PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY –
A PRECONDITION FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY

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Abstract
Social economy functions based on some principles, the decision making process being one of the definitive processes. Because the question is whether some democratic decisions can be taken within organizations in the absence of a democracy culture at the level of society. In the same time, solidarity and social participation- basic conditions for promoting and developing social economy – remain a challenge for Romania, having in view their negative connotation given by the association with the experiences during the communist period. Starting with the essence and the benefits of democracy, this article makes a review of social economy from the perspective of practice in the promotion and consolidation of democracy. The article looks into the importance of participative democracy as a precondition for the development of social economy in Romania.

Key words: social economy, democracy, civic culture, community leadership, community development, participative democracy

Introduction

Both social economy and democracy can have certain cases of occurrence and development, they can manifest in certain conditions and in different forms, they comply with certain principles and values, they require a certain infrastructure, they have certain type of relationship with the market and imply a high degree of individual responsibility and social co-responsibility. If we consider the history of the occurrence and the development of social economy in Romania, a normal question is whether participative democracy might be a precondition of its success in our country.

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The end of 2012 brings into the attention of the specialists from many activity areas, from civil society and from the large public, maybe more and stronger than before, the debates and the projects of social economy and solidary economy. Against the economical crisis, with a close sensitive impact but with popular reactions and differentiated policies within the European Union’s member countries, we should mention, first of all, the Strategy of Europe 2020[1] – a projection for the future development cycle on the continent for the period 2014-2020 – and the Project of the European Carta of Social Co-responsibility[2], an innovating document in the field of social cohesion. The European Strategy 2020 sets out three basic benches as landmarks of progress: intelligent economical increase (consolidation of knowledge, innovation, education, digital society), sustainable increase (increase of efficiency in production and of competitiveness) and inclusive economical increase (a greater participation on the labor market, acquiring new professional skills, decrease of poverty), while the Project European Carta Social Co-responsibility promotes pro-active, responsible and assumed attitudes with the purpose to reduce poverty, social and economical inequalities, discrimination of any kind and stagnation. The role of social economy in reaching the objectives resulted from the documents mentioned is more than obvious.

Possible causes of occurrence and development of social economy

The organizations that can come under social economy were started and developed in Romania because of several reasons, not all being the result of the action of a person with a reduced level of studies and minimum competencies, and not all having necessarily as a purpose to socially integrate vulnerable groups.


Social economy is defined in our country as “the type of economy that efficiently combines individual responsibility with collective responsibility in order to produce goods and/or service supplies, that desires the economical and social development of a community and whose main purpose is the social benefit.” (Asiminei, 2012, p. 10). If what we desire is to develop the community, then we should remind here the need for knowledge and social and civic skills, on one hand to be able to be included in this, and on the other hand to contribute to its long-term development and sustainability. Participative democracy could be an answer that meets this need.

The occurrence of social economy in Romania has several causes, the most mentioned are: market or the state ignoring or incompletely covering the needs of the individuals and the necessity either of the people, or of the organizations – to survive- in a new context. In many cases, at least at the beginning of the 90s, the correlation between ignoring and incompletely covering the individual survival led to the occurrence of non-governmental organizations at the grassroots. These were set-up on one hand, by those who, after losing their jobs but having a high level of education (for example engineers), have seen the opportunity to help themselves by helping each other – and maybe to understand democracy and get involved in its consolidation. On the other hand, the graduates of applied human sciences universities, without employment opportunities in their field, have associated in order to initiate social or socio-medical services in the benefit of the disadvantaged groups. The representatives of both groups have called up, usually, after going on an educational route provided by the American and European experts in the field, including the structuring and the management of non-governmental organizations (I would specify here especially the organizations from the United States of America and Great Britain) and benefiting from technical assistance and external financial support.

Another cause for the occurrence and/or the development of social economy might be the opportunity to benefit of a favorable context either for the occurrence and development of social economy (through
national and/local policies) either for “the adequate development of the individuals, groups and communities” with the purpose of winning independence from external support (Zabratanska K, Szadowska-Ciezka A and Krosniak P, 2012, p. 182). In this sense we must mention here, despite the problems created in its implementation, the favorable framework offered by the financing through the Operational Sectorial Programme the Development of Human Resources (POSDRU).

Last but not least, the social entrepreneurial initiatives, completed after the occurrence of social economy and/or solidarity economy, can be generated also by a high degree of organization and community development.

**Conditions**

There are some conditions which are necessary for the development of social economy and among these, there is solidarity and social participation (Asiminei, 2012, p. 20) on one hand and entrepreneurial culture (Pascaru, Gh. and Doboş, A., 2012, p. 142) on the other hand.

But another condition for the development of social economy is civic culture. Emphasizing the fact that “…it is necessary to involve the entire society for the development of this field of social enterprises”, Mrs. Marieke Huysentruyt[1] mentions, in the interview given, among the fields of interest for research, “the level of people`s employment” (Pitea M, 2012, p. 126). Civic commitment is an aspect of civic culture, and its importance so that democracy functions is emphasized by Wiliam M. Sullivan[2] in the article The infrastructure of democracy: From Civil Society to Civil Community. The author presents the conclusion of the study made by Robert Putnam regarding regional governing in Italy (Myers, 1996, p. 11).

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[2] Philosophy professor at La Salle University, at the date of publishing.
Putnam has analyzed four aspects of civic cultures in the successful regions of Italy where democratic governing has functioned very well, and that are (Myers, 1996, p. 7):

1. Civic commitment, the expectations that the individuals and the groups are “spirited by the interest of others”;
2. The high degree of political equality, defined as a social context where “horizontal relationships of reciprocity and cooperation” prevail on the “vertical relationships of authority and dependence”;
3. The high levels of solidarity, trust and tolerance;
4. The fact that civic regions were places of intense associative life, which developed cooperation skills and the shared responsibility.

The conclusion of the study was that the force of the civic norms and of the expectations has determined the development of social tolerance, trust and cooperation. Surprisingly, the force of civic norms “has proved, also, to be the best predictor of economical vitality”. We should also specify here that political equality, the fundamental purpose of democracy “have greater chances to enforce respect in the absence of the great economical inequalities” (Lijphart, 1999, p. 258).

Besides a civic culture, the local culture regarding elites could be, also a condition of the social economy development, if we have in view the Community leadership. Leadership means first of all to lead (in the sense of a leading activity), but in the same time the capacity, ability to lead, in our case a community. The concept of community leadership has and focuses on a special field and can be defined as “the tendency of a community to collaborate between the sectors in a way that is sustained, orientated towards the intensification of the performances of that community” (Botezat, 2012, p. 52). Its spheres of activity may include an organization, an area of interest, an institution, a city, a county or a region. Community leadership implies that the person exerting it has an influence and exerts power – either in just one sphere of activity within the community, or in several – to the good of that community.

Within a community, inclusion and participation are equally important. But, even in small communities, it is impossible that all the members have the same role. When some develop leadership skills and
capacities and in the extent that their activity shall be recognized by the members of a community and shall meet their adhesion, then we have *Community leadership*. Because the members of a community are not passive, but they get information on the community affairs and actively intervene to inform the leaders regarding community issues, we can say that the two concepts, participation and leadership, are correlated and linked and cannot be discussed separately one from the other. The roles of the leader, either a formal or an informal leader, and of the participants are complementary and *community leadership* cannot be exerted in an authoritarian regime, but only in a democratic one. Besides, *community leadership* is the expression of the democratic spirit and of the fundamental values of liberal democracy: freedom, equality, community.

Democracy means the governing form where power and civic responsibilities are exercised by all citizens, directly or through their free elected representatives and is, at the same time, the institutionalized form of freedom. Participative democracy means the individual participation of citizens in the political decision making process and in the development of policies that affect their life, especially in a direct way and not through their elected representatives. Active citizenship, generated by civic culture, and participative democracy organized the principles of the claiming and ensuring the rights by the poor and the excluded ones. In other words, the felt necessities shall be changed into actions, becoming expressed necessities. In this way, the increase and the expansion of the citizen participation area educates the individuals to be efficient and democratic citizens and, at the same time, empowers them. Participative democracy can therefore transform the individual from private citizen, concerned only by its problems, in a public citizen, attentive, considerate, who cares of what happens around him.

Participative democracy has become an integral part of the European model of society, participation becoming a civic right. The dedication of the complementarity between representative democracy and participative democracy are mentioned in the Treaty of Lisbon[1] which

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confirms the three principles that are the base of the democratic government in Europe:

- Democratic equality – the citizen must enjoy the equal attention from the part of the European institutions;
- Representative democracy – assigning a more important role to the European Parliament and a greater involvement of the national parliaments;
- Participative democracy – new mechanisms of interaction between citizens and institutions, of which we have, for example, the initiative of the citizens.

Plus, the Treaty of Lisbon clarifies the nature of the relationships between the member states and the European Union.

### Display forms

Social economy is displayed through two main models: the social integration of the vulnerable groups and the community development (Asiminei, 2012, p. 6). We define here the community as being “that population that commonly owns characteristics there are assumed by the members of the community as being identitary” (Botezat, 2012, p. 41), while for the definition of the community development we choose the one given by the United Nations Organization in 1955: “a process meant to create the conditions of economical and social progress for the entire community, with its active participation and with the total possible faith in the initiative of communities”.

Any community is characterized by a certain capacity, and this can be defined in two ways[1], by:

a) that characteristic that affects the ability of a community to identify, call up and discuss the social and health issues;

b) the way to cultivate and use the transferrable knowledge and abilities, and also the systems and resources that affect the change level of the community and of the individual, compatible with the social and/or public health purposes and objectives.

The community capacity depends on the participation and on the management, abilities, resources, social and inter-organizational networks, on the community sense, on the understanding of the community history, the community power, the community values and on the critical consideration. Once more we realize that community leadership cannot be exerted by the participation of the community and that there is interdependence between the members of the community – either leaders or simple participant members- that affect exactly the capacity of the community to face the common problems. Both participants and leaders must ensure the capacity of the community to discuss local issues, to create quality plans, to obtain access to the necessary skills, to assess the needs of the community and to implement adequate programs for these community needs. They must work together for a community change, in terms of regulation and/or organization. Organizational change could mean also the development of a sub-unit of social economy within an existing organization.

We should also remind here that there are four moral targets of the management[1]:
- to release the human potential of others;
- to achieve balance between the individual needs and the community needs;
- to protect the fundamental values of the community;
- to induce in the individuals the sense of initiative and responsibility.

Community development means the empowerment of communities and refers to, mainly, to the creation and/or the remaking of the community conditions that could make possible the reintegration of the community in the global circuit of a desirable welfare and by all means collective. At the same time, community development refers to the formation of some calling up mechanisms that the community can have at a certain time. For this purpose, community organization was developed, “a democratic process, of long term, by which people are encouraged to: gather around some common interests and problems,

identify the potential solutions of the community problems and to act so that the decision factors transpose them to reality”[1].

The approach of the common interests and problems is participative, because it is given priority to the active role of the beneficiaries that assume responsibility for the performance of activities and shall have, in fact, a voice in the decision making process. We can consider the process as a social participation, because we are talking about the “action of the individuals integrated in a group, greater or smaller, confronted by a certain situation, problem or task” (Asiminei, 2012, p. 17). But we can also have in view the issue concerning participative democracy. First of all, social participation was possible because there were created opportunities so that all the members of the community bring their contribution in the decision making process. The democratic exercise became an exercise for the citizens to use their power, for them to set out the priorities of what is important, instead of letting these issues be dealt by the elected representatives and to resolve the problems and decide what is important. The decisions are taken by building consensus, considered to be achieved when each part agrees that they can live with the suggested solution, even if it is not their favorite solution. More than that, the process has at its base “trust, goodwill and democratic idealism” which are “the democratic imperatives” (Myers, 1996, p. 1) and could be considered “the key practical resources” in social economy.

The relationship with the market

The relationship of social economy with the market is resulted from the presentation of the two sub-sectors of social economy as they are found in the Carta of Social Economical Principles from 2002: the commercial one (business) and the non-commercial one. Therefore, the non-commercial sub-sector is formed of “all the organizations of social economy that the criteria of the national accounts consider non-commercial producers, meaning the ones that supply most of their pro-

[1] Extracted and adapted from STORIES OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION – or how ordinary people make things happen Center for Resources for public participation, Bucharest, 2011.
duction free of charge or at prices which are insignificant from the economical point of view” (Asiminei, 2012, p. 7).

Democracy has in its turn, a relationship with the market. On one hand, as Benjamin R. Barber\[^1\] mentions in the introduction of chapter VI *Democracy and the free market*, “capitalism needs democracy but doesn`t know how to create it or to support it and often produces circumstances that can undermine it” (Myers, 1996, p. 32). The main characteristics remains the fact that “the markets are rather contractual than community markets”, in the sense that they don`t offer “a common identity or the quality of group member”. At the same time, the market generated a “speech which is rather private than public”, and stops us – as simple consumers- “to talk from citizen to citizen about the social consequences of our choices within the market”. Thus, while “consumers slide towards the elementary rhetoric of the «I»”, citizens “create the common language of the «us»”. The effects of globalization and of the crises support hereinafter the conclusions of the author: “We do not only need democracy beyond the market, but also our markets need democracy if they want to survive”. We talk now more and more about *fair trade*, such products started to increasingly appear on the market, and the products and the services of some Romanian NGOs (such as the Foundation Alături de Voi from Iaşi, but not only) start to compete with the commercial sector (the businesses).

In the same time we must remind that the markets have introduced a certain dynamics of the social and economical relationships, and the evolution of market economy continuously brings challenges. If we take into account the evolution of technology, we observe that market economy can be more dynamic than democracy, with profound implications on this. And as Wiliam M. Sullivan was mentioning in the introduction of Chapter 3 – *The Creation of Economical Systems on the Global Market* “the fundamental benefits of democracy, such as the security of individual rights, can only exist as long as most citizens share the feeling of solidarity and common destiny” (Myers, 1998, p. 14). The civic measures for the compliance with the principles and the values of democracy, like the awareness raising campaigns for the issues that

[^1]: Director, Centre Walt Whitman for Culture and the Policies of Democracy. University Rutgers from New Jersey, at the date of publishing.
some group of persons are facing, can make the whole community responsible, can lead to co-responsibility and to the creation of a favorable environment for the development of solidarity and participation, therefore to the creation of the conditions favorable for social economy.

**Individual, social responsibility and social co-responsibility**

Taking into account what philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau said, that people were born free, William A. Galston[1], in the introduction of chapter II – *The role of the citizens: rights and responsibilities*, highlights that “maybe the most important responsibility of the citizens is to use their freedom in the most adequate way and to respect the rights of others” (Myers, 1996, p. 7). By freedom we understand here, on one hand, the absence of barriers in the way of the community members’ action, on the other hand, freedom means also the capacity of people to lead their own lives. If the life of each of us is connected with the life of the community we live in, to be free means to participate in the management of the community affairs. In other words, freedom means also to participate in the life of the community, to be involved in the community leadership.

A constructive participation in the life of any community depends on our capacity to critically and creatively reflect and on our desire to be active and responsible. The participation of a person in the life of a community depends on the level of civic education, on the results of the social learning process, on the need to prove both the responsibility spirit and the understanding and the expression of respect for the shared values. But participation also depends on the desire of successful social and interpersonal involvement. Even in these conditions, the personal and/or the family problems can hinder a person from being active and responsible in the community, with long term consequences which are less visible and/or more difficult to anticipate at that time.

[1] Director, Institute for Philosophy and Public Policies, University of Maryland, at the publishing date.
these situations, the justified lack of individual responsibility can be replaced either by social responsibility or social co-responsibility.

We should also bear in mind here the fact that the specific political freedoms of democracy – such as the freedom of association – can be seen both as a main development objective, and as an essential tool through which other targets for development (e.g. welfare, economical increase, improvement of health, etc.) can be reached in the most efficient way. This can be one of the reasons for which, lately, the political aspects of participation have reconnected to its dimension of development within democracy and citizenship. The model of participative democracy, among others, allows citizens to prioritize what is important for them. Therefore, if there are needs which are unmet by the market or by the state and “if the interests that connect the community are not momentary, the chances for development are sustainable” (Botezat, 2012, p. 47).

As John Dewey states, democracy is not just a form of governing, but a life style, “the idea of the community’s own life” (Myers, 1998, p. 22). Individual, social responsibility and social co-responsibility can be born only within communities and only in a culture that favors their appearance and development. Both Montesquieu and Rousseau, when presenting their vision on democracy, have emphasized from the beginning the priority of culture on the political, showing that not only the vital customs of a social group (mores) and the cultural conditions have fed the democratic spirit. This democratic spirit allows the independent and the bottom-up structuring of the civil society organizations. And these organizations, as Vaclav Havel said, “give the people the opportunity to be themselves”, “including to be social creatures that desire, in thousand of ways, to participate in the life of the community they live in” (Myers, 1998, p. 28).

**Conclusions**

Our communist inheritance brings first of all to into attention, as obstacles for the development of the social economy sector, the problems linked to solidarity and social participation. Collectivization and patriotic work remain associated with the negative experiences
because they were imposed from up to bottom, and words such as volunteer and consensus still have a negative connotation after more than 20 years of democracy in Romania.

Communities and the participation of the members of the community in the public affairs have started to be rendered valuable by the non-governmental organizations through community organization activities and community leadership, in the context of a participative democracy.

The economical crisis and the social crisis can offer opportunities to develop social economy, but it is needed to have a participative process, named ascendant or “from bottom to up” type, that starts from the perception of needs and their transformation in citizen initiatives. In this direction, participative democracy could be a precondition of success in the promotion and development of social economy, at least in our country.

**Bibliography**


