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Social Economy and Public Private Partnerships: Analysis, Drivers, and Prospects from the Local Level for Territorial Development

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Abstract: Public private partnerships (PPPs) have traditionally foster collaboration between public administrations and private actors in terms of efficiency and risk sharing. Recent approaches emphasize aligning PPPs with sustainability and social value goals. This study explores PPPs with social economy entities at the local level and its impact to the territory by examining cases in energy, housing, and digitalization in the region of Valencian Community (Spain). The research identifies drivers, benefits, and obstacles in its implementation, showcasing pioneering cases as models for sustainable growth and achieving a green and digital transition. It highlights positive territorial impacts, the promotion of social innovation and the alignment with Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: public private partnership (PPP); social economy; local level; territorial development; case study; public policy

1 Introduction

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have traditionally served as a means for public administrations to channel projects that benefit both involved partners and promote public interest (Alsina and González 2019). Despite multiple definitions and approaches to the term PPP (Roehrich, Lewis, and George 2014), we can understand them as cooperative institutional arrangements between public and private actors (Hodge and Greve 2007). Traditional advantages associated with PPPs include lower costs, risk-sharing, improved technical and economic feasibility, leading to greater

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efficiency and equity in each of the projects (Wang et al. 2018). In recent times, new approaches to PPPs are emerging, advocating that these collaborations should not only seek economic profitability and risk diversification but be also tied to sustainability and social value (Hueskes, Verhoest, and Block 2017; Nayak 2019).

Following this same line, from an institutional perspective, there is a push for public private collaboration not only with traditional companies but also through the involvement of social economy (SE) entities (European Comission 2021, 2022; Fajardo, Merino, and Vaño 2019), as the lack of collaboration between the Administration and social enterprises has been one of the main limitations of the system (Alsina and González 2019). However, despite this institutional support, certain rigidities are detected in practice when it comes to carrying out these collaborations in public procurement at the local and regional levels (Catala and Chaves 2022; Montesinos 2016).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as a universal framework that should underpin the formulation and implementation of any public policy, precisely call for the promotion of effective partnerships in the public-private sphere, leveraging experience and resource acquisition strategies [Goal 17.17] (UN 2015). The 2030 Agenda focuses on meeting the needs of people and social objectives over financial goals, much like social economy does (Chaves and Monzon 2012). Precisely for it being aware that SE entities are considered the engine of economic change as their interests align with the SDGs and the goals of public administrations, the doors are increasingly opening to develop PPPs with these entities (ILO 2022; UNTFSSE 2019).

Social economy has a direct impact on well-being, equity, employment, and territorial development (Chaves-Avila and Savall-Morera 2019; Utting 2015); and it is characterized by making contributions in the context of crises and facing global challenges. Its resilience, ability to stabilize and regulate the system, capacity to connect with its environment, and engage with affected populations are the main features of the social economy in these contexts (Chaves-Avila and Soler 2023; Itçaina and Richez-Battesti 2018). Recently, SE is called upon to address three major global challenges: energy, urban and digital transition (European Comission 2022, United Nations 2023). Its transformative capacity and adaptability to the territory, coupled with metagovernance approach being adopted by regional and local public administrations (Bastida, Vaquero García, and Vázquez Taín 2023) , have led to generate social innovations in these emerging sectors and collaboration between the public and private spheres.

The Valencian Community region in Spain stands out as a strong ecosystem for promoting social economy (Catala, Savall, and Chaves-Avila 2023). Its municipalities, often supported by the regional government, are starting to implement public policies to promote social economy (Catala and Chaves 2022). Even if PPPs with social economy entities are still scarce, certain Valencian municipalities and regional bodies are pioneering partnerships in strategic sectors such as energy, housing, and digitalization. These cases serve as a paradigmatic precedent for other local entities, with the collaboration of regional institutions, to work towards sustainable growth and the green and digital transition, enhancing a new model of public governance.

This study aims to be a first exploration of PPPs with social economy entities at the local level. Specifically, it seeks to provide empirical evidence to the academic debate on the scope of public-private collaboration by analyzing various successful cases in the fields of energy, housing, and digitalization with social economy entities. Although literature has studied new paradigms in the concept of PPPs, there is a limited contribution in the realm of PPPs with social economy entities, especially at the subnational level. Therefore, it remains a research gap on this topic. This study aims to address this gap by examining Valencian Community cases to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the main partnerships with social economy entities in the fields of energy, housing, and digitalization in the Valencian Community? (2) What are the main drivers, benefits, and obstacles of conducting local level PPPs with social economy organizations? (3) To what extent do PPPs with social economy entities at the local level impact the territory and the development of the SDGs?

To do so, first, the theoretical perspectives on the concept of PPPs, local-level PPPs, and those involving social economy are determined. Then, through case studies, various examples of partnerships in the Valencian region are presented in the results, and finally, the main conclusions are detailed.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 New Approaches for the PPPs Conceptualization

The term PPPs has generated a prolific debate in the literature over the years (Wang et al. 2018), and there has not always been a clear consensus on its characteristics (Wettenhall 2003). From a traditional perspective, PPPs are characterized by incorporating private financing into the public sector and providing advantages to all stakeholders (Zimmermann 1996). However, in recent times, criticisms associated with this model have started to emerge (Bertelli, Mele, and Whitford 2020; Hodge and Greve 2017; Willems and Van Dooren 2016).

According to Nayak (2019), the conception of PPPs has traditionally been driven by profit maximization and risk socialization within a market logic, both in terms of public policies and scientific literature. This author argues that it is necessary to reconceptualize the perspective of PPPs from a focus on human development and social well-being.

Other authors have also started to conceive of PPPs from different conceptual approaches. Willems and Van Dooren (2016) advocate for repoliticizing PPPs from a social and discursive point of view. Stadtler (2016) illustrates and sheds light on the concept of "*PPP for development*" based on the analytical framework of Austin and Seitanidi (2012) at macro, meso, and micro levels. This view of partnerships highlights a social and public interest aspect that public administrations should address. Hueskes, Verhoest, and Block (2017) argue that the sustainability scope in PPPs is currently limited, and governments should promote this type of projects. A strong commitment to sustainability is incompatible with traditional PPPs. Vecchi and Casalini (2019) study the phenomenon of Social Impact Bonds (SIB) as a new form of PPPs with a differentiating element: innovation and a focus on generating social value.

The recent socio-economic reality post-Covid-19 has also revealed new pathways for PPPs (Casady and Baxter 2022; Seddighi et al. 2021). Collaborations in the healthcare sector have been crucial in a context of global crisis and open up the adoption of new practices in the future (Vecchi, Cusumano, and Boyer 2020). However, the primary goal in these collaborations should be the achievement of results that benefit society and the economy as a whole, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and should function as a means to promote innovation rather than primarily as a means to expedite the quick execution of numerous investments (Vecchi, Tanese, and Osborne 2022).

PPPs have also been studied from the perspective of New Public Governance (NPG), understood as the *"new dominant regime of public policy implementation and service delivery, with an emphasis on the development of sustainable public policies and public services and the governance of international relationships"* (Osborne 2010:414). Casady and Baxter (2022) argue that PPPs function as a tool of NPG and that this new governance model requires a broader vision of PPPs different from the traditional one. Specifically, they study how PPP institutional maturity (legitimacy, trust, and capacity) affects the development of NPG. For other authors like Subirats (2015), framing PPPs within the context of NPG allows these collaborations to acquire new dimensions such as transparency, competitiveness, trust among actors, and improved evaluation.

In summary, and in line with Vecchi, Tanese, and Osborne (2022), there are three key points for understanding these new forms of PPPs, which are essential in subsequent case analyses: first, an alignment between the need for the public sector to identify more sustainable, innovative and effective solutions and the willingness of the private sector to invest in this direction. Second, the need for PPPs to add value to both individual citizens and society through collaborative public ventures, considering that cooperation between actors within an ecosystem is necessary to achieve social value creation; and third, the need for them to respond to more sophisticated approaches to risk governance.

2.2 PPPs in the Provision of Public Services and Infrastructures at the Local Level

In the current context of public administration and local resource management, collaboration between the public and private sector is emerging as a crucial element to address complex challenges and promote sustainable development at the local level (Maria). However, this collaboration is not a recent phenomenon, as there is prolific literature from various countries in the form of case studies analyzing such partnerships and their impact at the local level. These partnerships increase employment opportunities, especially in depressed areas (Watson 1995). The most common areas or sectors where these partnerships occur are in water supply, solid waste management, and the provision of various types of infrastructure.

Despite PPPs being a widespread practice at the local level, some authors argue that collaborations at this level entail certain risks and disadvantages, such as uncontrollable circumstances, the absence of market forces, inadequate expertise, the high cost of contract enforcement, and barriers to transparency (Bloomfield 2006). Others, like Carpintero and Helby Petersen (2016), point out the risk of a lack of coordination between different levels of public administrations, which hinders the development of certain projects by local governments and causes delays in the construction of infrastructure. Xiong et al. (2023) determine that the fiscal gap at the local level has a direct impact on the development of PPPs and generates risk aversion on the part of private entities.

Literature has also studied the main drivers that promote PPPs with municipalities. Among the key drivers are demand risk allocation in the private sector of the partnership (Athias 2013), debt and electoral competition (Kopańska and Asinski 2019), the consolidation and track record of the private sector of the partnership (Zhang et al. 2019), and the density of firms in the territory and the social capital endowment of the area (Mazzola et al. 2019).

In the social economy sector, initiatives of local PPPs have been less studied than collaborations with traditional private companies. In Japan, it has been shown that the presence of social economy organizations positively influences the decisions of local governments to execute PPPs and subcontract them to provide public services. However, it is recommended that these entities have financial and management capacity to develop strong and sustainable relationships with municipalities (Okuyama, Ishida, and Yamauchi 2010). Other studies have addressed issues such as sustainability in PPPs (Wang et al. 2022) or civil participation in PPPs through the development of a new social management (Shi 2017), but not from a local perspective. The limited literature emphasizes the importance of researching and addressing the concept of how social economy can play a fundamental role in collaboration with local governments for the provision of public services and infrastructure.

2.3 PPPs Through Social Economy Entities

Social economy entities encompass enterprises, organizations and other entities that are engaged in economic, social and environmental activities to serve the collective and/or general interests (United Nations 2023); and contribute to economic, social, and political development. Among their various functions related to improving the public sector is addressing allocation failures in the provision of goods and services, whether private or public (Chaves and Monzon 2012). This contribution to the creation of goods and services generates public value, and one mechanism for delivering it are public-private collaborations with social economy entities, especially at a time when PPPs have taken on new dimensions, as previously mentioned.

European legislation has built a strong argument for why cooperatives and other social economy entities are more suitable for collaborating with public administrations than traditional businesses (Fajardo, Merino, and Vaño 2019). Firstly, because the cooperative sector and the public sector share the goal of serving the general and community interest, especially when it comes to social cooperatives (European Comission 2004). Secondly, since the users of cooperative services are also their members, the direct satisfaction of needs is ensured, especially for groups who would not have access to these goods and services if cooperatives did not provide them due to economic inefficiency (European Comission 2011). Thirdly, cooperatives contribute to key European objectives such as sustainable growth, quality employment, social cohesion and innovation, local and regional development, and environmental protection. Once again, there is a convergence of goals between public administrations and cooperatives (EU Council 2015).

Recently, in some of the most relevant global pronouncements on the social economy, the suitability of fostering these types of partnerships has been highlighted. Specifically, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSE) argues that *"the partnerships with international organizations and diverse local stakeholders from different sectors for the financing, production, trade, and consumption of SSE goods and services are a crucial driver to scale up SSE"* (UNTFSSE 2019: 2). Additionally, the International Labour Organization (ILO) advocates for *"strengthening the interaction and partnerships between SSE entities and public administrations at all levels, including local and regional"* (ILO 2022: 4). Finally, the United Nations General Assembly (UN) has recognized that the SE can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and their adaptation to the local context through the creation of local alliances and networks and the promotion of participatory governance (United Nations 2023: 2).

The significant references in the political agenda of the social economy to public-private partnerships contrast with the limited existing scientific literature. From an academic perspective, Cojocaru and Sfetcu (2013) provide a preliminary view of PPPs with the social economy and determine that it should be promoted to be replicable in other regions. Other authors, such as (Flores, Perogil, and Barroso 2023) , study how cooperatives can improve territorial governance through a local PPP. Furthermore, from an exploratory approach, (Maria) have tackled, from a primarily legal perspective, the forms of conducting PPPs in Spain, highlighting the most suitable formulas for development with social economy entities, shedding light on how these collaborations occur with supported employment centers, insertion companies, the third sector of social action, and labor societies. Most of these collaborations are still in their early stages.

In this context, the central aim of our research is to explore the role of PPPs with entities from the social economy in the local sphere, emphasizing the benefits of these collaborations, the barriers and obstacles to their development, and their connection to the territory and to SDGs. We will do this based on paradigmatic case studies in the energy, housing, and digitalization fields in the Valencian Community.

3 Research Methodology

To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative methodology involving multiple case studies was chosen. The selection of multiple cases allows for cross-case comparisons to enhance the robustness of findings (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2003) and increase confidence in the generalizability of the findings (Galloway and Sheridan 1994).

The case study selection strategy was twofold. Firstly, a focus group was conducted (Table 1) with experts in the field of social economy and public private partnership to determine innovative strategic sectors with high future development prospects at the local level. Regarding the criteria for selecting sectors, the experts'

Table 1: Focus group session.

Characteristics	
Date	November 2021
Duration	2 h 30 min
Mode	Online
Participants	– Technician in local administration with expertise in social economy. – Technical director of the housing cooperatives federation. – Researcher in social economy. – Worker in a social economy entity dynamising projects and promoting local development.

Source: own creation.

reflections centered on major current social challenges in which the social economy plays or could play a significant role. Based on this, energy, digital, and urban transitions were considered key areas.

Housing, digitalization, energy, and culture were considered as potential fields to delve into. After preselecting these four sectors, secondary data were collected and analyzed through document searches and reports in these fields with the objective of reinforcing the idea that the selected sectors are indeed strategic sectors, as well as to gather information on potential case studies (European Commission 2022; Fajardo, Merino, and Vaño 2019; Sapiens Energia 2022). Difficulty in finding strictly local PPPs in all sectors opened the possibility of considering partnerships involving both regional and local government. The cultural sector was excluded due to its lack of development, which implies that, in practice, there are no successful cases of public-private collaboration within this sector (Catala and Chaves 2022).

As a result, the chosen strategic sectors for analysis were energy, housing, and digitalization, for several reasons. Firstly, these sectors are emerging, and the social economy has begun to offer competitive responses in recent years as alternatives to traditional models. Secondly, ensuring access to affordable, safe, sustainable, and modern energy (SDG 7), stimulating technological innovation (SDG 9), and providing access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing for all (SDG 11) constitute global challenges on which public administrations have put their focus on and are calling for contributions to achieve a green and digital transition by developing sustainable practices (European Commission 2022). Thirdly, the European Union, through the Next Generation funds, aims to capitalize on projects and programs related to energy transition and digitalization, and local governments will be significant beneficiaries (FEMP 2022).

The research is conducted in the Valencian Community region in Spain. This territory is known for its strong cooperative tradition and the socioeconomic impact that social economy entities have in the region. In the Valencian region, social economy represents 8.2 % of the employed population and 12.9 % of GDP (Catala et al. 2024; Catala, Savall, and Chaves-Avila 2023). The region has legislation that promotes the development of PPPs with the social economy. Specifically, Article 111.1 g) of the recent modified Law on Cooperatives establishes the duty of the Generalitat Valenciana to *"promote public-private collaboration through cooperatives by encouraging the participation of cooperatives in the management of public services."* (Valencian Community Cooperative Law 2023). Additionally, the support and promotion plan for cooperatives in the Valencian Community, FENT COOPERATIVES 2021–2022, has selected public-private collaboration as one of its strategic lines, with the aim of *"extending public-private collaboration between cooperatives and local administrations and the Generalitat Valenciana, either directly or through its instrumental public sector, in various areas of cooperative activity"* (Alba et al. 2021).

Through the focus group, and after considering aspects such as innovation possibilities in the sector, the level of PPP development, and the degree of participation of social economy entities, four case studies were selected across three sectors. The selection of a few case studies in this research is justified, firstly, because they are pioneering cases that represent unique and advanced experiences in the study context. The scarcity of similar examples adds scientific relevance, as research on these innovative cases provides valuable empirical foundations for replication in future projects. Furthermore, their novel and referential nature makes them paradigmatic cases, aligned with the principles of practical guides such as the "Base Viva Guide" (Fajardo, Merino, and Vaño 2019) and the "Guide on Energy Communities" (Sapiens Energia 2022). These documents highlight the importance of studying exemplary cases that can serve as models for implementation in other contexts.

The case studies data collection involved conducting four semi-structured interviews along with the collection of documentary information (Matton and Salem 1995). The protocol followed for the interview process consisted of several steps: first, the objective of the interview and its type were defined; then, the interview script was designed (it can be found in Appendix I). Once the questions were agreed upon, the selection criterion for each interview was established as the person with the most responsibility and knowledge in each case study. In this scenario, the interviews were conducted with the General Manager of Enercoop (I1),[1] the President of Sapiens

Table 2: Case study description.

Case study	Comptem	Racó de Mar	BlockchainFUE	Ágora collaborative housing
Strategic sector	Energy		Digitalization	Housing
Municipality/ regional organism	Crevillent local council	Canet d'En Berenguer local council	Alicante ISTEC public regional firm	Alicante. EVHA public regional firm
SE entity	San Francisco de Asis electric cooperative (enercoop group)	Racó de Mar association	BlockchainFUE cooperative	Vida Sostenible cooperative; Rabasa Comunidad Colaborativa cooperative
PPP tipology	Renewable energy community. Energy model	Renewable energy community. Space model	Public administration firm as cooperative partner	Land transfer and granting of public financial guarantees and endorsements

Source: own creation.

1 Interviewee 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, respectively. This notation is used in the results section to transcribe sentences from the interviewees.

Energía (I2), the Director of the BlockchainFUE Technical Committee (I3), and the President, Vice President, and General Coordinator of Rabasa Comunidad Colaborativa cooperative (I4, I5, I6). Three of the interviews were conducted between October 15 and November 15 of 2022, and the last one in October 2023. The input from the interviewees was incorporated to enhance the accuracy of the interpretations (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Table 2 provides a summary of the case studies and their key characteristics. It is important to note that the consulted documents provide a broader understanding of the sector relevant to our case study. This contextual information not only helps to frame the case more effectively but also facilitates the interview process by allowing us to identify drivers, advantages, and obstacles.

4 Results

4.1 Energy Sector Experiences

In the energy sector, the focus of local PPPs revolves mainly around renewable and community energy projects. Several factors have fueled the demand for a decentralized, clean, democratic, and digital energy model (Vaño 2023). These factors include the pandemic and the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, which highlighted a large degree of energy dependence. Additionally, there is a need to mitigate climate change by adopting a sustainable energy model.

In the Valencian Community, there are "*numerous initiatives*" (I2) involving community energy collaborations with municipalities, and regional and local authorities are encouraging their public promotion through guides and events (Sapiens Energia 2022). For the analysis, two well-known and pioneering PPP cases have been selected: the Comptem Energy Communities in the municipality of Crevillent and Racó de Mar in Canet d'en Berenguer. Both cases have significant differences in their approach. In the case of Racó de Mar, it is an *energy PPP model*, meaning that the exchange that occurs between the public and private entities involves the energy itself, and the energy community is an association. Meanwhile, in the case of Comptem, the PPP consists of a *spatial model* (Sapiens Energia 2022), where the provision is made through the assignment of municipal lands, operated by a cooperative.

In Racó de Mar, the initiative originates from the municipality, which makes an initial investment in 80 kWp solar panel above the municipal swimming pool and applies for a grant from the regional government. The municipality secures 50 % of the grant for the infrastructure and chooses to keep 50 % of the energy for its own use, sharing the remaining 50 % with households that are members of the energy community, acting as an aggregator. Currently, it distributes 1 kWp per family associated with the installation. The Energy Community comprises 40 families, and there is *"a waiting list to join, but there is not enough energy to supply potential new members*" (I2). In terms of the counterparty by the Energy Community to the municipality and the town, it involves providing 2 hours per week of public attention and co-organizing six annual informational events on energy transition and self-consumption. This PPP has evolved with the collaboration of Sapiens Energía, a cooperative that initiated the creation of the Racó de Mar energy community as an association. Sapiens Energía has provided three additional installations that the energy community can operate, thus supplying more households. However, these installations are private, and there is no intervention by the municipality.

In the case of Comptem, a PPP is established between the municipality of Crevillent and the Enercoop group, whose parent company is the Cooperative Eléctrica Benéfica de San Francisco de Asís. The municipality tendered the lease of the roofs of 21 public buildings (15,000 m2) for a duration of 75 years. It is an operation *"that involves more paperwork than if only one or two plots were transferred but ensures the future of the energy community. It is very secure for the concessionaire*" (I1). Currently, five of the spaces have been occupied in two years, and "*they are progressing well*" (I1). Each installation costs the Energy Community around €100,000, and the total roof occupancy horizon is 2030. In the case of the municipality, it can participate as a user in some of the production facilities as an equal partner, although not in all of them. However, its main role is to be *"the facilitator of the rooftops and a significant generator of trust in the model"* (I1). As a counterpart, the Energy Community has installed billboards or informational panels in the municipality, displaying both municipal information and energy community information in equal proportion. Regarding financing, the Energy Community received regional (IVACE- Instituto Valenciano de Competitividad Empresarial), national (IDEA-Instituto para la Diversificación y Ahorro de la Energía), and European (Horizon Europe) subsidies, and its financial partner for infrastructure investments is a credit cooperative.

The role of the local public sector in both cases is different: in Canet, the municipality is a promoter, while in Crevillent, it is a facilitator. Both roles come with strengths and weaknesses. In the "energy model", the municipality, as the owner, can unilaterally terminate the agreement in case of non-compliance, but it may face challenges in finding a suitable promoting group. In contrast, in the "space model", it offers opportunities to municipalities that cannot make significant budgetary efforts and reduces much of the administrative bureaucracy. However, they have a high dependence on the awarding entity (Sapiens Energia 2022).

4.2 Digital Sector Experiences

In the digital sector, the focus of local and regional PPPs is based on promoting initiatives that enhance the digitization of processes, services, and activities in public administrations, promoting the digital transformation of social economy entities, and facilitating the creation of digital cooperatives and third sector entities, through new financing avenues (Gomez-Alvarez 2023).

The case study in this field is pioneering because it is the first cooperative to offer a public blockchain technology network, called BlockChainFUE, established in June 2020. Its origin was based on the organization of a hackathon by the BAES research group at the University of Alicante (Applied Blockchain to Businesses), where a contest was held to address various challenges using this technology. One of the ideas that emerged was the creation of a blockchain network. However, "*the BAES group couldn't materialize it because it was a research group, and a responsible entity was needed to be the network owner and service provider*" (I3). This led to the creation of the cooperative, which acts as the network's owner and is conceived as a service cooperative, with its members being the network's users.

The PPP that occurs involves the inclusion of a public company as a member of the cooperative, which acts as an instrumentality of the regional administration. ISTEC is a public sector company of the Valencian government with the goal of facilitating digital transformation by providing services in the communications, digital identity, and enabling technology sectors. It is a founding member of the cooperative and benefits from the network like any other member, as the cooperative does not differentiate in rights and obligations between its public and private members. The cooperative also has other public partners, such as the Chamber of Commerce of Alicante or the College of Property Registrars, the latter being "*semi-public*" (I3). ISTEC, as a member of the cooperative, provides blockchain network services to other regional government bodies dependent on it: "*The cooperative does not inquire about who is using the network. For example, ISTEC is providing services to the entire Generalitat Valenciana, but the cooperative does not know which specific department it serves. ISTEC acts as a bridge between the regional administration and the cooperative*" (I3).

One of the unique aspects of this partnership is its exit plan, as the cooperative assures ISTEC that if it ceases to provide network services, the data will be stored for 5 years, allowing for migration, while "*normally if a network goes down now, everything is lost*" (I3). Additionally, the cooperative requires a mix of both public and private members to instill trust in the network.

In terms of financing, the cooperative received the one grant from the Valencian government to draft its bylaws, valued at €600, but "*it is financed through the contributions of the members and the unpaid work of the research group.*" (I3) All cooperative members made an initial contribution of €1000 and contribute monthly maintenance fees. ISTEC and all public members of the cooperative make the same contributions as other members. Furthermore, *"as users, you pay for network usage. So the Generalitat Valenciana will pay more because it uses it more. Payments are based on the cooperative activity"* (I3).

At the local level, this technology can be used to implement Smart city services and infrastructure. Municipalities can operate in two ways: "*either become cooperative members and provide network services to their residents and businesses in that city, or become members and use it for themselves to certify their own documentation.*" (I3) Additionally, municipalities can indirectly benefit from the network. For example, in the case of BlockchainFUE, a cooperative member has created a citizen card system called the Avilés Digital Identity Platform (PIDA) for the Asturian municipality located in Spain. In this case, even though the municipality does not have direct participation, it benefits from the advantages of operating within the network.

4.3 Housing Sector Experiences

In the housing sector, the focus of local PPPs is on the creation of social housing. Housing policies in Spain have traditionally been oriented toward promoting protected housing for sale, which has not led to the development of a public residential estate. However, in recent times, policies to increase public-cooperative housing from the perspective of land access, improved financing, and model dissemination are being favored (Maria).

From the regional government of the Valencian Community, there has been an effort to promote and highlight housing policies oriented towards public-private collaboration with social economy entities, such as the drafting of the Base Viva Guide or the Social Transformation Lab for PPPs (Fajardo, Merino, and Vaño 2019; Maria). This marks a starting point for promoting social innovation where local governments can play a significant role in the development of PPPs. Common initiatives include the allocation of municipal public land for cooperative housing construction or the public land tendering based on social criteria. Additionally, fiscal measures, technical support, and awareness campaigns are put in place to support this model.

The selected case study has been the "*collaborative, intergenerational housing on public land under a lease and self-managed basis*" (I4) known as Ágora Cohousing in the municipality of Alicante. In this experience, a PPP involves two main elements: the public land allocation and the provision of guarantees and financial support by the regional administration. Regarding the land part, the public entity EVHA (Entitat Valenciana d'Habitatge i Sòl) tendered the allocation of a 75-year lease on a 2500m2 public plot, which won Vida Sostenible cooperative. Subsequently, this entity subrogated the land to the Rabasa Cooperative Community for the development of the Ágora Cohousing project, involving the construction of 17 family homes with communal spaces such as "*the garden area, a dining room, multipurpose rooms, a potential laundry, and a couple of commercial spaces related to the community*" (I5). Therefore, the first element of the PPP, which is the land allocation, has been successfully realized.

Regarding the financial aspect, the cooperative has faced difficulties. To finance these homes, each member must contribute 20 % of the investment, which is later refunded when they no longer hold membership, and the remaining 80 % is paid through monthly dues to the cooperative. However, "*to be able to build the housing, you need to advance the money, as with any other home. You need that 80 % loan provided by a cooperative credit institution. But that bank requires nominative guarantees, and we cannot individually provide guarantees because we do not own the land, nor will we own the homes. Since the land belongs to the Valencian government, and our lease is for 75 years, the GVA (Generalitat Valenciana) that provided us the land needs to guarantee us*" (I4). Currently, efforts are underway to find a legal solution to the issue of guarantees and endorsements, as the Department of Housing signed an agreement with the Valencian Institute of Finances (IVF) at the end of 2022 to transfer the deposit of guarantees worth 2 million euros to finance collaborative housing. However, the allocation of these guarantees has not been finalized. In April 2023, the cooperative reached out to the Síndic de Greuges, which is a public body in charge of resolving any violation of valencian citizens' fundamental rights, to request a legal solution to this obstacle from the public sector of the PPP. Obtaining guarantees and endorsements is a crucial step in successfully developing the final part of the PPP.

In this specific initiative, as well as in other pilot projects of PPPs in the housing sector, the intermediary role played by the Federation of Housing Cooperatives and Rehabilitation of the Valencian Community (FECOVI) has proven to be decisive because "*they are vigilant, and many things are channeled through them*" (I4).

4.4 Drivers, Advantages, and Obstacles of Local PPPs with SE Entities

After analyzing the local and regional PPP initiatives with social economy entities in strategic sectors, both synergies and challenges have emerged in their implementation, which are closely linked to legislative development and access to funding.

The presence of grants, whether executed by local governments or social economy entities, is a key element for the development and success of PPPs. Although most initiatives become self-sufficient as they mature, a common element in all sectors has been the recognition that without initial investment, *"there might not have been a project"* (I2), *"there could have been a project, but the speed and profitability would not have been the same"* (I1), or *"it's challenging to find a grant for a profile like ours, and the grant would enable us to develop outreach activities and not be such an unknown reality*" (I4). In the digital sector, it is noteworthy that the initiative was developed with only a small grant for the creation of the cooperative.

On the other hand, strong political commitment at the regional level to develop the model and the creation of guidelines to promote local PPPs has encouraged their expansion: *"People tend to copy a lot. Therefore, it is necessary to create precedents for sustainable practices and for municipalities to imitate each other"* (I2). Furthermore, the fact that local governments support pioneering initiatives that may initially generate mistrust among the population provides strength and confidence to the model with social economy entities.

Among the main obstacles to a rapid and effective materialization of local PPPs with the social economy, the following are highlighted. First, the slowing down of projects due to the novelty of the initiatives and the lack of regulatory precedents: "*Our bidding project was the first in Spain, and there were no other tender specifications from another municipality that could be used as an example. We had to innovate and shape administratively a process that had not been done before in Spain*" (I1). Second, the complexity of some bureaucratic processes and the reluctance of public officials toward new models: "*The problems with guarantees are undermining morale, patience, and the enthusiasm of the human group. We have been waiting for a long time, and it is wearing down our patience and enthusiasm"* (I6).

Moreover, working with social economy entities in partnerships also has numerous benefits. First, all these initiatives have a positive impact on the territory in terms of social cohesion, and local dynamism, and they make a direct contribution to the SDGs: "*People feel the project is theirs"* (I1), *"These types of communities are beneficial for the towns and local communities in which they are established. They present alternative housing models compared to traditional ones.*" (I5), *"With our project, we collaborate with the environment"* (I4). Second, being pioneering initiatives that often have no precedents legitimizes them to have the freedom to execute and create legal documents "tailored" for each of them. And third, municipalities that undertake these kinds of projects are perceived positively by both the citizens and other municipalities. "*We are role models, and that gives the municipality a certain status*" (I2). In these types of projects, "*people think more collectively than individually, and it makes municipalities feel like institutions close to the citizens*" (I1). In Table 3, a summary of the identified drivers, advantages, and obstacles can be found in the three strategic sectors and at a general level.

Table 3: Summary of drivers, advantages and obstacles in local PPPs with SE entities.

Strategic sector	Drivers	Advantages	Obstacles
Energy	– Guide for the development of local energy communities. – The cooperative is the most suitable legal form to establish an energy community in accordance with the characteristics established in European energy directives. – Availability of large land areas by local governments.	– Savings on the electricity bill through surpluses. – Promotion of renewable energies and positive environmental impact. – Enhancement of citizen empowerment. – The community energy's counterpart benefits local well-being. – Ownership of the project (no rejection from the community). Bottom-up process.	– Lack of awareness and energy culture on the part of local governments and the population. – Inadequate responsiveness to the population's needs (waiting lists). – Prolonged administrative processing for grid connection (need to standardize contracts).
Digitalization	– Existence of a favorable legislative framework for digitization in nonprofit infrastructure, e.g., European data governance Law.	– Equality among partners. No predominance on the part of the public sector. – Environmentally, economically, and technologically sustainable initiatives. – Ease of incorporation by public administrations.	– Difficulty in finding subsidies for cooperatives dedicated to blockchain and expanding the model. – Insufficient promotion of the cooperative digital sector. – Need to find instrumental entities in municipalities to provide digital services.
Housing	– Support from the federation of housing cooperatives.	– Exploitation of underutilized municipal public land. – Promotion of resilient communities.	– Development issues of PPPs in the financial field of guarantees and collateral. – Limitation on participation in initiatives due to the economic conditions of users (e.g., establishing economic requirements for partners in the bidding specifications).
General	– Existence of initial subsidies for project development.	– Initiatives that have a positive impact on the territory and a direct	– Slow implementation due to the novelty of the initiatives and lack

Table 3: (continued)

Strategic sector	Drivers	Advantages	Obstacles
	– Existence of specific promotion guides to encourage local PPPs with the social economy: it enhances the possibility of imitation. – The participation of public entities in projects generates trust in the system. – Political interest in the development of initiatives.	contribution to the sustainable development goals (SDGs). – Pioneering initiatives guarantee greater freedom to operate. – Inclusion and perception of local administration as an administration close to the citizens. – Promotion of social cohesion and social innovation.	of regulatory precedents. – Lack of legislative documents to imitate. – Complicated bureaucratic processes. Resistance from public officials to new models.

Source: own creation.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Local governments are strategic agents for the development of public private partnerships (PPPs) with social economy entities (Maria), especially in a context where new approaches are emerging, and PPPs need to focus on not only their traditional synergies but also new directions such as social well-being and sustainability (Hueskes, Verhoest, and Block 2017; Vecchi, Tanese, and Osborne 2022). There is a long tradition of PPPs at the local level, but the number decreases when these initiatives materialize with social economy entities, despite the current recommendations of international, national, and regional organizations to promote public policies aimed at fostering such partnerships due to the alignment between the objectives of public administration and the social purpose of SE entities (ILO 2022, United Nations 2023).

In Valencian municipal and regional public entities, there are various paradigmatic cases of PPPs with social economy entities. This is the result of efforts by the regional public administration to promote this model, especially in cutting-edge and typical sectors such as energy, digitalization, or housing. In response to the first research objective, in the energy sector, there are experiences of local energy communities that are cooperative or associative, often linked to the commercialization, distribution, and production of energy in hard-to-reach areas. In the field of housing, municipal policies are aimed at providing land to cooperatives, facilitating access to financing, and implementing measures to promote the cooperative housing ecosystem, such as technical support or model dissemination. In the digital field, municipalities are tasked with digitizing local administrations to make them more efficient and accessible to the public with technology 4.0. Specially in the local context, the transformative capacity of the Social Economy enables it to be a change generator to face global challenges such as the energetic, urban, and digital transitions. In this sense, the study is in line with Itçaina and Richez-Battesti (2018) when the authors points out that the SE guarantees innovative responses to challenges in a complex economic context.

Through case studies such as Comptem, Racó de Mar, BlockChainFue, and Ágora Cohousing, addressing the second research objective, the main drivers, advantages, and obstacles of establishing partnerships with the social economy have been identified. In general, these differ from the drivers and obstacles studied in academic literature with traditional entities, where risk-related motives (Athias 2013; Bloomfield 2006) or characteristics of the private sector often predominate (Zhang et al. 2019). In contrast, the study findings suggest that the main drivers for the development of local and regional PPPs with social economy entities are the existence of initial subsidies and practical promotion guides; political interest in promoting them, and the trust generated in society when municipalities collaborate with social economy entities. Common problems arise on the public side of the partnership, where there is evidence of a slowdown in the implementation of initiatives due to their novelty, as well as a lack of legal solutions to problems in their implementation. Moreover, one of the limitations found in the analyzed initiatives is the lack of knowledge within municipalities about how to collaborate with social economy entities. Following the recommendations of Mazzola et al., (2019:2282), it is necessary "*Firstly, a specific empowerment program for local administrators to develop PPPs. Secondly, to familiarize them with the management of local development programs to build territorial capital. And thirdly, the continuity in planning development initiatives at the local level and the diffusion of PPP schemes*."

Regarding the third research objective concerning the territorial aspect, the study findings suggest that PPPs with social economy entities at the local level have a positive impact on the territory and contribute to territorial development, especially in terms of social innovation. This result is in line with (Flores, Perogil, and Barroso 2023), who determine that cooperatives contribute to the development of governance models that promote territorial development. In the context of energy communities, in line with Grignani et al. (2021), the study confirms that cooperatives are a convenient legal form for the establishment of energy communities. In terms of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this study confirms that social economy entities have a significant impact on the SDG related to local development (CEPES 2019). Therefore, in the evaluation field and following the sixth proposition in Wang et al. (2018), PPPs with social economy entities must be seen as a network performance, where outcome indicators should not only assess PPPs from a technical perspective but also evaluate other governance aspects.

In the realm of public policies and territorial development, the study shows that the political interest in deploying these initiatives and encouraging municipalities to promote public private partnerships has been a crucial element in the emerging development of pioneering cases. This finding aligns with Bastida, Vaquero García, and Vázquez Taín (2023) who argue that the role of governments is decisive in enhancing SE promotion and, consequently, in territorial development. Moreover, the fact that these collaborations occur with the administrations closest to the citizens in a decentralized scope generates a greater impact on the territory, as *"the more proximity of these actions, the more positive effects on territory"* (Bastida, Vaquero García, and Vázquez Taín 2023: 1206).

This work is relevant for several reasons. Firstly, it helps raise awareness of PPPs with social economy entities in a context where the literature is scarce, and it promotes applied research of other partnerships at the local level by highlighting their advantages. Secondly, it identifies the main drivers and disadvantages of current partnerships that can help foster new cases. Thirdly, it highlights that the new approach of PPPs is effective through collaboration with the social economy. It represents a new way of making public policies that engage society and combine efforts to achieve desirable social objectives, representing the SDGs. And finally, this study adds to the well-established body of literature supporting the notion that social economy and the corresponding public policies designed to foster it exert a significant influence on territorial development.

However, the study has several limitations. Firstly, in some case studies, there is no direct participation by the local government but rather by the regional government. This is due to the difficulty of finding fully developed PPPs at the municipal level and because of the incipient state of the collaborations. Secondly, the study has chosen to examine a limited number of cases in depth to gather information. However, the number of cases may be limited for result extraction, despite their scarcity cases in the reality. Future research suggestions include the study of local PPPs in the cultural sector, which is currently almost non-existent, and a deeper exploration in the field of energy, comparing it with actions in other European regions.

Appendix I: Semi-Structured Interview Script

1. If you had to explain to someone who doesn't know how the (…) sector works, how would you describe it?

2. What type of public-private collaboration has taken place? Has it been crucial for the implementation of (…)?
3. What role has the (…) municipality played and what actions have they taken in this public-cooperative collaboration?
4. What role has (…) played and what actions have they taken in this public-cooperative collaboration?
5. Have other public entities been involved in the collaboration? What has been their level of participation?
6. In terms of financing, have they received assistance from other organizations? To what extent have these aids been useful for the project's viability?
7. What were the main limitations when starting this public-cooperative collaboration in the beginning? And now?
8. What are the main strengths of this public-cooperative collaboration compared to others?
9. What measures do you think local institutions should promote to encourage more public-private collaboration with Social Economy entities?
10. From your perspective, what are the main motivations that Social Economy entities have for engaging in public-cooperative collaboration projects?
11. What benefits/advantages result from this collaboration for public administrations and society in general?

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