

APPLYING THE DOUGHNUT MODEL AS COMPASS TO MAXIMISE THE SOCIAL ECONOMY CONTRIBUTION TO THE TWIN TRANSITION



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Theme: SOCIAL ECONOMY AND SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSITION

Abstract

The twin transition has become a global priority, especially in light of recent events like COVID-19 and Russian military aggression. The social economy can contribute to this transition if unlocked. Our paper explores how the Doughnut theory can be applied to the social economy to maximise the impact on the twin transition. Developed by Kate Raworth, this theory guides sustainable social and economic development. The Doughnut theory and social economy share a focus on social and environmental aspects, as well as democratic principles. It offers a framework for planning actions, addressing challenges, and promoting success.

Keywords

Twin transition, green, digital, fair, social foundation, social economy, social enterprises, sustainability, social and economic development.

Jel code: L31, O35, Q57, Q58

Introduction

Accelerating the twin transition has become a global priority.¹ This issue is particularly urgent considering the events of the last years, mainly the COVID pandemic and the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, which have both shed a light on the importance to cope with both the green and digital transitions. Currently, the European Union has put forward a set of actions to accelerate the transition on multiple fronts, including the social economy. If unlocked, the potential and contribution that the social economy can bring to the transition are highly relevant. It proposes models and examples of how to make the twin transition fair and sustainable for everyone it helps lay down a social foundation.

This is why, at the end of 2022, the European Commission published the Twin Transition Pathway for the proximity and social economy ecosystem, a document proposing strategic actions to maximise the ecosystem contribution to such transition. Therefore, models and tools that can support the contribution of the social economy are highly valuable and to be scaled up. (European Commission, 2022)

The objective of our paper is to delve into the connection between the Doughnut theory and its practical application in the social economy. The paper begins by briefly introducing the Doughnut theory and its applications. Next, it explores the similarities and parallels that exist between the model and the social economy. Finally, it analyses how the model can be utilized as a tool to guide change and optimize social economy action towards the twin transition. The Doughnut theory offers a valuable framework for social economy enterprises to enhance their planning and address common challenges to succeed in the future economy. It serves as a compass to guide and maximize social economy actions towards the twin transition.

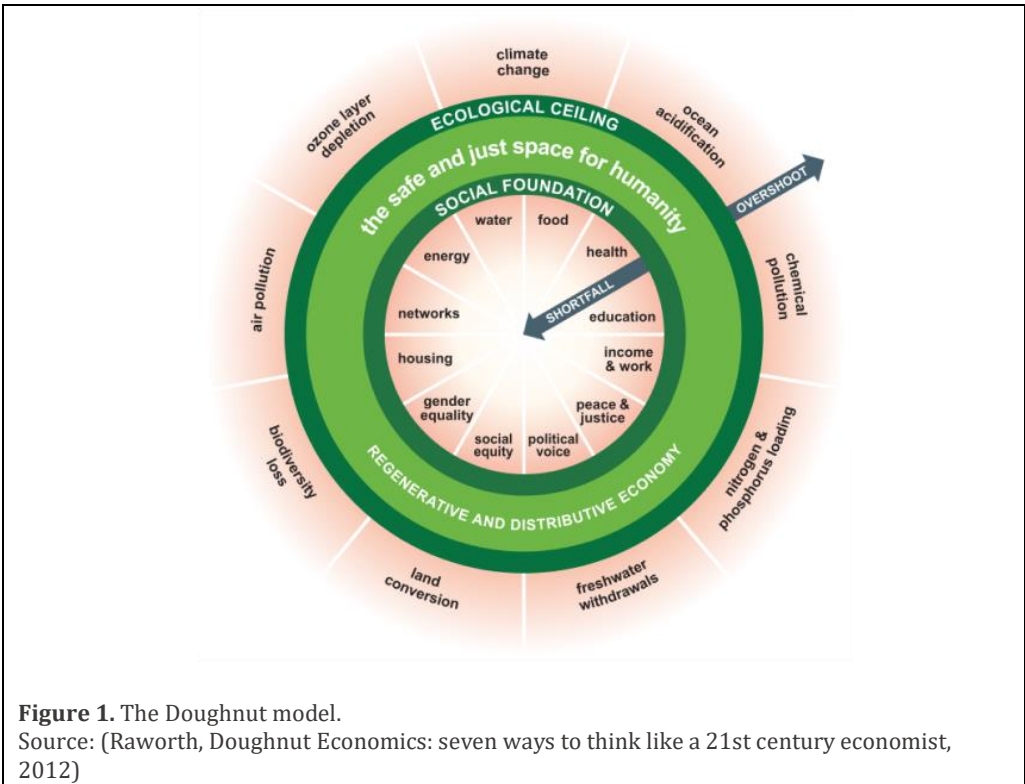
¹ "Rather than treating digital and sustainability in isolation, a twin transition strategy combines these critical functions to unlock huge benefits in terms of efficiency and productivity. The twin transition can make a positive impact by 'greening' technology, data assets and infrastructures while accelerating sustainability across the organisation." (Blüm, 2022)

The Doughnut

a. The model

Raworth (2017) proposed a new economic model called the Doughnut Economics model, which aims to promote humanity's well-being while also protecting the planet's natural resources. As she explained, only by respecting these two aspects can humanity thrive and be ecologically safe and socially just. The Doughnut model emphasizes that we must find a balance between ensuring that everyone's basic needs are met while also protecting the environment.

The Doughnut model offers an insightful view of how humanity can achieve a balanced state of thriving in the 21st century. It advocates for a mindset and approach to development that prioritizes sustainability. First introduced by Kate Raworth in her book "Doughnut Economics: seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist" in 2012, this theory has gained significant traction among various stakeholders, including enterprises, city departments, foundations, and other organizations. In essence, the Doughnut serves as a compass for achieving sustainable social and economic development that meets the needs of all people while respecting the limits of our planet's resources. The theory posits that fair and sustainable development must be situated within an ecological ceiling and a social foundation.



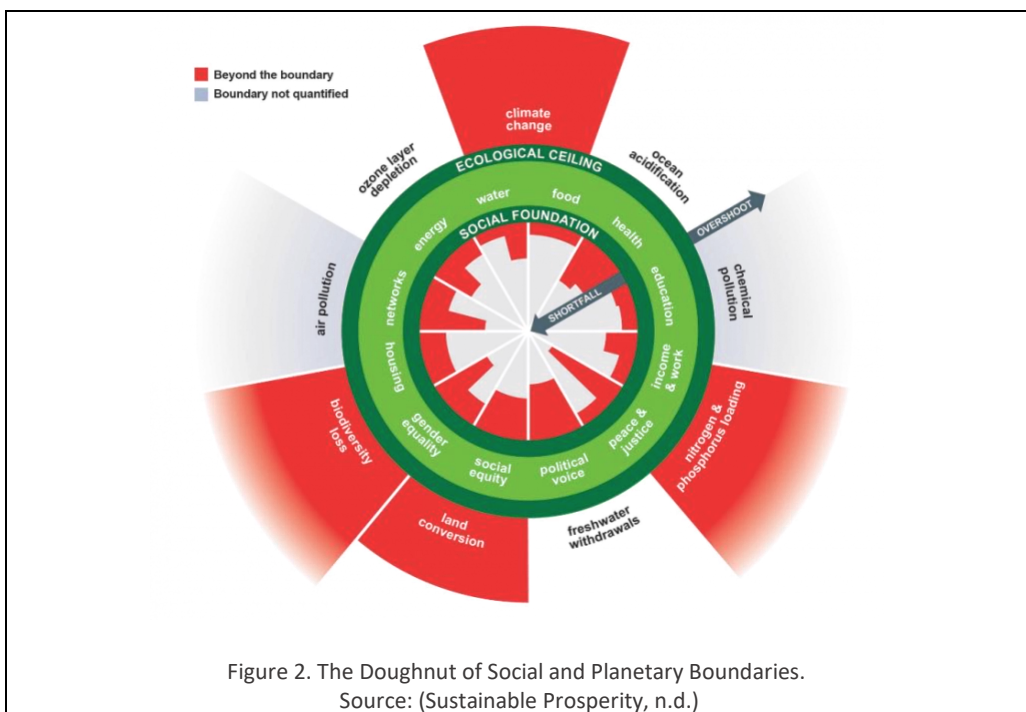
The name derives from the shape of the diagram, with a hole in the middle. The diagram is framed by:

- the social foundation (the inner rings), which means the essential elements and resources needed for a good life in the 21st century (both tangible and intangible): water, food, health, education, income and work, peace and justice, political voice, social equity, gender equality, housing, networks, and energy. If one of these items is not met, or if a person is living within the inner circle, she/he is living in a state of deprivation.
- the ecological ceiling (the outer ring), which means the environmental limits above which it is dangerous to live ozone layer depletion, climate change, ocean acidification, chemical pollution, nitrogen and phosphorus loading, freshwater withdraws, land conversion, biodiversity loss, and air pollution.

The space framed between the two rings represents the ecologically safe and socially just space. The purpose of economics should be to help us enter the space between those rings and to remain there. The Doughnut is a framework that enables us to see, in immediate and comprehensible terms, if economic and social development is fair and sustainable, and if not, what is state of the art and where the improvement points are. (Monbiot, 2017; Bon Pote, 2022)

Therefore, the model illustrates which are “the red areas of the current economy, whether inside the donut – the essential needs that are not yet assured for all of humanity – and outside – the planetary balances already put under pressure”. (Oxfam France, 2017; Raworth, 2017)

Thanks to the example below, illustrating the current global economy we can see that the situation is concerning as we are currently collectively both in overshooting the ecological ceiling and short falling the social foundation.



Blüm (2022) further elaborated on the Doughnut model by stating that the hole in the Doughnut's center represents the proportion of people worldwide who lack access to life's essentials such as food, water, healthcare, and political freedom of expression. It is humanity's challenge to get everyone out of that hole. Conversely, overshooting the Doughnut's outer crust can be detrimental to Earth's life-giving systems, such as a stable climate, healthy oceans, and a protective ozone layer, which are crucial for human well-being.

This model can be applied to different levels and sectors, including countries, regions, and cities. The Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL, 2022) has provided a tool to evaluate the Doughnut of each country.² By evaluating each country's Doughnut, policymakers can identify areas that require improvement to promote both societal well-being and environmental sustainability.

b. Applications

Starting from this theory, the Doughnut economics provides a framework for a) transitioning from endless economic growth to a sustainable one embedded within, and dependent upon, society and the living world; and b) recognising that economies and societies are complex and interdependent systems that need to be understood via systems thinking. (Buces, 2022) Therefore, the Doughnut can support the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, moving from an economy that is currently divisive and degenerative, to a fairer and more sustainable one.

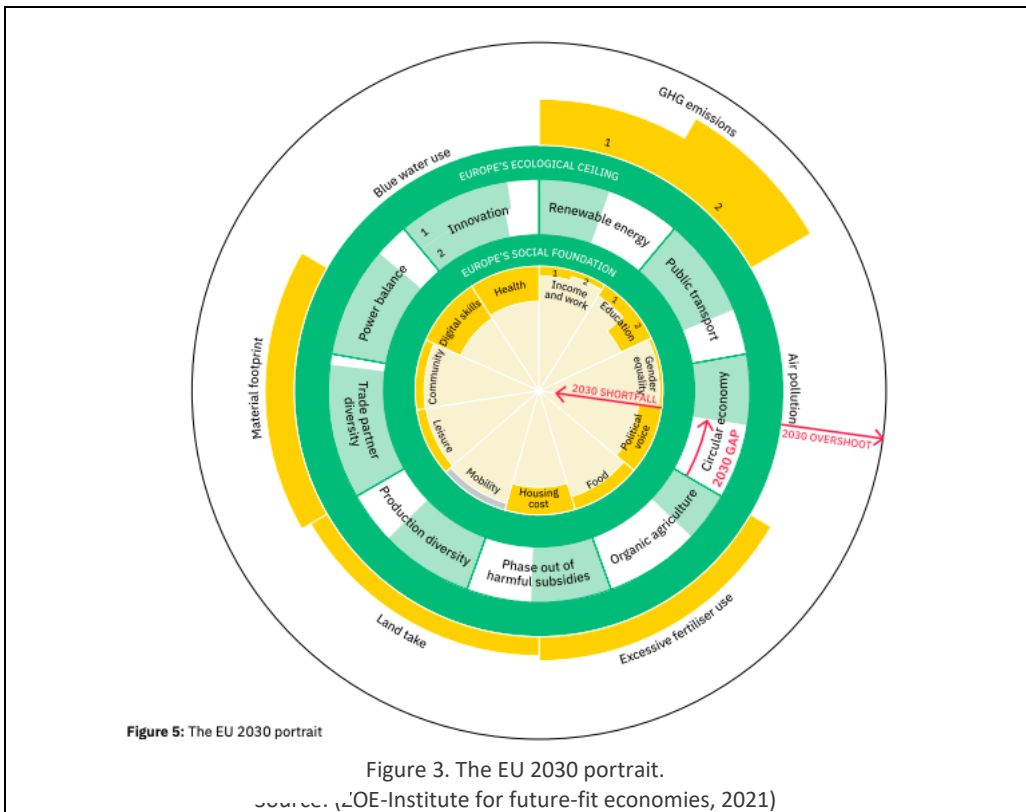
Since the Doughnut was created, it has been widely applied within academia, policymaking, progressive business, urban planning, and civil society as “a tool for reconceptualising sustainable development”: it provides changemakers with a tool to turn ideas into actionable projects. (Raworth, 2017)

² The tool is accessible through: <https://Doughnut-economy-fxs7576.netlify.app/>

Different levels of policymakers have applied the model. For instance, cities such as Brussels³ and Amsterdam⁴ have used the Doughnut model to plan their socio-economic development strategies.

Plus, since 2020, the European Commission has been exploring and experimenting in applying the Doughnut Economics to the EU’s development (DEAL, 2022). In 2021 was proposed a narrative and dashboard inspired by the Doughnut Economics framework to monitor progress in the EU towards 2030 in becoming a climate-neutral continent by 2050 in a fair and sustainable way (Barth et al, 2021).

Therefore, the Doughnut becomes at the same time a compass and a monitoring tool. (ZOE, 2022)



³ Browse the Brussels Doughnut here: <https://donut.brussels/bruxelles/macro-portrait/>

⁴ Read the Amsterdam Doughnut here: <https://Doughnuteconomics.org/amsterdam-portrait.pdf>

The Doughnut Theory and The Social Economy: Parallelisms

Existing similarities and parallels can be identified between the Doughnut model and the social economy. Social economy organisations (SEOs) have always existed, promoting and acting in accordance with the principles of Doughnut economics - promoting fair and sustainable social and environmental economic growth. Indeed, both approaches share the centrality of social and environmental aspects, as well as redistributive and democratic thinking.

a. Social Foundation

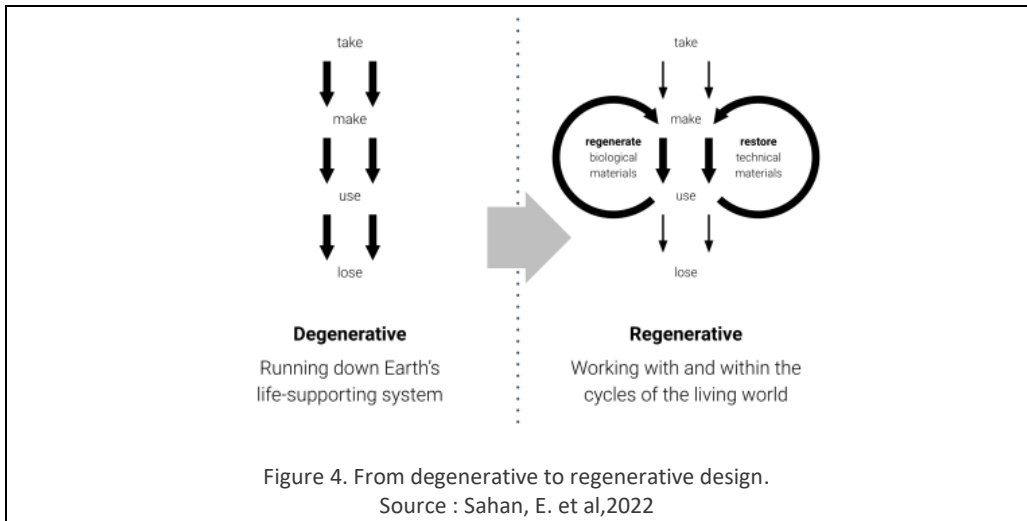
The mission of SEOs and enterprises is to have a positive social impact. As mentioned in the Social Economy Action Plan, they are defined by the primacy of people as well as social and/or environmental purpose over profit, the reinvestment of most of the profits and surpluses to carry out activities in the interest of members/users ("collective interest") or society at large ("general interest") and democratic and/or participatory governance. They have the ability to create and promote employment and decent working conditions, as well as reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion and promote equal opportunities. Therefore, by nature, SEOs can support in achieving all the elements set in the social foundation of the Doughnut model and can support societies and communities in achieving it.

b. Ecological Ceiling

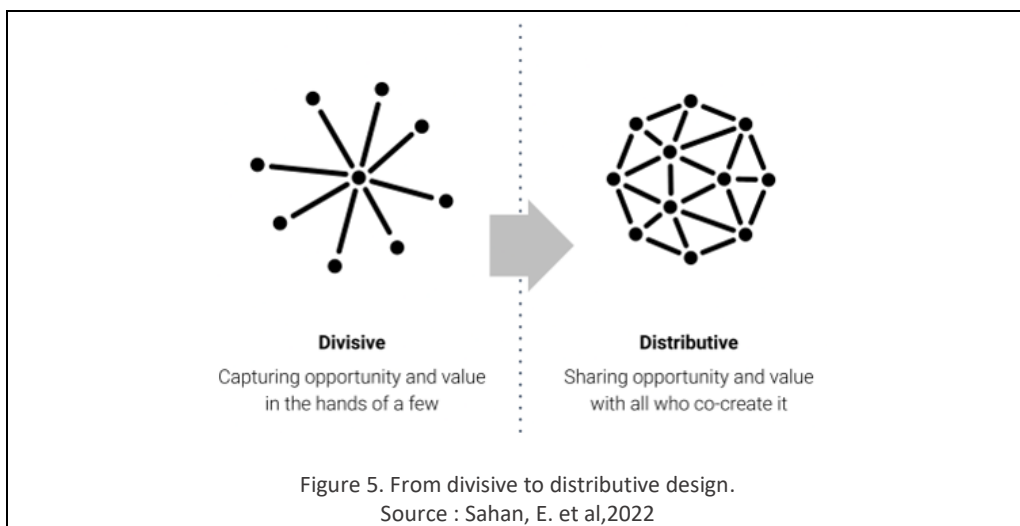
As mentioned above, by definition, SEOs and enterprises prioritise people and the environment above profit. Thus, these organisations contribute to the green and digital transitions and ensure that they are fair. They are able to supply sustainable goods and services and bridge the digital divide while at the same time considering the needs of citizens, employees, and other stakeholders. Hence, SEOs can support not overshooting the ecological ceiling.

c. Redistributing and Regenerative Aspect

As briefly mentioned in the chapter above, the Doughnut theory proposes two major transformations of our economic models. The first is the transformation from degenerative to regenerative design, which means to exit the logic of linear models of production and consumption and transit to more circular and sustainable ones. A regenerative approach is respectful of both people and the planet.



The second is the transformation from divisive to distributive design. This aims at transiting from a situation where wealth is earned by few to the detriment of the majority to a system where values and opportunities are shared, and inequalities are decreased. (Sahan et al, 2022)



The social economy meets both these aspects, as its business models already propose a regenerative and distributive approach (WEF, 2022; Chaves Ávila et al, 2019). Indeed, thanks to its social and democratic mission, not only do SEOs aim at providing a great social impact for communities but are also managed in a democratic way that enables distribution by respecting the environment and societies. Social economy doesn't seek maximisation of profit and exponential growth, but rather a sustainable and fair one (Catana et al, 2016).

The SEOs play a significant role in driving transformative change, focusing on sustainability, inclusivity, and practical solutions for unresolved issues. The role of social economy in regenerative inclusive projects, especially in rural spaces, has garnered significant attention in recent years. SEOs play a crucial role in involving local communities in the governance of their territories through an inclusive and bottom-up approach. They act as role models, serving as embedded intermediaries that bridge the gap between rural communities and supra-regional networks (Costantini et al, 2021).

In alignment with the principles of social economy, the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative emphasises sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion, adopting a multilevel and participatory approach to transformation. Stakeholder engagement and inclusiveness are pivotal in driving collective innovation, ensuring that creative solutions benefit all without leaving anyone behind. The NEB initiative aims to create a sustainable and inclusive future by connecting the European Green Deal with living spaces, communities, and experiences. The key axes of the NEB, such as "Reconnecting with nature," "Regaining a sense of belonging," "Prioritising the places and people that need it the most," and "Shaping a circular industrial ecosystem and supporting life cycle thinking," all revolve around regenerative principles and the need to strike a balance between economic development, social equity, and environmental preservation. The concept of Doughnut Economics aligns seamlessly with the regenerative approach promoted by the initiative.

How to Apply the Doughnut Model to Social Economy Development?

Illustration through a best practice: Déclic en Perspectives

The integration of Doughnut Economics principles within the realm of social economy development offers a promising avenue for advancing shared objectives. Recognising the inherent alignment between Doughnut Economics and the social economy, we explore how SEOs and enterprises can leverage the Doughnut model to catalyze meaningful change.

The Doughnut Economic Action Lab (DEAL) advocates that "working with Doughnut Economics helps businesses understand the scale of transformation that is needed" (DEAL, 2022). Embracing five key "layers of design" — purpose, networks, governance, ownership, and finance — businesses and organizations can realign

their strategies and operations towards more regenerative and distributive dynamics, thereby contributing to sustainable development goals.

As a potent business tool, the Doughnut model guides enterprises through a transformative journey of (re)design, fostering a paradigm shift in mindset and culture. By unlocking new avenues for innovation, investment, and action, it enables the creation of economies and businesses that prioritize social equity and environmental stewardship.

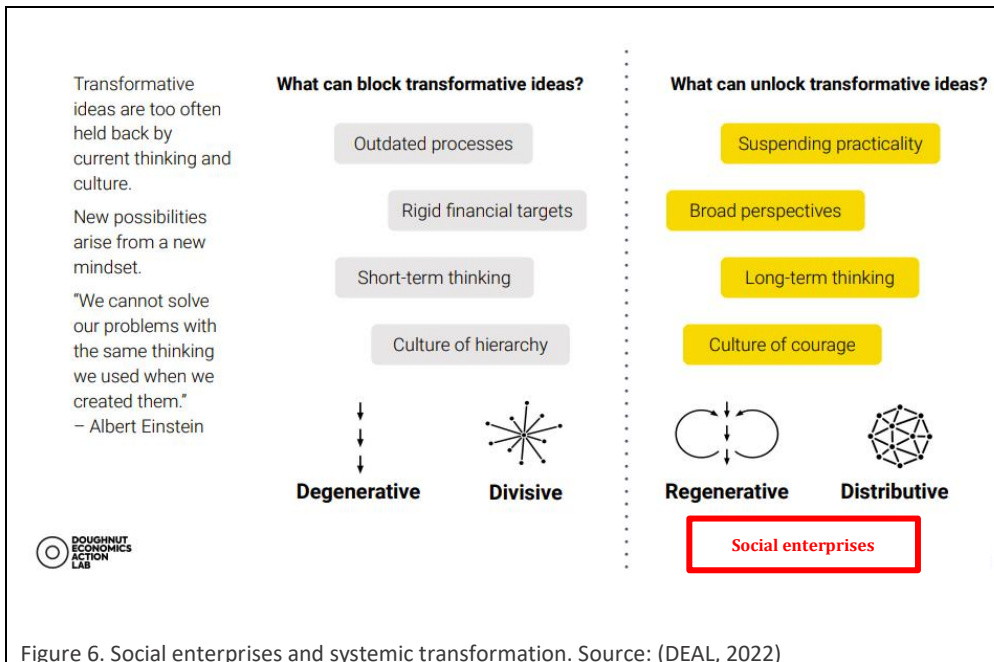


Figure 6. Social enterprises and systemic transformation. Source: (DEAL, 2022)

Therefore, the Doughnut can be a tool for social enterprises and organisations to articulate their business models and organisation design in order to maximise their positive economic and social impact. (Social Enterprise UK, 2022)

The use of this tool can be particularly beneficial in the incubation phase. In the pre-incubation phase, the use of Doughnut Economics can serve as a guiding framework

for entrepreneurs and SEOs to shape their business ideas and models. By considering the "layers of design" identified by DEAL, they can ensure that their initiatives align with the regenerative and distributive dynamics advocated by Doughnut Economics. This approach helps them lay a solid foundation for their enterprises and create a positive impact on society and environment.

The integration of Doughnut Economics principles into the pre-incubation and incubation phases of social economy development offers a promising avenue for advancing sustainable and equitable business practices.

Within this context, Déclic en Perspectives⁵, a non-profit organization, serves as a notable case study illustrating the application of Doughnut Economics principles. Déclic en Perspectives aims to foster a more just, united, and human economy by facilitating the creation of social economy business projects. Central to its approach is the utilization of the Doughnut model, a framework that encapsulates social, environmental, and economic considerations. For this reason, we chose to interview them and understand better the use they make of this tool.

In the pre-incubation phase, Déclic en Perspectives employs the Doughnut model as a pedagogical tool to empower young entrepreneurs. Déclic en Perspectives believes that if the right framework is set from the beginning of the entrepreneurial journey it will continue to be pursued afterwards. Indeed, Déclic's mission is to offer training in social entrepreneurship to young people and the Doughnut seemed to meet the needs of their training programmes. Indeed, the staff realised that their participants needed a model that allowed them to visualise both the social and environmental issues of social entrepreneurship.

So, Doughnut model gives them a basis for explaining how the two aspects - social and environmental - complement each other. It allows participants to understand if

⁵ (<https://declic-en-perspectives.be/>)

their social entrepreneurship idea fits the environmental ceiling and contributes to strengthening the social foundation, and if there are issues related to these two aspects that are urgent in their local context. Déclíc en PerspectivES is now using this model in two of their trainings: the Déclíc Day and the Déclíc Tour. The Doughnut model serves as a visual representation of the interconnectedness between social and environmental issues, guiding participants in the formulation of viable project proposals.

The Déclíc Day is a day to discover the social economy, meet committed entrepreneurs and create, in a few hours, a collective entrepreneurial project with other motivated youth. Participants are surrounded by Déclíc en PerspectivES coaches and facilitators and discover collective intelligence and shared governance techniques to develop a project idea that responds to a current social issue. During one day, participants choose a problematic question, which are normally societal issues or social problems, to which they have to find an answer through the development of a social enterprise. In this framework, after having discovered the social economy and understanding how it is different from the classical economy, the participants are in sub-groups around a common issue (for example housing, food, reuse, etc.). After having introduced the concept of social economy and before the project emerges, they are introduced to the Doughnut, to give a visual illustration of where their idea is placed. This allows participants to keep in mind both the social and environmental issues when developing the social entrepreneurship project. The Doughnut gives them both a framework and a source of inspiration to develop their idea.

The Déclíc Tour is an itinerant activity aimed at anyone who wants to get in motion around a social issue to develop an idea for a collective social economy project. This one-week activity allows participants to meet the actors in the field, to discover concretely where the existing alternatives are, and to forge links with the members

of the group whose collective intelligence and creativity will inspire participants to move forward in their journey. The objective of the Déclíc Tour is to give participants a collective experience to collectively respond to an issue. It is a unique week-long experience that aims to generate both ideas and collectives. For the Déclíc Tour, the Doughnut is used in two ways. The first is when choosing the themes that will be treated in the Déclíc Tour. This training is always developed around two or three themes related to the social economy and that represent important contemporary issues at the regional and local level. To do this, educators use several strategic documents. In 2022, one tool that has been used is the Brussels Doughnut,⁶ which highlights the most pressing social and environmental issues for the city.

In parallel with other tools like the Social Business Model Canvas⁷, the Doughnut model equips participants with a long-term framework for sustainable business development. By instilling a foundational understanding of Doughnut Economics early in the entrepreneurial journey, Déclíc en PerspectivES empowers participants to continually assess and refine their business strategies in alignment with social and environmental imperatives.

Déclíc en PerspectivES believes that by having learned to use the Doughnut early on in their journey, participants will be able to continue to do so throughout the life of their business or future entrepreneurial ventures. Not only will they be able to continue to test their assumptions and see if their idea remains true to their original issues, but the Doughnut also allows them to continually redevelop and refine their strategy. The Doughnut can also be used as a follow-up and to measure impact.

Moving into the incubation phase, the application of Doughnut Economics continues to be relevant. During this stage, businesses and organisations can

⁶ (<https://donut.brussels/en/homepage/>)

⁷ <https://bmttoolbox.net/tools/social-business-model-canvas/>

employ Doughnut Economics as a practical tool to transform their ideas into action. By adopting a new mindset and embracing transformative ideas, they can design innovative and sustainable solutions to address various challenges while contributing positively to the economy and society.

The Doughnut Design for Business tool⁸ was born as a result, offering a guiding framework for businesses interested in embracing the principles of Doughnut Economics. Developed through collaboration with over 300 businesses, the tool was shaped and refined through 22 pilot workshops co-hosted by the Doughnut Economics Action Lab and various collaborators. Its aim was to assist businesses in their transformative journey towards becoming regenerative and distributive entities. The tool's reach extended far and wide, welcoming a diverse range of participants. Start-up incubators, founders, intrapreneurs, trade unions, business schools, impact investors, and community groups were all invited to explore the possibilities within the Doughnut Economics framework.

The workshops facilitated an exploratory journey, encouraging participants to delve into the boldest and most imaginative ideas for their businesses. No idea was too audacious, and the tool urged participants not to be held back by current limitations. It encouraged them to envision discontinuing certain product lines, radically redesigning services, or even embarking on a carbon-negative production process.

The key was to redesign their businesses from the ground up, allowing for a deep transformation of their purpose, networks, governance, ownership, and finance. By doing so, they could unlock and enable a broader range of actions and investments that would align their businesses with the regenerative and distributive dynamics of the Doughnut.

⁸ <https://doughnuteconomics.org/tools/doughnut-design-for-business-core-tool>

Protecting the integrity of Doughnut Economics was paramount, and a policy was put in place to ensure that businesses communicated responsibly about their journey. Public-facing claims were limited to the redesign of their businesses, emphasising how Doughnut Economics served as inspiration for these changes. Any reference to businesses being fully within the Doughnut or endorsed by the DEAL was discouraged to avoid misrepresentation. To further support the concept and showcase real-world examples, DEAL invited businesses to submit compelling case studies. These stories were to demonstrate how transformative ideas were brought to life through the redesign of businesses. The focus was on highlighting ambitious regenerative and distributive ideas, understanding how the current design of businesses either enabled or hindered these ideas, and showcasing how the redesign of businesses unlocked new possibilities.

In this way, the Doughnut Design for Business tool became a beacon for businesses seeking to create positive change. It provided them with a framework for deep introspection and exploration, encouraging them to challenge norms and embrace bold ideas. Through this journey of discovery, businesses could pave the way for a more sustainable and equitable economy that thrived within the bounds of the Doughnut.

Déclic en PerspectivES provides a tangible example of how the Doughnut can be effectively employed in the pre-incubation phase. Through their Déclic Day and Déclic Tour activities, they introduce the Doughnut model to young entrepreneurs, helping them understand the significance of social economy and environmental considerations. Utilising the Doughnut, Déclic en PerspectivES fosters collective intelligence, shared governance, and innovative thinking among participants, facilitating the emergence of impactful social economy projects.

Conclusions

Integrating Doughnut Economics principles and tools into the social economy and enterprise sector offers promising opportunities for transformative change and positive impact. Analysing the potential applications and benefits of the Doughnut model reveals that this framework can serve as a valuable guide for businesses and organisations on their journey towards a regenerative and distributive approach.

Firstly, the Doughnut can be used as a practical business tool that enables enterprises to redesign their business models, activities, and development strategies. This transformation aligns their initiatives with the regenerative and distributive dynamics advocated by the Doughnut Economics Action Lab. By considering the five "layers of design" identified by DEAL (purpose, networks, governance, ownership, and finance), social enterprises and organisations can ensure that their endeavours contribute positively to social and environmental aspects.

The Doughnut is crucial in shaping business ideas and models for aspiring entrepreneurs and CEOs in the pre-incubation phase. It helps participants visualise the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues, allowing them to develop projects that address urgent local challenges while respecting ecological limits. This early integration of the Doughnut model empowers participants to focus on sustainability and impact throughout their entrepreneurial journey.

Moreover, the Doughnut Design for Business tool is a comprehensive framework for businesses adopting Doughnut Economics principles. Developed through extensive collaboration and pilot workshops, it encourages companies to embrace transformative ideas and rethink their purpose, networks, governance, ownership, and finance. By redesigning their businesses with a regenerative and distributive

mindset, enterprises unlock new possibilities and contribute positively to the economy and society. Throughout this transformative journey, businesses are urged to communicate their commitment to Doughnut Economics responsibly. Emphasising the inspiration drawn from the Doughnut model, they can showcase their efforts to redesign and realign their businesses with sustainable and equitable practices.

A regenerative approach, as promoted by the Doughnut model, focuses on circular and sustainable economic practices that respect both people and the planet. This principle is well-aligned with SEOs' objectives, prioritising social impact, democratic governance, and sustainability over profit maximisation and exponential growth. By integrating regenerative principles, SEOs can be role models in driving transformative change, particularly in rural spaces, by involving local communities in inclusive and bottom-up governance.

The Doughnut Economics model emphasises corporate citizenship, supporting communities, and reducing environmental stress, and aligns seamlessly with the regenerative approach promoted by the NEB. This model maps onto the three central factors of the Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) proposition, guiding organisations to operate within the "sweet spot" that ensures human well-being while respecting planetary boundaries.

Climate change presents a pressing challenge, and the regenerative nature of the Doughnut model becomes increasingly relevant in navigating climate-related risks. By embracing Doughnut's regenerative principles and integrating them into the NEB's vision, businesses and policymakers can contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive future that addresses climate challenges and promotes community well-being. SEOs, focusing on cooperation, democratic governance, and social objectives, are crucial in driving sustainable and inclusive transitions within European

communities. By fostering collaboration and collective effort, we can create a just society that meets all citizens' needs while respecting our planet's ecological limits. The integration of the Doughnut Economics model into the social economy and enterprise sector offers a robust framework for effecting positive change. This empowers entrepreneurs, businesses, and organizations to envision a world where economic activities are premised on due respect for the planet's ecological boundaries and the promotion of social well-being. By utilizing the Doughnut as a guiding tool, these entities can create businesses and economies designed to foster regenerative and distributive dynamics, thereby fostering a sustainable and just future for all.

The success of the Doughnut Design for Business tool is hinged on its emphasis on responsible communication and real-world case studies. Businesses are encouraged to transparently communicate their journey towards embracing Doughnut Economics principles, whilst case studies highlight the transformative potential of adopting regenerative and distributive business models. The integration of Doughnut Economics principles into social economy development represents a promising shift towards more sustainable and equitable business practices. Through initiatives such as *Déclic en PerspectivES* and the Doughnut Design for Business tool, businesses and organizations can harness the transformative power of Doughnut Economics to create positive social and environmental impacts.

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