



SOCIAL ECONOMY ENTERPRISES AND MAINSTREAM BUSINESS: CRAFTING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE IN EUROPE



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"Buy Social" represents a transformative approach to procurement that is gaining momentum across Europe and beyond. Rooted in the principles of sustainability, social responsibility, and inclusivity, "Buy Social" initiatives aim to channel purchasing power toward products and services offered by Social Enterprises (SEs).

The concept has gained significant attention, in part due to its alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the European Pillar of Social Rights. This subject holds significant importance on the EU agenda, with social procurement being emphasized in the [EU Social Economy Action Plan \(SEAP\)](#) and the Transition Pathway as a pivotal catalyst for transitioning towards a more inclusive, equitable, and ecologically conscious economy.

In contrast to other ecosystems and mainstream enterprises, the Proximity and Social Economy Ecosystem effectively leverages its economic model, which revolves around the balance of social and environmental responsibility alongside profitability. This ecosystem can be regarded as a fundamental

actor in the development of circular value chains. In essence, "Buy Social" represents a powerful paradigm shift in the world of commerce, one that underlines the potential for business to be a force for positive change.

Social economy organisations (SEOs) are already contributing to these circular value chains through their activities and the business models and practices they implement. However, they often lack appropriate scaling strategies and the establishment of essential partnerships necessary to fully unlock their potential.^[1]

Indeed, there exists a significant untapped potential for collaboration and partnerships between mainstream enterprises and social economy organisations within the realm of sustainability. Present-day environmental and social challenges, coupled with the growing awareness of these issues, are intensifying consumer preferences for eco-friendly and socially responsible products. Additionally, social and legislative pressures are compelling an increasing number of companies to fully integrate sustainability into their business



OCTOBER 2023 | DIESIS ARTICLES SERIES

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strategies in order to maintain their social license to operate.

The questions arise: How can we foster collaboration between SEOs and mainstream businesses? How can we construct meaningful partnerships that enable businesses to procure the goods and services they require while infusing innovation, diversity, and sustainability into their supply chains and simultaneously, social entrepreneurs can benefit not only from expanding their own enterprises, but also from amplifying the positive impact they are generating?



Diesis Network is actively working to address the aforementioned questions by leading the "[Buy Social Future of Social Economy](#)" project [4] (BFSE-B2B), which receives co-funding from the European Commission (EC) under the Single Market Programme (SMP/SME Pillar). The project's primary aim is to facilitate and accelerate the expansion of "Buy Social B2B Markets Across Europe."

The project's objective is to initially gather a collection of best practices that demonstrate existing partnerships between Social Enterprises (SEs) and mainstream businesses. Our focus is to assess the evolution of these partnerships, identify mutual benefits for both parties, and determine their potential for sustainable and ongoing collaboration. At the same time, we have initiated a promotional campaign across four European countries (in collaboration with our consortium partners) to raise awareness about such partnerships, present them as a novel collaborative model, to increase understanding of impact of Social Enterprises, and

make them more visible and attractive to B2B engagements.

Could these collaborations become a routine aspect of doing business? Encouragingly, an increasing number of mainstream businesses are aligning themselves with the social economy goals. This, coupled with the gradual integration of environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) criteria into mainstream business governance, is paving the way for fresh opportunities for collaboration and entry into new markets. [2]

For more information about the projects and its activities follow our LinkedIn page "[Buy Social](#)".

References:

[1] OECD (2022). Policy brief on making the most of the social economy's contribution to the circular economy.

<https://www.oecd.org/publications/policy-brief-on-making-the-most-of-the-social-economy-s-contribution-to-the-circular-economy-e9eea313-en.html>

[2] European Commission (2022) Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy.

<https://www.diesis.coop/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/COMUN-254.pdf>