece is not a depoliticization, as much as a communitarianization of solidarity. As one interlocutor indicates:

Solidarity has a lot of politics in it … But we don’t take the whole issue so politically. [Our] activity is also commercial … We can talk about, on a broader level, the SDGs [UN Sustainable Development Goals]. These, if you call them politics, yes, we can say we have politics. But on that level. Because there’s a difference in how we think about politics, how we express things, and how we work. (social entrepreneur B, April 2021)

In this narrative, SSE work continues to be informed by ethical and political considerations, albeit in analytically puzzling ways. On the one hand, the United Nations’ SDGs have been criticized for conflating sustainability with economic growth (Kumi 2019). This comes at the cost of reducing the imaginative capacities of politics to a set of ‘best practices’ from which actors ‘choose,’ analogous to consumers. On the other hand, the distinction between ideas, expressions, and labor practices suggests ethics and politics are radically contingent, rather than ontological, overlapping significantly with conceptual considerations in communitarian thought. For communitarians, there are no a priori political or moral principles (Etzioni 1996). Rather, the community is the condition for the emergence of political and moral principles. What follows from this, is that there cannot be a politics that is organized around universal principles that apply equally to all people (Davies 2012). Indeed, asked about the meaning of solidarity, another interlocutor remarks ‘look that depends, it’s different for everybody. I cannot define it generally’ (member in an employee cooperative B, October 2021).

For the SSE, this firstly means that because economization and entrepreneurialization deplete the ethical and political components of ‘the social’ and solidarity, their normative effects are emptied out and become contingent. Communitarianized solidarity is a matter of historical and local circumstance and of ‘transient consensus about what attitudes are normal and what practices are just or unjust’ (Rorty 1995, 189). Secondly, in turn, the ‘contingent ethics’ (Chouliaraki 2013) of communitarianized solidarity are informed precisely by the indexical nature of market signals, where market methods of commensuration (e.g. price mechanism, impact measurement) shape what counts as solidarity. These forms of valuing disenchant solidarity (in a Weberian sense) and deny its possibility of intrinsic value. This is because, although the SSE draws from the ethical and political character of solidarity, ‘the social,’ or social benefit, its market-based principles remain central in formulating and regulating them. Asked about how a social enterprise can practice solidarity and produce social benefit, an interlocutor replied:

Look, what I say, to be cool with myself and those around me, is ‘people who work towards not only economic sustainability, but also social impact.’ I include some categories, like ‘eco-friendly, ‘empowering employees’, ‘run by vulnerables’, ‘gives back to society’; [enterprises] that … include it in their branding. They self-identify like this.

Author: how do we judge if they do this, practically?

Interlocutor: This is why I’m telling you, they themselves need to say that … This way I can judge them, but also consumers. And they can say, ‘guys, exclude them’. (employee of civil non-profit company A, January 2021)
‘To be cool with’ points precisely to the ethical quality that shapes my interlocutors’ SSE practice. On the one hand, this quality embodies the entrepreneurializing tendencies of branding solidarity and ‘the social,’ as outlined in the previous section, via such dubious categories as ‘run by vulnerabilities.’ On the other hand, it is market signals, via consumer behavior, that evaluate this quality. Communitarianized solidarity reproduces the inequalities of the market in that it conditions how the community evaluates who is, or is not, ‘deserving’ of participating in and benefiting from the SSE.

More often than not, my interlocutors frame these ethical evaluations through the somewhat Benthamite (1876, 33) ‘modifications of pleasure of pain,’ that is, ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ ‘positive’ and ‘negative.’

When you are in the social space, be it social solidarity or collaborative … you want a better world. You want a better condition, alright? It’s the same for everybody. The question is how you do it and what it is that you actually do … we see people who really, through their job, want to offer something positive to society (social entrepreneur B, April 2021, emphasis added).

This statement is instructive for the contingency of ethical and political questions in communitarianized solidarity. First, this is because it illustrates a minimum consensus among SSE actors regarding the shared goal of positive social change in the SSE, but without normative conflicts over political and ethical dispositions. Here, the ethical content of communitarianized solidarity evokes the voluntary choice to provide top-down help, rather than the universal responsibility to mutual care. In communitarian thought, what is ‘good’ or ‘positive’ to this regard is that which ensures the ‘frictionless’ and ‘healthy’ functioning of a society (Yar 2003, 105); a form of community ‘equilibrium’ that is ‘akin to sustainability’ (Davies 2012, 773). Indeed, my interlocutors’ references to, and the law’s codification of, ‘sustainability’ and ‘social innovation’ outlined earlier, point precisely to the hybrid-economic notions of ‘harmonization’ in the SSE. Second, the (ethical) value judgement of what ‘positive’ entails is contingent upon the very evaluative methods (i.e. social impact measurement) that – as we have seen in the economization section – SSE actors themselves create. Analogous to positive psychology, itself grounded in communitarian thought, ‘goodness’ and ‘positivity’ becomes an end in itself (cf. Kern et al. 2020). While this goal is guided by a moral sense of improving livelihood conditions, it comes at the cost of partially invisibilizing what is ‘negative’ or ‘deviant’ and, in turn, the underlying conflicts over the structural conditions of inequality. As the state partly withdraws from social needs provision and funding, the SSE community needs to define its own conceptions of solidarity in response to the crisis of care and austerity. Yet it is precisely because the SSE community is governed by (and through) hybrid-economic practices, that solidarity is communitarianized. The market is not untouched by these processes. In the SSE, the market is refashioned as compassionate, in that it substitutes demand and supply with the harmonization of social needs and their satisfaction – all in the name of solidarity.

**Conclusion**

After years of austerity, SYRIZA’s law 4430/2016 has institutionalized the SSE in a way that allows practitioners to engage with market-based principles of e.g. innovation, entrepreneurship, impact and measurement, through the affectively resonant collective principles of solidarity and ‘the social.’ I have shown that the SSE can be viewed as a governmental mode of power that renders social and market-based principles commensurate through the codification and proliferation of hybrid-economic practices. Commensuration has allowed the Greek state to coopt many of the practices of the SSE. This is because, as pragmatic sociology informs us, the ‘new spirit’ of the state in neoliberalism is defined precisely by the cooptation and normalization of critique and radical practice (Boltanski and Chiapello 2017). Here, the performance of hybrid-economic practices by SSE practitioners partly camouflages the withdrawal from the state. This withdrawal signifies a re-regulation, rather than de-regulation, of state-market-subject relations of social needs provision: because the SSE is the partial result of austerity, it is institutionalized in a way that is dependent upon the public sector.
for support, and the private sector for trading success, both of which arguably set limits to the transformative ‘alterity’ of the SSE (Amin, Cameron, and Hudson 2003). Arguably, these tendencies have exacerbated since the New Democracy government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis took over office from SYRIZA in 2019. In an ironical fashion, one of my interlocutors point out that New Democracy fears the SSE ‘will succeed in bringing about communism’ (policy-maker, April 2021). As a matter of fact, New Democracy abolished the Directorate of the Social and Solidarity Economy and integrated it into the General Secretariat of Labor, while SSE organizations were excluded from the first phase of financial assistance to enterprises in the face of COVID-19. As a result, some of my interlocutors point to shifts in their self-presentation towards public bodies and donors, by increasingly re-signifying their work in terms of e.g. open fabrication, environmental sustainability, social impact, or urban commons, and less so in terms of social and solidarity economy.

Meanwhile, the consequences of hybrid-economic practices are not so much the mere reproduction of neoliberal rationalities through solidarity, as the transmutation of solidarity. Transmutation points to the unanticipated effects of fusing market-based and social principles beyond the binary of either radical transformation or neoliberal reproduction. As I have shown, hybrid-economic practices economize, entrepreneurialize, and communitarianize how ‘the social’ and solidarity is understood. Because economization and entrepreneurialization deplete solidarity and ‘the social’ of their political and ethical contents, SSE practices play out in the name of solidarity. Here, communitarianization replenishes the ethical and political contents of solidarity, but not with a priori normative and universal principles of e.g. collective care, mutual aid, and others that signify ‘a politicized form of love’ (Lynch and Kalaitzaki 2020, 239). Instead, the ethics and politics of communitarianized solidarity are indexical: they are contingent upon market signals, the ways in which SSE actors define ‘positive’ social impact, benefit, and solidarity, and evaluate their worth through market-based principles of valuation. These processes have allowed those employed and organized in the SSE to address social issues in ‘critical-complicit ways’ (Muehlebach 2012, 26), in that hybrid-economic practices do not signify a radical betrayal of my interlocutors’ moral and political positions but, instead, shape them.

Notes

1. Interviews for this research were conducted between 2020 and 2021 via video calls (during COVID-19 lockdowns) and in-person. Interlocutors include policy-makers and self-described social entrepreneurs involved in the legal drafting and consultation process of law 4430/2016, self-described members of employee cooperatives, and ‘ecosystem support actors’ (Temple et al. 2017) that assist SSE organizations with e.g. company vision, sustainable financing and funding, social impact plan support services, and business development. The organizations in which my interlocutors are involved in attend to psychosocial care, self-care and well-being, socially inclusive cultural and educational programming, ethical consumerism and sustainable living, open manufacturing and design, and SSE training and capacity building. Those organizations’ legal forms are Social Cooperative Enterprises (KoinSEp), Employee Cooperatives (SYN.ERG), and Civil Non-Profit Companies (AMKE). I recruited interlocutors through my network in the solidarity movement and the SSE. Snowballing began through interlocutors of my doctoral work, who were participants of the Greek anti-austerity movement and set up solidarity initiatives and SSE organizations after. I also recruited interlocutors through my previous professional network in the cultural sector in Greece. Though there is a division of work within my interlocutors’ organizations, because these consist of relatively few employees (up to ten), for all except the civil non-profit companies there are no clearly attributed roles, but a needs-based sharing of responsibilities, often grounded in a collectivist ethic. My sampling included 10 female and six male interlocutors. In line with my research questions, sampling was based on actors that use, valorize, and proliferate hybrid-economic practices. Interview questions evolved around the meanings of the social and solidarity, as well as the appeal of hybrid-economic practices, e.g.: why is it meaningful to measure impact? Why is it useful to address social needs with innovation? But also follow-up questions e.g. on the assumption that solidarity can be ‘maximized’: how is this done? Data analysis is based on transcription and memoing, followed by a software-assisted initial and focused round of constructivist grounded theory coding (Charmaz 2006).

2. Interview with policy-maker, July 2021.

3. Smart development is concerned with furthering a resource-efficient, competitive, knowledge-based economy (EC 2020a).
4. Many of the moral ambiguities my interlocutors express are grounded in the pressures of trying to render practices pertaining to solidarity as economically sustainable, and the tensions between initial political motivation and the realities of a precarious labor market (this is especially true for those interlocutors with a transformative aspiration in their conduct). Here, interlocutors at times resort to self-critique, e.g. by acknowledging that the ‘commercial dimension of the social, the solidarian, and the cooperative serves capitalism’ (member of employee cooperative B, October 2021). In other instances, they point to institutional limitations: ‘Let’s say there is an economic network which is based on exchange, where people exchange help, services, knowledge, to offer everything they can to other people. There is no legal status through which you can do this, where this works properly legally … So can there be a market that is not capitalist? It is hard to imagine it today. The economy today is built in a way that cannot be collective, so that there is an alternative market, for example, which is legal, based on gift and mutual exchange, and that can be developed into the future. So there is this gap between what you want to do, and what is legally possible’ (member of employee cooperative A, January 2021). Arguably, these forms of justification partly serve the purpose of addressing the limitations of institutionalized solidarity practice (which some of my interlocutors did not expect to encounter in this way), so as to safeguard against moral exposure and radical critiques (e.g. by informal grassroots solidarity initiatives) from the outset. It is reasonable to assume institutionalization has contributed to a political distancing between formalized SSE organizations and radical informal solidarity initiatives.


6. Worker Cooperatives may be registered as SSE organizations without justifying ‘social benefit’. Alternatively, they can adhere to ‘collective benefit’, which the law defines as the joint service of the needs of the members of SSE organization, through the formation of equal relations of production, the creation of stable and decent jobs, the reconciliation of personal, family and professional life (Law 4430/2016).

7. Multiple interlocutors highlighted this, e.g. participant observation, team meeting at ecosystem support actor, July 2021.

8. Indicatively: The Greek abbreviation of the SSE in Greece is K.A.L.O, meaning ‘good’.

9. E.g. interview with employee of civil non-profit company B, July 2021.

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