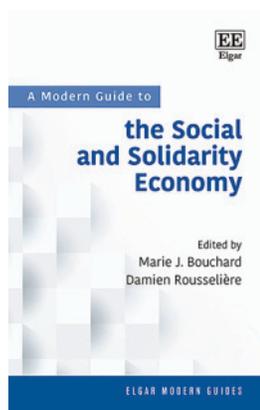


Book Review / Compte-rendu

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A Modern Guide to the Social and Solidarity Economy. Edited by Marie J. Bouchard & Damien Rousselière. Cheltenham, UK & Northampton MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2026, pp. 344. ISBN 9781035310890

A Modern Guide to the Social and Solidarity Economy consolidates decades of scholarship on the social and solidarity economy (SSE) while contributing to its conceptual and institutional stabilization. Drawing on earlier collaborative works (Bouchard & Rousselière, 2015; 2022; Yi, 2023), the authors present the SSE as a globally relevant, structured socio-economic field and scientific discipline with the potential to inform pathways toward a just socio-ecological transition.

On one hand, the volume situates SSE within contemporary global trends, including financialization, internationalization, evolving public policy regimes, and socio-ecological transformations. On the other hand, it provides conceptual and analytical tools intended to guide both scholarly inquiry and institutional practice. The authors define the SSE by adopting an inclusive “umbrella” approach encompassing related and overlapping phenomena, such as the nonprofit sector, social economy, solidarity economy, popular economy, and social entrepreneurship, while also delineating points of convergence and tension with adjacent formations, such as intentional communities, social movements, informal and indigenous organizations, and feminist economics.

Throughout the volume, the SSE is conceptualized as a value-based relational system grounded in democratic, emancipatory, and empowering relations. It is anchored in practices oriented toward working and living together and toward the reproduction of life. Its implicit critique to “capitalocentrism” (Gibson, 2026, p. 297) is evident in the emphasis on social, ecological, and communitarian instances that resist reduction to profit maximization. Within this framing, the SSE emerges as a human-natural ecosystem structurally oriented toward sustaining collective life, yet compelled to navigate uneven, often antagonistic institutional spaces that privilege growth-driven paradigms.

The book is organized around three thematic axes. Following an introductory chapter that reviews definitional debates and conceptual tensions, the first section outlines the SSE field, the second examines the development and governance of SSE organizations, and the third explores broader perspectives on SSE ecosystems and their transformative potential. Each chapter includes framing and

concluding sections that enhance coherence and accessibility. The volume is further enriched by graphical representations mapping academic production, policy developments, legal frameworks, territorial variations, organizational diversity across continents, and the radical heterogeneity of economic practices.

The first section situates the SSE within broader critiques of industrial capitalism, rejecting its reduction to nonprofit residuality or third-sector marginality. Instead, the SSE is framed as a form of institutional entrepreneurship capable of reconfiguring relations among state, market, and civil society. This historically grounded and normatively informed perspective rests on the premise that solidarity-based governance arrangements may enable more democratic and participatory forms of coordination than market-based mechanisms.

The second section turns to public policy, organizational diversity, solidarity finance, and the impact of SSE laws on organizational cooperative laws. It examines both “hard” and “soft,” as well as first- and second-generation, SSE policies; analyzes internal and external governance paradoxes; explores credit rationing, typologies of social finance institutions, and access to finance by socialization; and investigates the reciprocal effects between SSE framework laws and cooperative legislation. Collectively, these contributions deepen the analytical articulation of the SSE and emphasize its embeddedness within complex regulatory and stakeholder environments.

The third section foregrounds transformative dynamics, including the internationalization of SSE practices, the conceptualization of SSE ecosystems that integrate human and natural dimensions, and operate across four territorial scales in support of socially just and ecologically sustainable transitions. Particular attention is dedicated to illustrating the distinctive traits of Latin American experiences, which challenge Western-centric narratives through closer engagement with popular, feminist, and Indigenous traditions. The lessons learned by communal studies and the analysis of the organizational aspects of intentional communities, the embeddedness in associationism and the dialogue with feminist economics and diverse economy approaches further expand the analytical horizon, recognizing the diversity of economic practices and value regimes that exceed conventional binaries.

By conceptualizing the SSE as an ecosystem, the *Modern Guide* implicitly invites analyses that move beyond traditional sectoral classifications to adopt a transformative posture that fosters substantive economy and democracy, operating a convergence toward the commons, and pursuing a good life for all (Laville, 2026, p. 269). Specifically, the authors suggest that the SSE occupies a relational field where value, recognition, regulation, and coordination are co-produced. In this framework, SSE, far from being a “third sector,” is a dynamic component of broader inter-(eco)systemic configurations encompassing the state, the market, and international organizations. This heteronormative and often antinomic perspective (considering the focus of the other ecosystems on economic growth) helps explain why SSE organizations “paradoxically” (Spear, Le Guernic, & Cornforth, 2026, p. 96) negotiate legitimacy, resources, and influence while preserving their normative distinctiveness.

Crucially, this inter-(eco)systemic framing also has political implications. Indigenous, feminist, informal and community-based economies, historically marginalized in both state and market ecosystems, could gain structured visibility, institutional recognition, and voice through the SSE. At the same time,

the authors remain attentive to the risk that institutionalization into policy or market frameworks could dilute the transformative distinctiveness of the SSE, potentially relegating it to a compensatory or palliative role (Gibson, 2026). These normative and relational tensions ultimately testify to the conceptual vitality and multidimensional character of the SSE as presented in the collection.

In conclusion, the *Modern Guide* offers both a synthesis and a platform for future research. By situating SSE within broader inter-ecosystemic and cultural spaces, it provides conceptual tools for scholars and practitioners to engage with socioeconomic and organizational diversity and the political inclusion of historically marginalized actors, offering a comprehensive and forward-looking map of the SSE ecosystem and related concepts. At the same time, it invites readers to move beyond dichotomies of state, market, and third sector toward a more dynamic understanding of economic pluralism, while emphasizing SSE's capacity to operate as a relational, life-centred, and globally relevant ecosystem that preserves its distinct normative commitments. Among the most promising research avenues is the exploration of horizontal connections between the SSE and other non-mainstream actors, highlighting intersections between solidarity-based collective practices and economic assemblages which can generate diverse forms of value and governance.

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