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1st Transnational Capacity Building event

# Boosting digitalisation and data strategies in the social economy

## 7-8 April 2025 - Turin

**Alessandro Portinaro**

**Innovation Manager**

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# AGENDA

Who we are

Digitisation and social economy

EVOLUZIONI as case study

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# Who we are: LINKS - Leading Innovation and Knowledge for Society Foundation

- The Foundation at glance
- Our research group
- The research programme on digitization and social economy

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# THE FOUNDATION AT GLANCE


## Mission

The mission of LINKS Foundation is to lay the groundwork for the development of **innovation projects with a high socio-economic impact** by leveraging on knowledge, cutting edge technologies, and strong skills in managing projects and building prototypes. We maintain a dense network of **collaborations with local and international academic and industrial institutions,** a strategic source of knowledge and mutual multidisciplinary contamination.

**200+**
RESEARCHERS

Age **37** (mean)

**12** spoken languages

**€18 M+**
TURNOVER 2024

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# THE FOUNDATION AT GLANCE


**TOTAL PROJECTS**
**220+**

- **19%** EU PROJECTS SUCCESS RATE (Average EU 14,2%*)
- **42** PROJECTS ON TWIN TRANSITION

**ENTERPRISES (ITALY)**
**229**

- **69** RESEARCH CONTRACTS
- **50** INDUSTRIAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR FUNDED PROJECTS

**PUBLIC ADMINIST.**
**60**

- **30** RESEARCH PUBLIC TENDERS OR DIRECT CONTRACTS
- **19** PARTNERSHIPS FOR FUNDED PROJECTS

LINKS Foundation oversees technical-scientific disciplines **in digital technologies and regional development**. The technological research areas cover **artificial intelligence**, **IoT and connected systems**, **cybersecurity**, **advanced calculation systems**, **satellite systems**.

The applied research in regional development includes **cultural heritage**, **urban planning**, **climate mitigation**, **smart mobility** and **social innovation**.

## RESEARCH AREAS

AI, DATA & SPACE (ADS) | ADVANCED COMPUTING, PHOTONICS & ELECTROMAGNETICS (CPE) | CONNECTED SYSTEMS & CYBERSECURITY (CSC) | FUTURE CITIES & COMMUNITIES (FCC) | INNOVATION IN CULTURE, SOCIAL & PA (ICS)

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# OUR RESEARCH AREA

The research group Innovation in Culture, Society and Public Administration (ICS) develop strategic and innovative research projects with policy authorities and social economy organisations aiming to the improve public services and the quality of life of people. ICS coordinates the following applied research programmes:

- UNESCO and Cultural Heritage
- Wellbeing and sustainable society
- Public policies & social innovation
- Extended reality lab (XRLab)

**Together WE STAND**

The project aims to promote the well-being of the Foundation's employees by the implementation of a territorial welfare initiative, in line with the regional WE.CA.RE. strategy.
The project seeks to "expand" the territorial network by involving suppliers, the third sector.

**3P4SSE**

The project promotes the maximization of the territorial impact of the social and solidarity economy by encouraging the creation of social economy ecosystems throughout the adoption of Local Action Plans.

**INVENTA**

The project is funded by ESA. INVENTA aims to combine Extended Reality technologies with the power of the 5G network in order to create new ways to promote the cultural heritage. The project aims to improve the accessibility of cultural assets, introducing new business models and pursuing particular emphasis on the needs of vulnerable groups.

RAISE UP
gReen and digitAl Initiative addreSsEd to dropoUts' Prevention

**RAISE UP**

The RAISE-UP project aims to prevent school dropouts and promote the pillars of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) by targeting VET students and promoting the skills of educators and teachers in digitisation and the green transition. The RAISE-UP programme will be evaluated by a social impact evaluation, in order to its direct effects.

**UNESCO Lombardia**

Scientific and technical assistance aimed to support Lombardy Region to lead the application processes for World Heritage List. Moreover, LINKS realized and developed a capacity building activities to improve the monitoring of cultural heritage management and governance policies.

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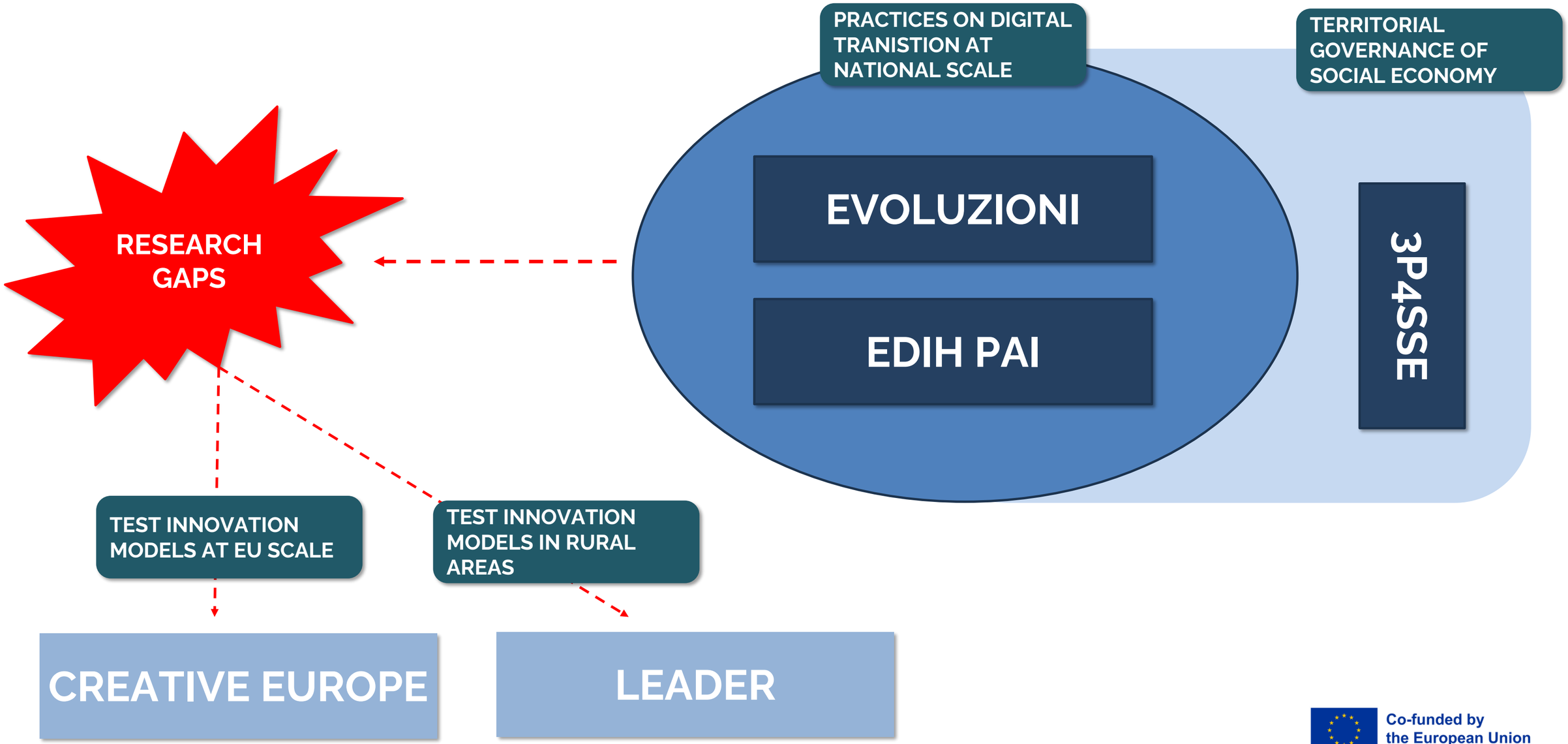
# THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON DIGITISATION OF SOCIAL ECONOMY

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# Boosting digitalisation and data strategies in the social economy

## 7-8 April 2025 - Turin

**Luca Scolfaro**

**Researcher**

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# Digitisation and social economy

- Which data to frame digital transformation in social economy at EU scale? ***Or how to characterize it?***
- How to manage the digital transformation in the context of social economy? ***Or how to govern it at territorial scale?***
- Then, who are the social economy organisations affected by digital transformation? ***Or digitization and equality: is it relevant for all SEOs and which are the lagging ones?***

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Digital and data-driven Opportunities to strengthen the Social Economy Impact

# Which data to frame digital transition?

The state of the art of quantitative/statistical information

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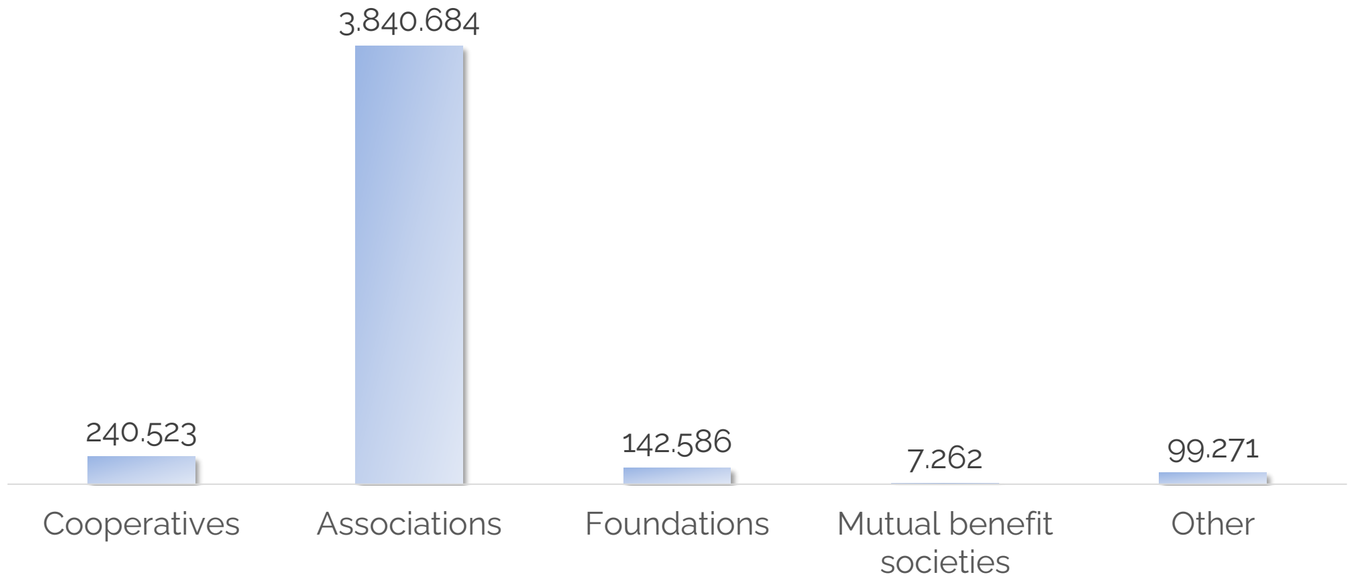
# WHICH DATA FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY AT EU SCALE?

## Approach to data

The national researchers have combined the data based on available national official statistics, applicable registers, data from networks and other sources. However, the availability and reliability of the data varies from country to country, which also affects the researchers' ability to utilize it effectively.

**Histogram: SEOs by typology in EU**




*Source: LINKS' elaboration on EURICSE 2024*

**Literature**:

European Commission: CIRIEC, Euricse, European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency, Spatial Foresight, Carini, C. et al., *Benchmarking the socio-economic performance of the EU social economy – Improving the socio-economic knowledge of the proximity and social economy ecosystem*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2826/880860

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# WHICH DATA FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY AT EU SCALE?

It is essential to understand the limitations of the available data and the reasons why data from different sources may not align perfectly.

## WARNINGS!

Limitation on aggregated data on SEOs

Limitation on data on digitisation and SEOs

Density does not automatically mean maturity

**EU top 5 in terms of number of social enterprises per 1 million inhabitants:**
**IT 1690**, HU 1620, LUX 1550, BE 1530, FR 1400

**EU bottom 5 in terms of smallest number of social enterprises per 1 million inhabitants:**
CY 22, DK 71, EE 92, GR 107, HR 128

**Literature**:

Scolfaro, L., Portinaro, A., Stumpo, B., Sforzi, J. (2024). È possibile un modello di maturità dell'economia sociale? Il caso di studio dell'Europa Centrale. XVIII Colloquio Scientifico sull'Impresa Sociale. 18-19 OTTOBRE 2024 PERUGIA

https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/3p4sse/

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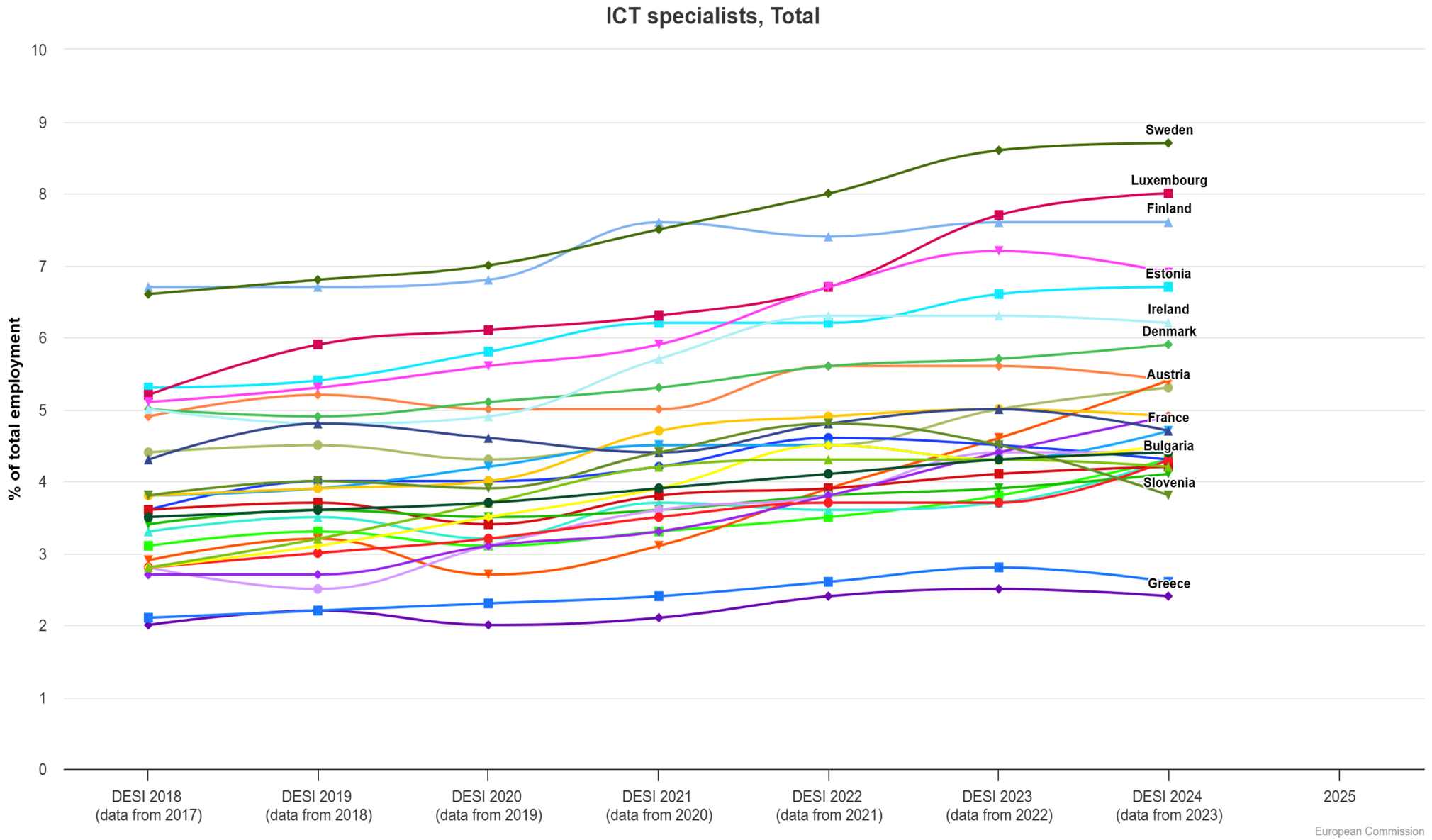
# STILL A LITTLE BIT OF QUANTITATIVE DATA ON DIGITAL TRANSITION




**Digital Economy and Society Index**:

To monitor and characterise the digital transition among EU countries

Dimensions:

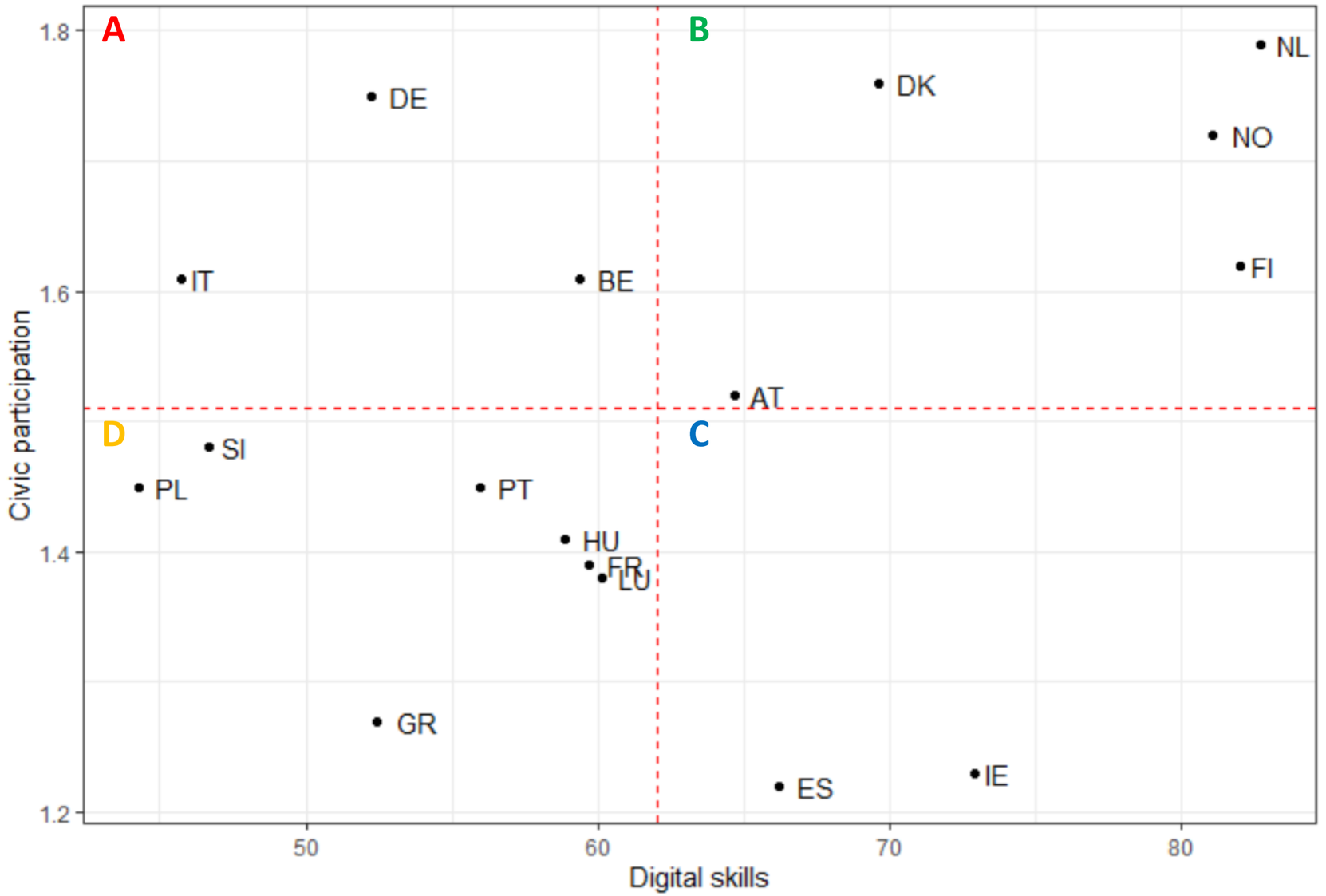
- Work force
- Education
- Enterprises
- Internet Use
- Technology

*Source: EUROSTAT (2025)*

# DIGITAL TRANSITION AND SOCIAL ECONOMY BY PROXIES

**Plot - Digital skills by civic participation**

Source: LINKS elaboration on EUROSTAT and ESS




- **Asymmetrical conditions among countries**:

Four groups of countries
**A** Low dig. skills, high participation
**B** High dig. skills, high participation
**C** High dig. skills, low participation
**D** Low dig. skills, low participation

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# Which data to frame digital transition?

No way by quantitative data? Go through qualitative!

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# GO THROUGH QUALITATIVE DATA!

### DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: FLOOW2 (NL)

FLOOW2 is one circular economy platform enabling companies, organisations, and government agencies to leverage the surplus capacity from not-exploited resources, such as equipment, waste, materials, and services. Moreover, it facilitates the transparency and exchange of employees' knowledge and skills. FLOOW2 counts 35,000 users, 30 internal sharing marketplaces.

### APP DEVICE: XENZONE (UK)

It is a social enterprise promoting the use of digital technologies to foster the accessibility to mental healthcare and to monitor remotely the evolution of emotional wellbeing. Currently, Xenzone is exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence to develop new models for preventive mental health care and early intervention.

### BIG DATA: CENTREPOINT (UK)

CENTREPOINT can become a key player in tackling the problem of homelessness. Especially, they provide Policy Authorities with precious information collected on the web, complementing the data gap of national official databases, and making it available to competent authorities.

### FUNDRAISING: SOCIALTECHNO (IT)

SocialTechno oversees the donation platform TechSoup Italia. It relates to an innovative programme that allows Third Sector organizations to obtain donations or sell digital products and services.

# BEST PRACTICES!

**Literature**:

Gagliardi D., Psarra F., Wintjes R., Trendafili K., Pineda Mendoza J., Haaland K., Turkeli S., Giotitsas C., Pazaitis A., Niglia F., Cox D., (2020), New Technologies and Digitisation: Opportunities and Challenges for the Social Economy and Social Enterprises. European Commission, Executive Agency for SMEs

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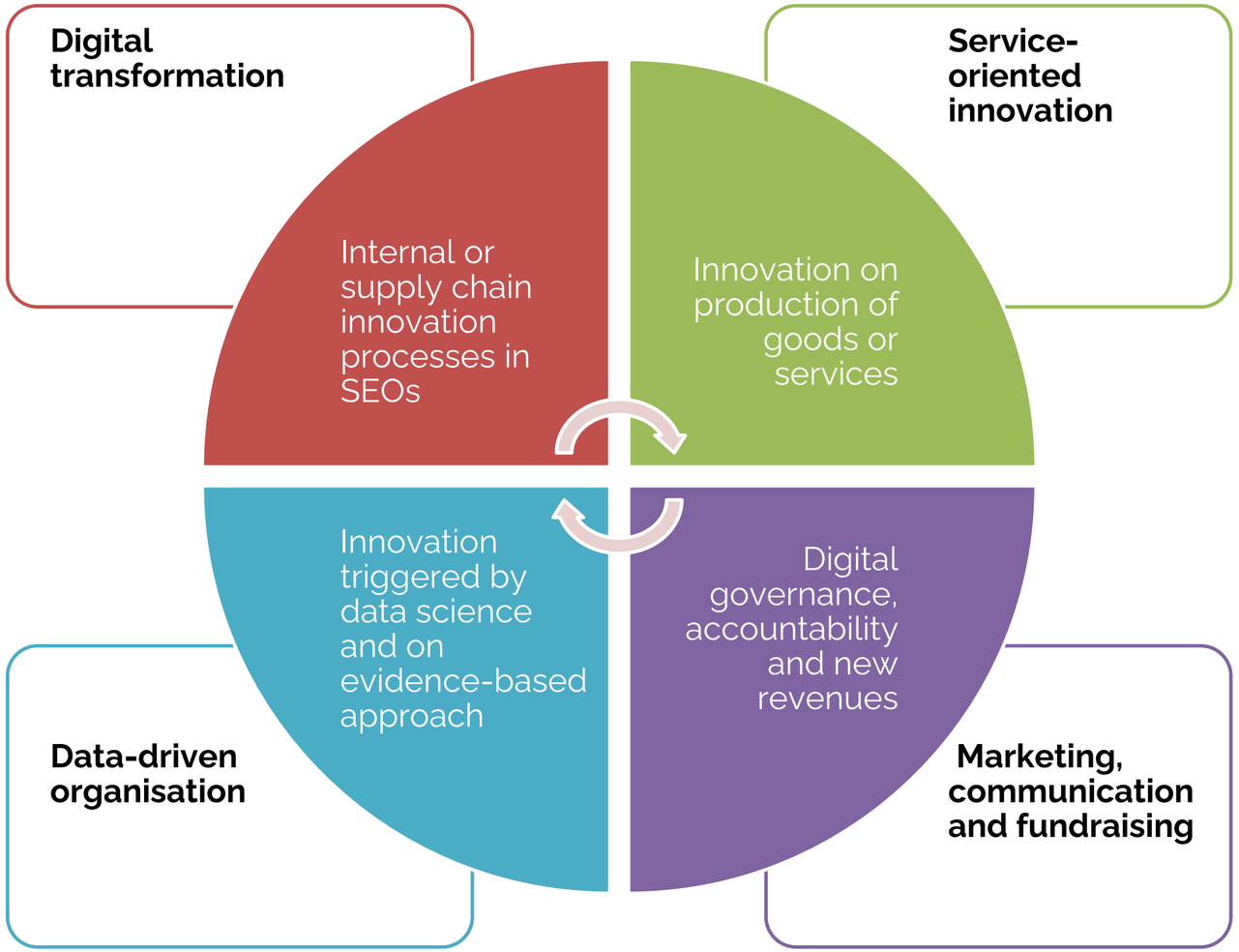
# A PROPOSAL OF CHARACTERISATION OF DIGITAL TRANSITION IN SOCIAL ECONOMY

## The four areas of digitisation among SEOs




*Source: LINKS (2021)*

The characterization of digital transition in social economy encompasses four areas. The transformation processes driven by the digital transition can take on either an **incremental** or a **radical nature**.

- The process is characterized by a **series of events** and/or **innovations** that occur by:
  - Modernising and enhancing **organizational efficiency**;
  - **Integrating new processes**;
  - **Designing new solutions**, adopting a digital business model, and improving the effectiveness of interventions;

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# How to manage the digital transformation in the context of social economy?

Which social economy ecosystems?

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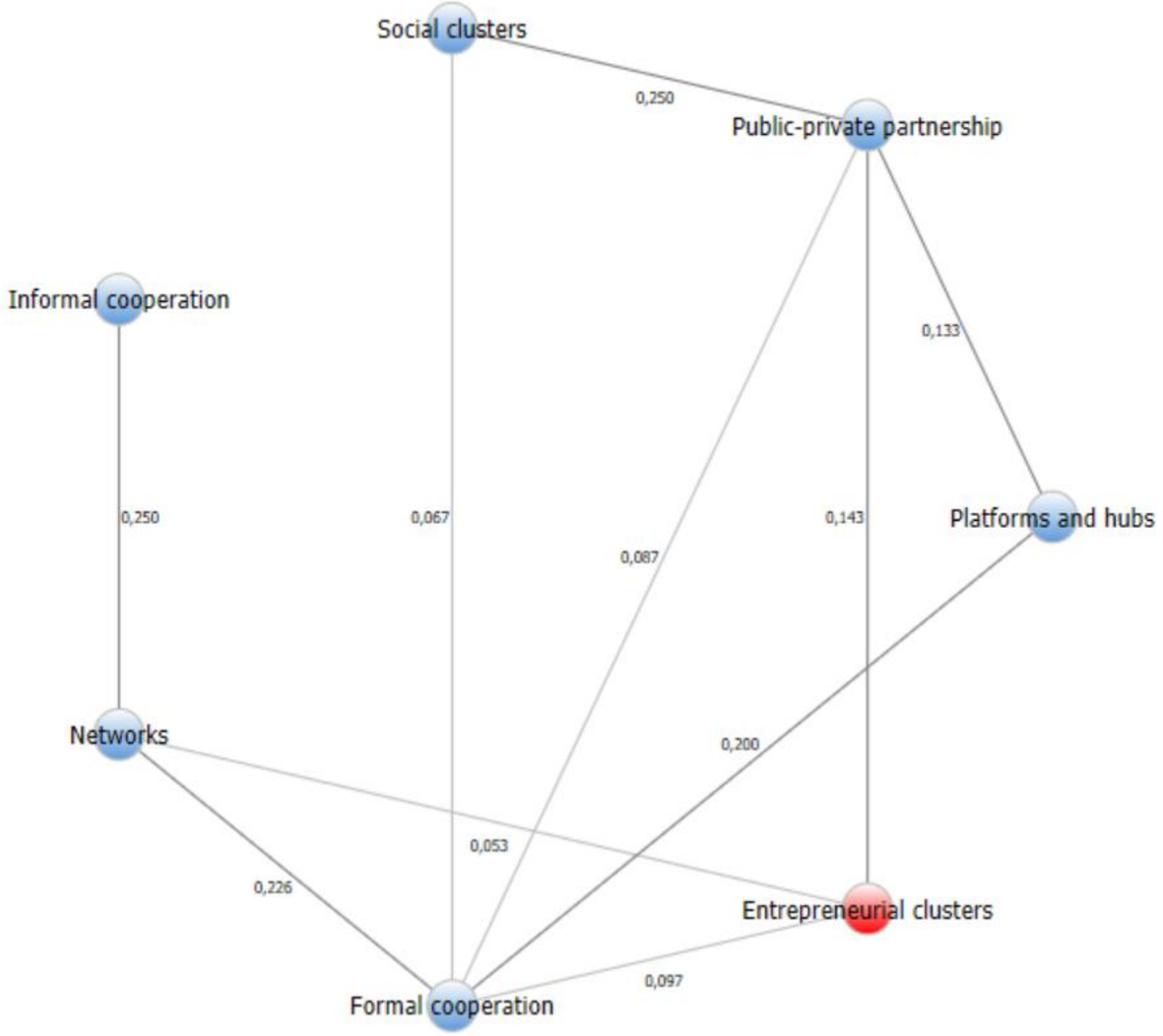
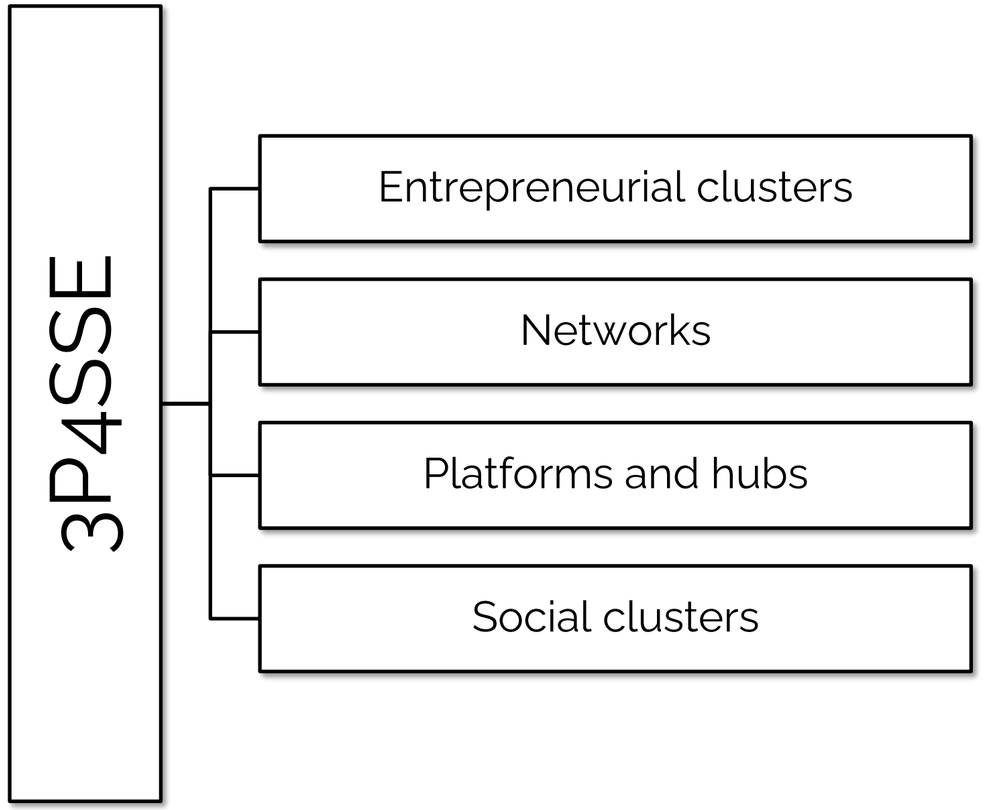
# WHICH TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

**Link analysis between typology of SE ecosystems and institutional settings.**




*Source: LINKS (2023)*

**Typology of social economy ecosystems.**




*Source: LINKS (2023)*

https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/3p4sse/

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# WHICH TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

PLATFORMS AND HUBS


European Digital and Innovation Hub

NETWORKS


Evoluzioni

**Literature**

European Commission, (2021). Clusters of Social and Ecological Innovation in the European Union, perspectives and experiences. Report GECES sub-group the role of clusters and similar forms of business cooperation in fostering the development of social economy.

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# Who are the social economy organisations affected by digital transformation?

Which social economy organisations?

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## Digital transition and social economy – Data from Italy

| Evoluzioni scope and landscape | | *Informal social economy (?)* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **SEOs claiming capacity building** | **SEOs claiming investment** | **The digital transition is not relevant for our business** | **Typology** |
| 37% | 36% | 43% | Associations |
| 34% | 31% | 42% | Cooperatives |
| 30% | 34% | 43% | Foundations |
| 40% | 32% | 47% | Other legal forms |

*Source: LINKS' elaboration on ISTAT (2024)*

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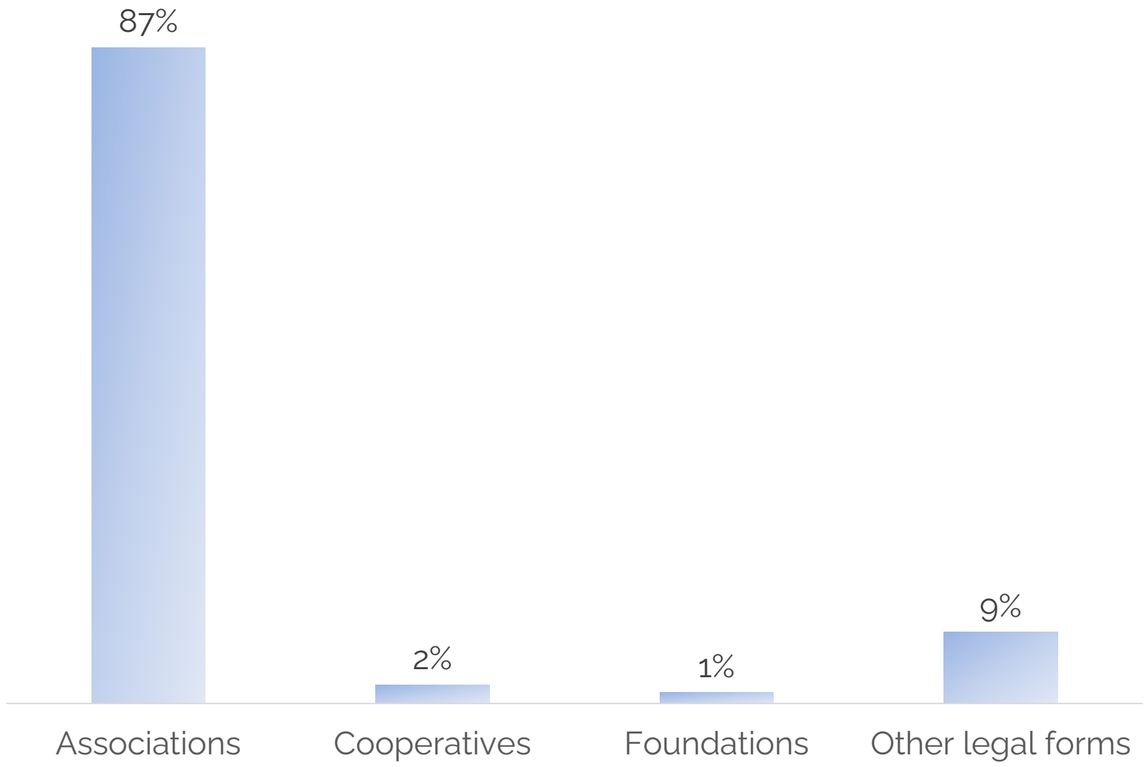
# WHICH SOCIAL ECONOMY ORGANISATIONS?

## Digital transition and social economy – Data from Italy

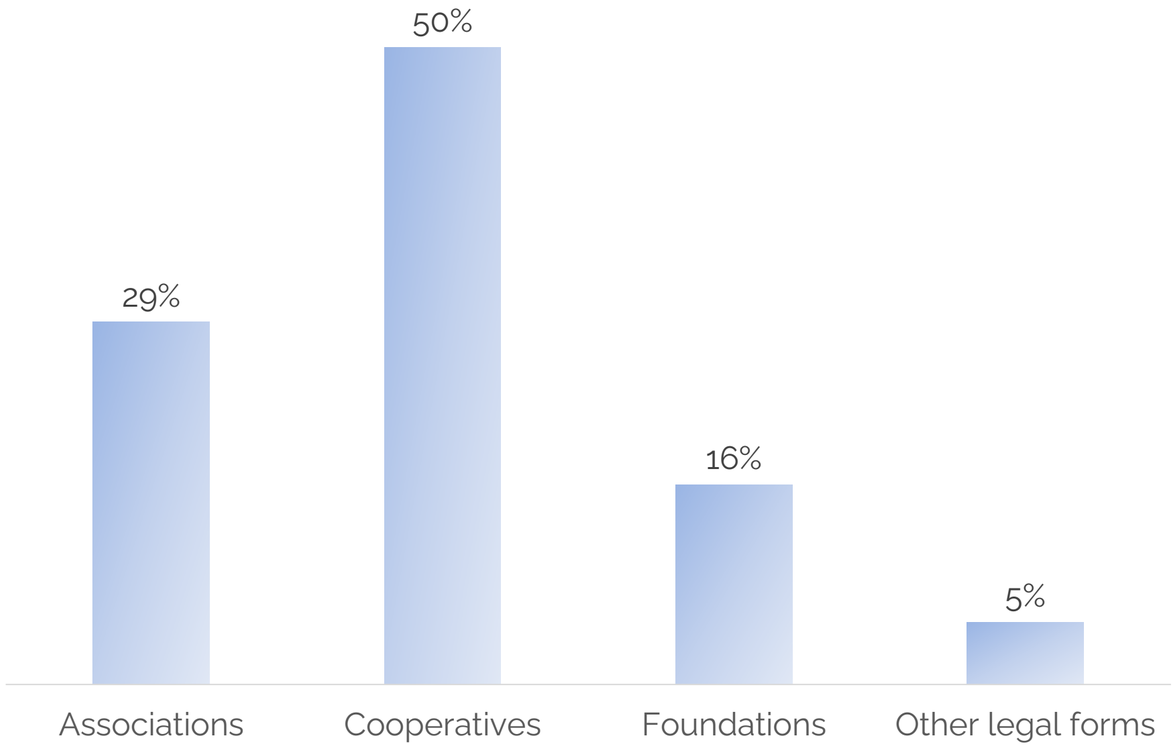
## Whom?

### Italy: sample of the national context




*Source: ISTAT 2024*

### “Evoluzioni”: sample of the applicants




*Source Evoluzioni 2023*

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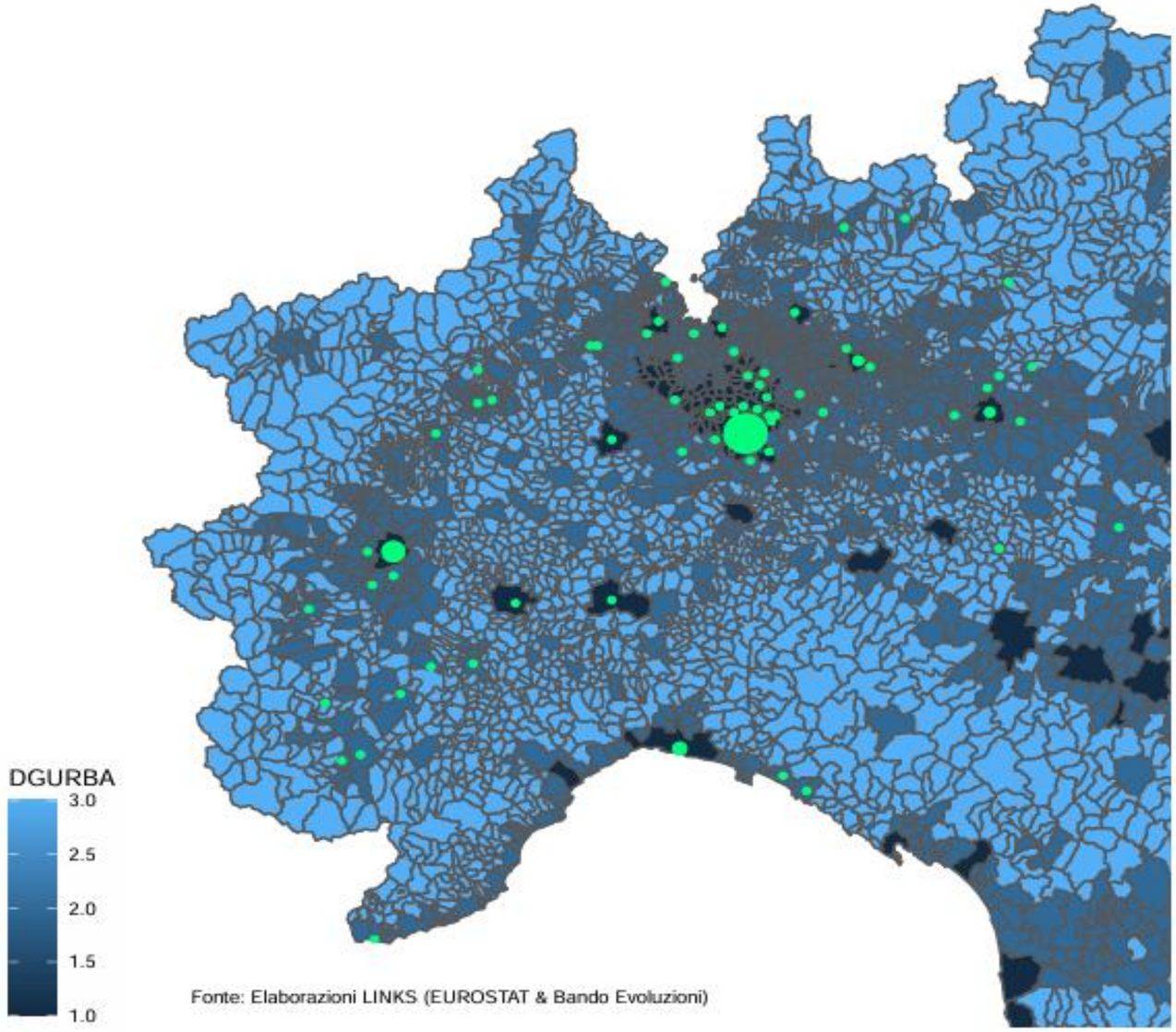
## WHICH SOCIAL ECONOMY ORGANISATIONS?

**Digital transition and social economy – Data from Italy**

# Where?

This map represents the amount/density of georeferenced applications by DEGURBA.

*Digitisation not for all.*

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# Boosting digitalisation and data strategies in the social economy

## 7-8 April 2025 - Turin

**Alessandro Portinaro**

**Innovation Manager**

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# EDIH - PAI
# Public Administration Intelligence

Illustration of one best practice

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## EDIH Network in Europe


European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) are digital innovation centres established under the European Digital Europe programme to support the digital transformation of businesses and public administrations through a network of technological proximity covering all EU Member States, facilitating access to digital skills, resources and infrastructure.

IN EUROPE: **228 EDIHs** spread across **85% of European regions**, covering almost **90% of the EU's working population**.
151 funded by Digital Europe, 77 supported by national or regional funds.

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# EDIH PAI at a glance

PAI (Public Administration Intelligence) is a node of the EDIH network.
**The only EDIH** project which is **targeting Public Administrations (PAs)**, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), **Cooperatives and Social Enterprises** that provide services to citizens.

Its objective is to **foster digital transformation** by equipping project beneficiaries with technologies to improve both internal management flows and processes (**internal technological skills**) and the management of **external interactions** (with users and beneficiaries).

.

EDIH PAI enhances **co-planning and co-programming between public administrations and cooperatives or social enterprises (SEOs)** in the management of territorial public services, promoting an active role as foreseen by the italian reform of the third sector.

The PAI project offers access to advanced technologies such as:

- **artificial intelligence** (AI)
- **high performance computing** (HPC)
- **cybersecurity**, **blockchain** and tech for good for **e-participation** of citizens.

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# EDIH PAI - partnerhip

The network consists of 18 partners, including **public and private ICT providers**, a **university**, a **research center**, a Digital Innovation Hub (**DIH**), a **social sector training agency**, an **independent financial advisor** and **developers of digital solutions** for the social economy.

In addition, the network is **connected to the social economy in Europe** and globally through the cooperation with DIESIS, a second level network of social organisations.


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# EDIH PAI - services

EDIH PAI proposes **5 macro-services**, which are selected and overlapped according to the characteristics of the client:

1. **Digital Maturity Assessment** (DMA) - mandatory
2. Testing and experimentation (**Test Before Invest**)
3. **Digital skills**
4. **Financing** (access to finance)
5. **Networking**

The path can be customised according to the level of digital maturity of the company or PA and specific needs.

Each SEO can choose the types of services that are most useful for achieving its goals.

In addition to the services, EDIH PAI promotes awareness-raising activities on the importance of digital transformation, taking advantage of its widespread presence in the Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions.

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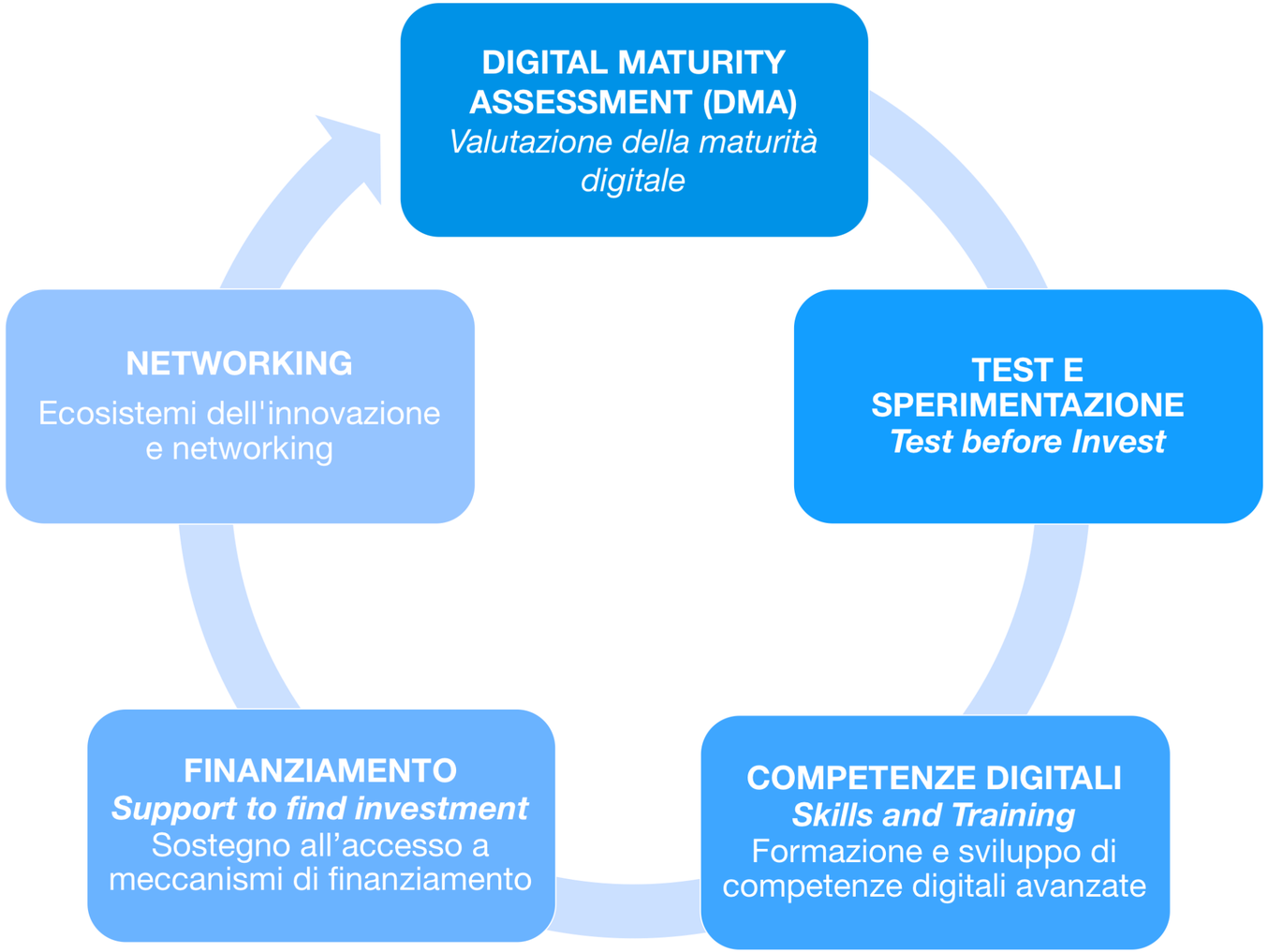
# EDIH PAI – Digital transformation path

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# EDIH PAI – The different steps

Mandatory
**Digital Maturity Assessment**

State of the art

Digitalisation path
Co-design

- TEST and EXPERIMENTATION *Test before invest*
- DIGITAL SKILLS *Skills and Training*
- ACCESS TO FINANCE *Support to find investment*
- NETWORKING

**Final Digital Maturity Assessment**
Evaluate improvements and efficiency

The counsellor and DMA facilitator accompanies the beneficiary through this phase.

Services can be combined and provided by more than one partner in the network
NOTE: it is advisable to create a digitalisation path that includes more than one stage.

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# EVOLUZIONI

Illustration of one best practice

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# The rationale and fundamental of Evoluzioni

The background, create a supportive community around SEOs, objectives and digital areas.

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**Challenges in Digital Transformation within the social economy**

In Italy, Third Sector faces significant challenges in adopting digitalization processes. According to the 2020 report by Italia Non-Profit, only 17% of respondents consider themselves "ready" to utilize software and hardware to enhance service delivery through in-kind resources, while merely 12% have access to capital investments for tangible and intangible infrastructure development.

**Internal Disparities in Digitalization Readiness**

There is considerable heterogeneity among Social Economy Organisations (SEOs) in their capacity to engage with digital transformation. While some organizations demonstrate the ability to integrate digital innovation in response to the rapid technological transition, a substantial portion of the sector remains at risk of being marginalized in this process.

**Strategic Focus on Network Building and Inclusive Digitalization**

To ensure a more equitable digital transition, it is essential to foster collaboration among SEOs. While digitally advanced entities can readily adapt to innovation-driven changes, many organizations require a "compensatory" approach to prevent further digital exclusion. This necessitates targeted interventions and support mechanisms to bridge the digital divide within the sector.

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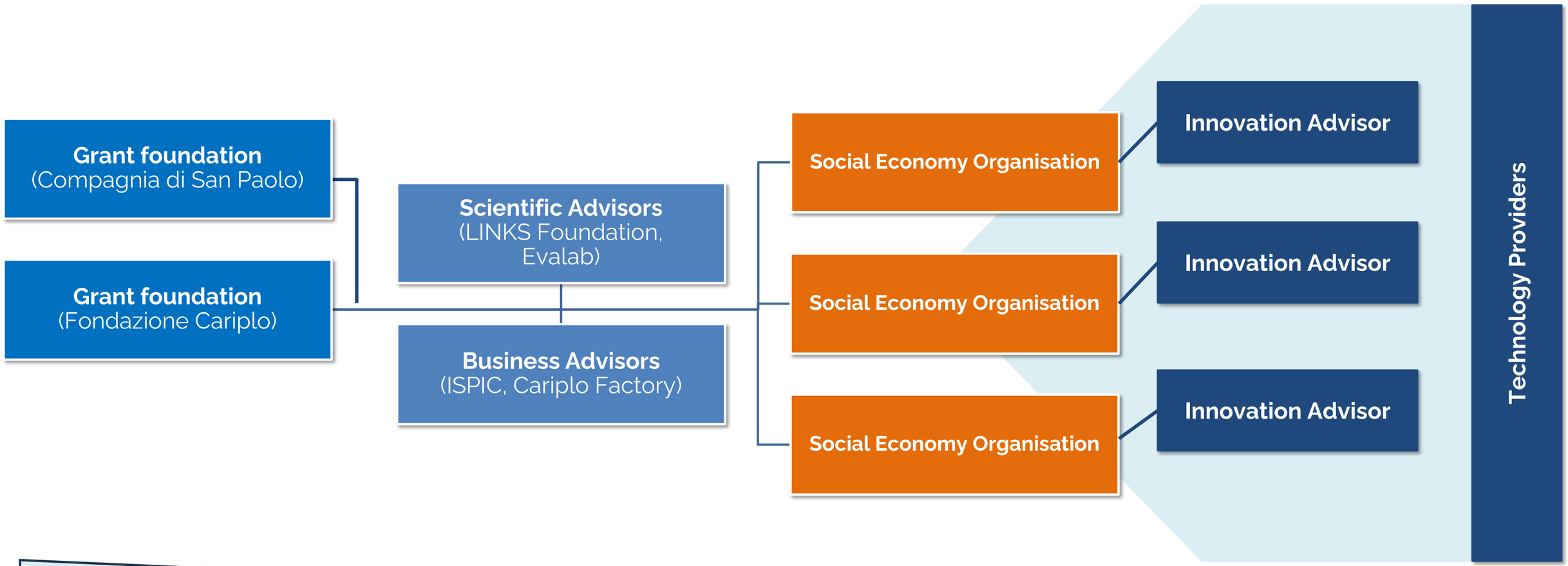
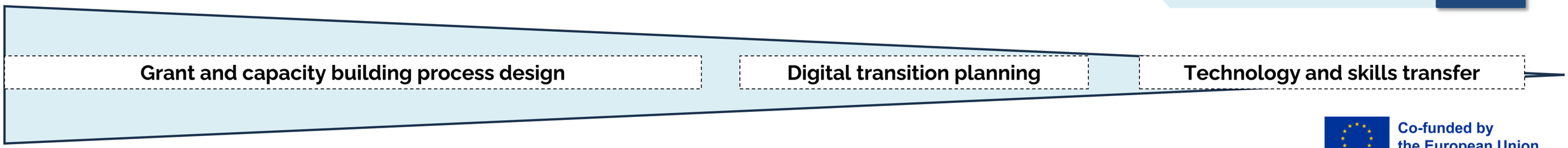
# EVOLUZIONI AS NETWORK

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# OBJECTIVES


- Promote strategic planning through the definition of a multi-year digital innovation plan, integrated into the overall strategy of the entity.
- Support the executive design and implementation of multi-year innovation plans.
- Foster the development of a culture of innovation and the enhancement of digital skills.
- Increase the expected impact and social value of the entity's actions on the well-being of users, workers, and the local community.
- Promote the hybridization of skills, communication, and collaboration between the social economy and technological ecosystems.

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# FOUR AREAS OF DIGITAL TRANSITION

## Digital transformation of processes

## Product or service innovation

## Data-driven organisation

## Marketing, communication and fundraising

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# DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF PROCESSES

The digital transformation of internal and supply chain processes necessarily entails the adoption of new organizational models, guided by the principle of efficiency. In turn, the enhancement of Social Economy Organisations (SEOs) promotes a greater capacity to respond to the increasing social demand and a heightened resilience in the face of market shocks.

The digital transformation of processes is essential for organizations seeking to maintain competitiveness in the current context. The adoption of new organizational models is not merely a matter of technological modernization; it also requires a comprehensive review of existing structures and operational methodologies. This process is driven by the objective of optimizing resource utilization, improving response times, and streamlining daily operations.

The efficiency gains achieved by SEOs not only facilitate a more agile and responsive management approach, but also enable these organizations to better address the growing social needs. Through the implementation of digital tools such as management software, data analytics, and integrated communication systems, SEOs can enhance their performance, respond promptly to user needs, and adapt to market changes.

Moreover, a more efficient organization is inherently more resilient. It is better equipped to face market shocks, such as economic crises or unforeseen events, due to its ability to swiftly adjust strategies and reduce costs without compromising the quality of services provided. Thus, digital transformation is not merely a technological investment; it is a strategic lever for ensuring long-term sustainability and innovation.

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# PRODUCT OR SERVICE INNOVATIONS

Designing with direct impacts on users is fundamentally linked to the quality of one's operations, with the objective of enhancing the final outcomes for the target audience. This approach necessitates the adoption of a framework that views technologies as direct vehicles for socially significant impacts, aiming to improve or augment the accessibility of existing services in an inclusive manner.

Such applications may encompass the development of algorithms designed to assist individuals with disabilities in selecting destinations, as well as the integration of technologies aimed at supporting therapies for children with autism or facilitating their cognitive advancement. Additionally, gaming initiatives may be employed to foster the inclusion of migrants. It is noteworthy to mention, purely as examples, how various social enterprises are utilizing digital technologies to: (i) enhance access to mental health pathways by providing users with opportunities to engage in online peer communities, supervised by a team of experts; (ii) offer remote consultations focused on emotional wellness; and (iii) deliver mobile services (apps) that enable individuals to monitor their own conditions.

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# DATA DRIVEN ORGANISATION

Engaging in evidence-based practice necessitates the establishment of a horizon that is as quantifiable and measurable as possible. This entails that organizations seeking to operate based on evidence must access a comprehensive range of information by developing databases, fostering interoperability among existing data systems, and employing data science techniques for effective data processing.

In this regard, it is crucial to underscore the potential of Big Data in addressing significant social challenges. Official databases may not always be readily available or complete concerning specific issues; thus, collecting informational resources from online sources can facilitate the reconstruction of a more holistic understanding. This enhanced perspective can more effectively mobilize volunteers, social enterprises, and public administrations.

Furthermore, Big Data can serve as an invaluable asset in examining risk behaviours among young people, as it allows for the establishment of comparative parameters that quantify the magnitude of phenomena such as violence and alcohol abuse within specific contexts.

It is also imperative that discussions surrounding data and technology include considerations of data management and transparency. The application of blockchain technology, for instance, has the potential to empower the third sector by enhancing the transparency of its operations to external stakeholders.

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# MARKETING, COMMUNICATION AND FUNDRAISING

The lack of development in digital competencies can adversely affect fundraising activities related to project financing, but it can also significantly hinder the ability to generate resources through digital channels.

Conversely, the digital landscape has connected third sector organizations (TSOs) more closely with their respective communities, including citizens and stakeholders. This transformation has redefined communication strategies and fundraising efforts (such as crowdfunding) into a complex and innovative approach to engaging social networks.

Consequently, organizations may adopt, for example, digital governance processes with their relevant social groups to design and implement interventions, as well as to establish accountability measures that enhance the transparency of their operations.

In essence, the digital transition in this domain assumes critical significance in the processes of co-creation and the generation of shared value in social action.

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# How to manage the digital transition at organizational scale

The several phases of digital transition at organisationl scale

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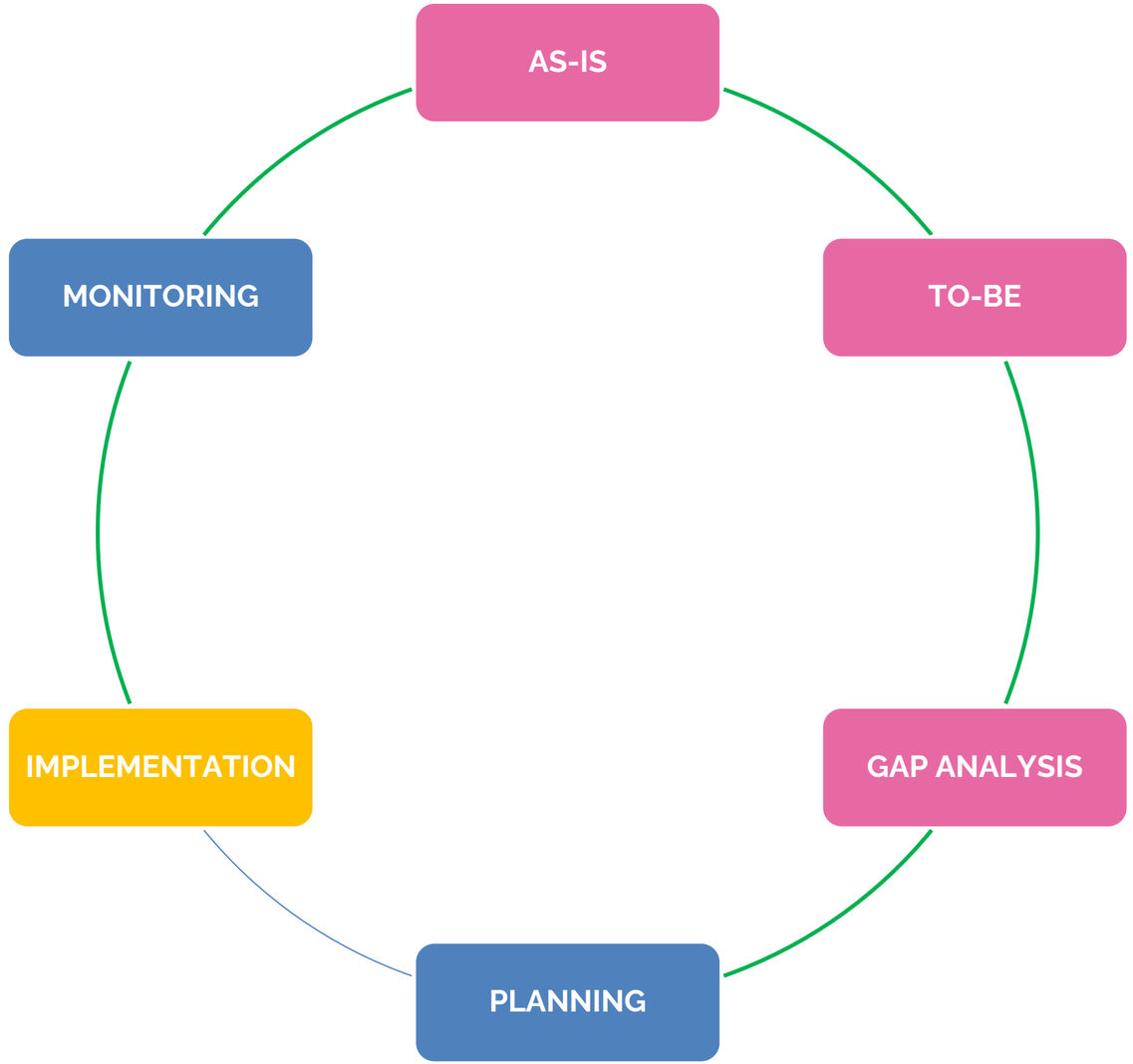
# HOW TO MANAGE A DIGITAL ROADMAP AMONG SEOs

Digital transition requires a flexible approach that can implement continuous refinement actions to ensure the system operates optimally.

A digital transition roadmap is based on a methodology that employs a circular approach and is organized into six steps.

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# THE DIGITAL ROADMAP AMONG SEOs

**Webinar** to introduce the guidelines

Guidellnes on **organisational and internal analysis.**

Guidelines on **Innovation Plan.**


Guidelines on **executive project.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **ORGANISATIONAL ANALYSIS** | Analysis of the organisational structure in its entirety, the mechanisms of functioning, and the relationships that govern it. | **ASSESSMENT** |
| **INNOVATION PLAN** | The plan is based on the organisational analysis, and defines the digital strategy of the entity over the medium to long term (24-48 months) | **STRATEGY** |
| **EXECUTIVE PROJECT** | The project aims at activating and operationalising the innovation plan and finalizing all of its components (12-18 months) | **EXECUTION** |

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# ORGANISATIONAL ANALYSIS


The distance that separates the current situation (As-is) from the desired future state (To-be). This step will generate the definition of actions aimed at realizing the digital strategy.

It describes the current situation of the organization, focusing on the key processes and highlighting those that will be included in the Multi-Year Innovation Plan.

This phase allows for:

- Assessing the current state of efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.
- Mapping the areas involved in the digitization process.
- Uncovering critical issues and growth opportunities for defining digital actions based on identified needs.

The final outcome must include information that is functional to mapping the current situation. This should encompass not only qualitative aspects but also quantitative indicators and measurable parameters.

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# THE INNOVATION PLAN: HOW TO FRAME THE ROADMAP


**SMART**:
- **Specific**: Clear and specific;
- **Measurable**: Quantifiable and capable of measuring the progress of activities;
- **Attainable**: Implementable;
- **Realistic**: Realistic, meaning achievable within the organization's capacity to reach the desired outcome;
- **Time-bound**: Planned within a specific time frame, identified with precise deadlines.


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# THE EXECUTIVE PROJECT: HOW TO PUT IN PRACTICE

It is the document aimed at activating and operationalizing the Multi-Year Innovation Plan and fine-tuning all its components. The activities, deliverables, timelines, methods, and necessary management, human, technological, and financial resources for the activation of the projects and actions that will facilitate the achievement of strategic objectives will be defined.

12-18 Months

The description of a WORK PLAN containing the project deliverables, respective responsibilities, phases along with the associated activities, methods, and timelines for implementation;

The identification of the PROJECT MANAGER and the WORKING GROUP, specifying the professional roles and the responsibilities of each individual within the organization;

The indication of the TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS that will be acquired, specifying the level of modularity that enables the acquisition of subsequent functionalities and the interoperability with technologies already operational within the entity, including the specification of technology suppliers;

The TRAINING PATHS and initiatives for enhancing digital competencies (mandatory) that ensure the full utilization of technologies by individuals working within the organization and potentially by other individuals within their relevant ecosystem, specifying the characteristics of the training paths (topics, duration of modules, number of training hours, individuals involved);

The detailed ECONOMIC PLAN of the project, which includes costs related to human resources and collaborations, the purchase of technological solutions and services, licenses, training costs, and any other associated expenses.

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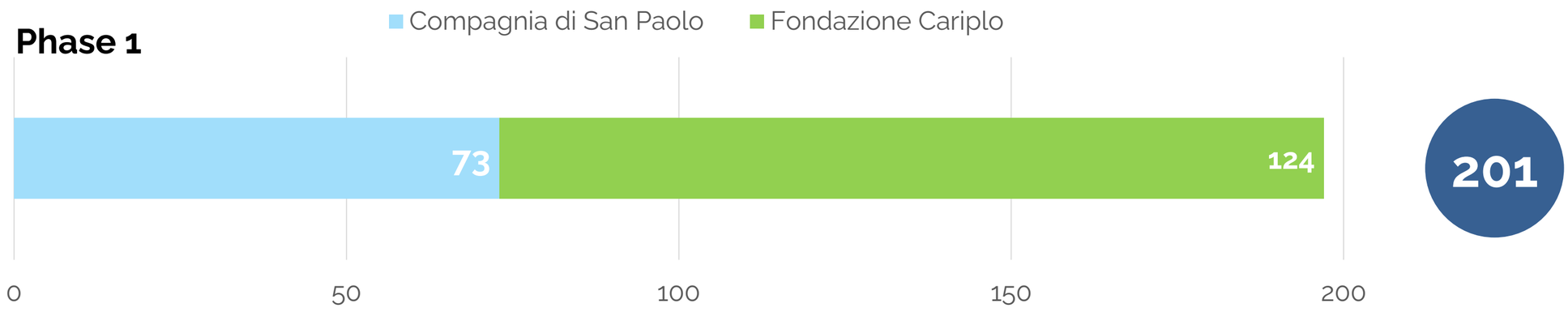
# RESULTS




| Region | Applicants | | Selected phase 1 | | | Selected phase 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % (on 80) | % (on Region) | Freq. | % (on 80) | % (on Region) |
| Lombardia | 123 | 63% | 40 | 50% | 33% | 11 | 48% | 28% |
| Piemonte | 59 | 29% | 29 | 36% | 47% | 8 | 35% | 28% |
| Liguria | 15 | 8% | 11 | 14% | 73% | 4 | 17% | 36% |
| **Total*** | **197** | **100%** | **80** | **100%** | | **23** | **100%** | |

*Total admitted application (196)

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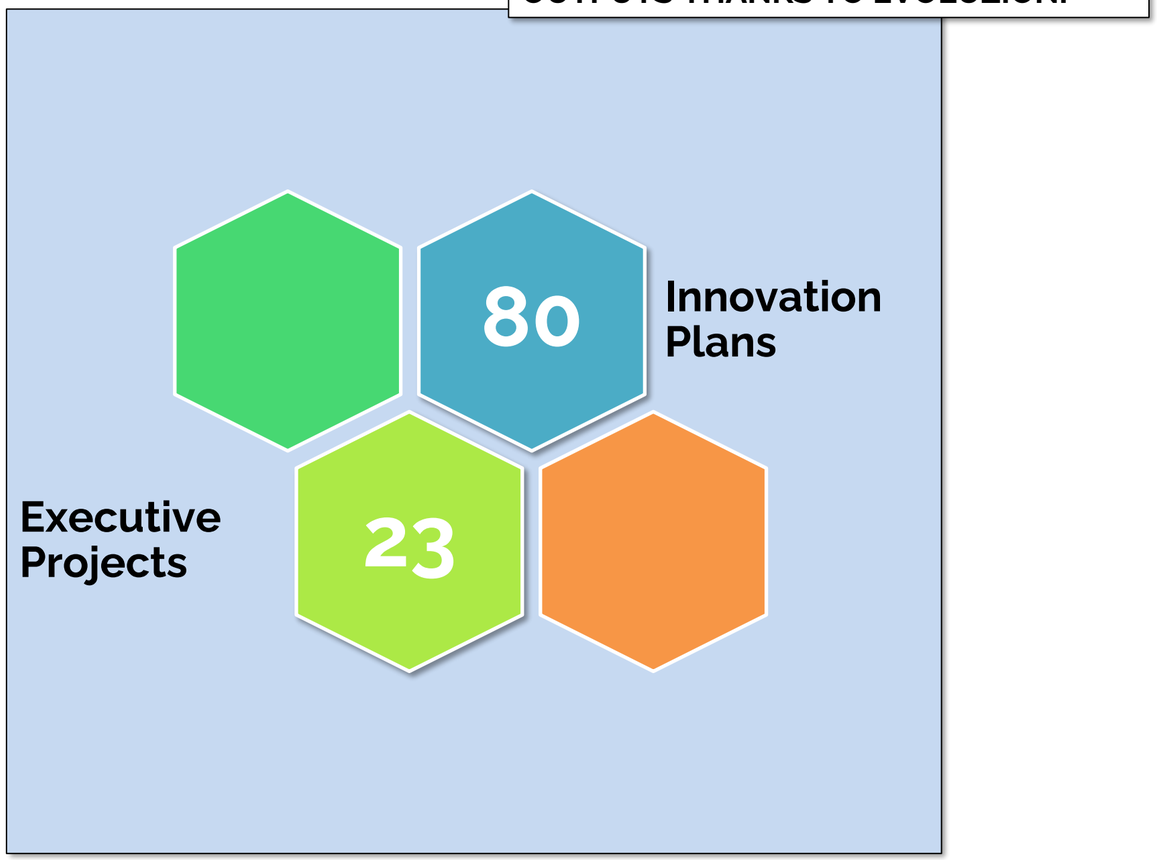
# RESULTS

## OUTPUTS THANKS TO EVOLUZIONI




## PROMOTING THE SOCIAL ECONOMY GROWTH

In 17 executive projects new digital-oriented hires were registered

In 11 executive projects new digital areas were generated within the organisations

In 8 executive projects new social-oriented services were developed

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# Thank you!

## Contacts:

alessandro.portinaro@linksfoundation.com

luca.scolfaro@linksfoundation.com

doimpact.eu

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