MENTALITY AND IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT IN SOCIAL ECONOMY

Cristina Gavriliță

Abstract
The social economy is an extremely present topic. It has been equally researched by economists, sociologists, politicians, philosophers etc. Moreover, we notice that the interest in this topic exceeds the ideological barriers, each of these ideologies outlining specific social economy formulas, but promotes the same values: solidarity, participation, work, cooperation, control, responsibility, common interests and managerial autonomy. We consider that the three ideological sources of the social economy (socialist, liberal and Christian) have fully contributed to create a responsive availability toward the social economy from east to west. Moreover, we believe that beyond these ideological resources the collective mentality and the human’s mentality values solidarity, community, common interest, etc, this being an advantage in developing and applying some models of social economy. At the basis of these values and concepts promoted by the social economy we find work in its concrete forms and values (either of religious nature or ideologically assumed).

Keywords: social economy, solidarity, work, ideology

1. The social economy and the resources of its receptivity

In the context of the modern world, the social economy has recurred in actuality not only at the level of the philosophic argumentations, of the ideologies, but also at the level of practical action. The existence of the financing lines and development of businesses, associations and organizations represents an argument in this matter.

The situation is valid both for the eastern states and for those from the west of Europe. Such a success is explicable not only by the ideological roots of the concept of social economy (such as socialist, liberal and Christian roots), but

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1 „A.I. Cuza University”, Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Iași, Carol I no. 11, 700506, Romania, cristina_gavriluta@yahoo.fr.
also by data of mental nature which create the premises of assuming some ideas and actions that place the idea of individual and community right in the centre. Social spaces which are so different, such as east and west of Europe benefit from an ideological support of the social economy idea. The fact that these ideologies cover the whole doctrinaire field from left to right, offering perspective and solutions proves that, in essence, the concept can exceed the ideological frame, this resembling afterward, only as a necessity for argumentation and doctrinaire solution. Thus, we believe that a presentation of the main three ideological directions, that are considered fundamental for the idea of social economy, would be very useful.

So, if the ideas of utopian socialism promoted by Robert Owen (“Owen’s villages”) supported Charles Gide’s later vision, who from his “cooperative republic” regarding the self regulating role of the society, fraternity, democracy, responsibility and social justice, especially in the socialist states from the east of Europe, the perspective enunciated above found an echo in a series of politics and currents that promoted the cooperative egalitarianism. On the same line situates a series of major movements that promote the solidary economy as a formula of regulating the most of the economic and social discrepancies within the society (Frunză, Gavriliuţă, Johnes, 2005: 283). There is no doubt that the utopian socialism’s ideologies had an effect not only at the level of the policies, but also at the level of the population’s behaviours and receptivity. Thus, there were created the premises of acceptance for other forms of economical and social cooperation and organization.

On the other hand, the ideas of liberalism had the same ambition to radically change the society and have emphasised the role of the economic profile and the rapports among individuals. Those who followed and assumed Herman Schulz’s ideas privileged the long lasting development and collaboration among individuals. According to these aspects, the social economy had to include the liberal ideas. What is
happening nowadays at the level of the European states represents a general tendency to transpose at the micro social level the neo-liberal ideas.

The two ideological sources, socialist and liberal find some particularities at the level of the Christian concept.

Even since 1891 „Rerum Novarum”, the encyclical of Catholic Church states that family is a key element in the structure and social organization. But, according to the Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, the corporations or cooperatives based on Christian solidarity are those which ensure the integration of family in society. Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen (The Columbia Encyclopaedia, Sixth Edition, 2004) is the founder of some economy and credit cooperatives (Wilson, Morrow, 1962: 23-29, 35, 45) that follow the Christian mode. Their activity is recorded long before the document mentioned above and it was based on a series of ideas such as mutual support, group solidarity, and voluntary work.

As the examples previously mentioned illustrate, regardless of ideology, in the philosophy and understanding the concept of social economy there are number of terms such as: solidarity, involvement, work, cooperation, control, responsibility, common interests, managerial autonomy, social capital, etc. All these aspects don’t just clarify the problem, but also state its importance in social and community life. For instance, nowadays the issue of social capital represents a subject of interest both for those who claim some doctrinal traditions and for those who have different orientations. Often, the social capital is seen as a panacea (Fine, 2001: 189).

If we accept that a number of predispositions for such approaches of economy in society have been enhanced in various areas of social, economical and political ideologies, this does not mean at all that in their case receptivity might not be discovered at a deeper level. More exactly, there are a series of mental data that include the sense of belonging to the group, community and which privilege the relations that appear in it. Thus, many of our behaviours and choices are not only the
formative role of some ideologies that have passed over us, they are the result of some genuine and profound experiences, of some beliefs, myths, etc. The researches carried on by anthropologists and ethnologists show strong feelings of solidarity and belonging generated by the belief and the concrete experience of some archaic communities. All these aspects are reflected in the way in which they managed to organize their common life.

Regardless of the support enjoyed by the idea of social economy in society, work is a central value around which the whole concept is built.

Thus, there is an interest in what we think about work, how we relate to it and which of our concrete skills are valued through work. The failure or the success of the social economy greatly depends on the availabilities, the representations about work and the direct involvement of everyone. This fact is valuable for Romania, too. The success or the failure of implementing some social economy programmes justify by the “wall of air” (Ungureanu, 2009) of the mentalities and the collective representations.

We will attempt to discover a few connotations and hidden meanings of work. This fact could explain our images and representations connected to it.

2. Religious perspectives on work

From a biblical perspective, “the need to work” appears at the same time with the original sin and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise.

«Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return» (The Book of Genesis). Thus work becomes a mark of our life. Does this mean that it has the quality or the defect not ever to end and not to be able to reach perfection? There is
always room for better. Thus, we are fated to eternal labour as a sign of servitude. Maybe it is not accidental the fact that physical, brute work is sometimes seen as degrading as it reaffirms the condition of the slave, the sentenced.

Certainly, in the same biblical context, work can be also seen as a way of saving the human being. It can become both support and mean to transcend toward eternity. Maybe it is not accidentally that God gave to the first people the ability to work.

Beyond the possible interpretations and explanations, work holds something from the condition of the slave Aristotle. As the Stagirit was pointing out the impossibility of the existence of a master without a slave, in the same way we could say that the human being could not exist without work. In these conditions, the slave and the work can raise to the statute of masters of their own masters. Though may be regarded either as a necessity, a right, a chore, a vocation or a joy, work is an indispensable attribute of the human condition. It can make us slaves or masters, rich or poor. The important fact is the way in which we refer to it.

The success that some activities have (commerce, bureaucracy and intellectual activity) in Romania, might be caused by a negative perception of physical activities. The production sectors have been avoided by the entrepreneurs as they required hard work and did not bring a fast gain. It is possible that the social prestige that someone gains from a production type activity might not be too motivating. The religious explanations are often doubled by those of social and mental type.

If we accept the idea that work also has a religious basis, we notice a series of differences regarding its perception and interpretation from dogmatic point of view and from the point of view of the exegeses that appear. Thus there appear a series of interpretations that associate to orthodoxy a contemplative – mystical attitude but, at the same time, not socially connected (Barbu, 2004). According to this interpretation, for the Orthodox, work should only ensure the basic means for
survival. The Catholic Church’s position toward work is clearly stated and it looks to the exegetes as being closer to the requests of social life (Ică, Marani, 2002). On the other hand, this involvement might have as effect a weakening of profound religiosity.

Perhaps, the most interesting interpretation of religion and its direct connections to the world was given by Max Weber in his famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1993).

Thus, once with the protestant reform, the problem was put in other terms. By dint of the divine choice, the Protestants used to preach, work exceeds the boundaries of gratifying individual necessities and becomes a means by which the choice (divine grace) can be proven. The human being is not a «fulfiller by doing» as in the orthodoxy’s case, but “he has to virtually stick to his profession and to the state God set him and to keep his earthy aspirations within the limits of his position” (Weber, 1993:12) The new approach that Luther and then Calvin proposes for the idea of work has led to the formation of a certain ethic, and thus to a certain mentality towards work. Moreover, the well-known sociologist, Max Weber, thinks that the reform was nothing else but the crucible from which later the spirit of capitalism emerged. Protestant ethics, long exercised over a few generations of Protestants has turned into a” modus vivendi”. Therefore, work is the relationship between man and his profession; it is a mission that must be fulfilled as well as possible.

Calvin used to say that God helps those who help themselves and blames the waste of time, laziness and begging. “The waste of time by parties, chatting, luxury and even the prolonged sleep, even longer than required to maintain health-six to eight hours-are absolutely objectionable from the moral point of view. Time is infinitely less, as every wasted hour diminishes work in the service of God’s glory”. (Weber, 1993: 161). In the Protestant view, the presence of desire to work is the equivalent state of grace. In addition, not
any work justifies your mission, but useful work. Criteria by which useful work is considered are the following: 1) moral criteria, 2) the importance of community property, 3) profitability

In other words, the presence of real models could lead to some corrections of our mentality towards work.

Starting from the German sociologist interpretations, we might think that the only religious formula that has proven to be valid in social practice is the one provided by the Protestant environment. The ideas launched by Weber were valid for a particular social-historical context and highlight the religious force in social life. This fact does not mean at all that other religious doctrines would have the opportunity to foster a social and ethical conduct favourable to work or to a social economy.

Many surveys show that Romanians do not have a convincing attitude towards work: either are not willing to consistently workout, or they don’t have a sense of organization, or they lack discipline, etc. Along with these negative connotations regarding the relationship between the Romanian people with work, there appear a number of positive values referring to diligence, skill and inventiveness of Romanian people. Therefore, we believe that within the Romanian space the social-historical contexts have minimized the religious discourse and the ideologies and different “borrowings” without substance have been the ones that mattered.

A number of favourable interpretations towards the position of orthodoxy towards work shows that: “The true inner life is born and maintained by the deed” (Bernea, 1995: 65) and thus, by work. This way, Ernest Bernea, shows that acting has a double meaning:

a) a physical one as it appears in everyday life in which man works as a machine;

b) another, the spiritual one that can be regarded as a function of higher order of our destiny of people. So it is not enough to work until exhaustion just thinking about the material aspect of life. The facts will really get a meaning when they concern both the material and spiritual welfare.
Our acts are the expression of the faith that we carry while the purpose goes beyond the everyday materiality. The authentic Orthodox becomes a “doer of the deed”. The self-fulfilment of the human being results from the exteriorization of faith through work. You are an Orthodox as long as your actions are able to demonstrate this.” Faith without acting is like a flower without a fruit: it is shown in a passing beauty” (Bernea, 1995: 65).

The fact that the attitudes and representations of the Romanians towards work are not always the best ones, although we consider ourselves Orthodox actually shows a particular superficiality and a poor understanding of the Orthodox spirit as “doer of the deed. It is possible that declared faith not to be sufficiently profound so it would change us inside and manifest through facts and the ideological, political or other nature influences to be more powerful.

3. Two ideological paradigms on work

There is only one step from the work’s Protestant ethics up to the consumerist capitalism. Though today, within the capitalist societies work in no longer understood from a spiritual point of view, there continues to exist a mentality that is favourable to hard work and to high standards. Honesty, correctitude, honour, quality and the importance of services for community are part of the profession and they are no longer a religious morality.

Within the contemporary capitalist system we discover a series of differences that prove different values of work. Thus, in the case of the German model we notice that what is really important is: qualification and years of service. The system favours a series of attitudes that expresses through fidelity, solidarity, professionalism. On the other hand, the American capitalism values mobility, change and adaptability. For example, in Germany in order to have a management position one must have enough experience within the same business
and to prove good job qualification. (Albert, 1994). An important role has the institution of *apprenticeship*. The apprentice does not have the statute of the servant. He is not obliged to have the same job until the end of his life. He knows he can overtake his teacher and this way, to have a better position within the social hierarchy. The German system seems more egalitarian than the American one which emphasises adaptability and professional competition. The very good qualification of the intermediate levels within the German system has an important role. From here comes the high standard of living. Youths don’t learn only theoretical and practical knowledge but a certain work’s ethics, too. This fact is less visible in our country. Within the German model, factories and government highly finance professional qualification. Thus, they ensure careers and homogenize the salary levels avoiding destructive rivalries.

The capitalism, with all its types, has offered the perspective of unprecedented material wealth. In such a social construction work is emptied of its religious meaning, it is judged only form economical point of view using coefficients and numbers. In the modern economy the human is only a gear that is part of a whole mechanism. The human and spiritual dimensions are neglected. By setting the basis of modern economy, Adam Smith, introduced the concept of *work*. For him, “the annual work of a nation is the basis for ensuring all the things needed for everyday life consumption. These things are always either the immediate product of work, or bought from other nations in exchange for that product” (Foucault, 1996).

From this perspective, *work* is a *measuring unit* for the value of change. The price of any product includes or should include the effort, the hours of activity, tiredness etc.

The capitalism brought along a paradigm change: work is no longer a *purpose* but a *means*. It becomes a measurement means and a way of ensuring happiness and less a purpose through which to unveil utility, skill and – why not? – faith.
On their turn, the Romanian communists brought along a new vision on life and on work. In the name of liberty and equality, communists wanted to equally divide work and bread. The idea is generous at first sight, but it unveils its deficiencies as it is applied. The results are the following:

1) The permanent ideology led to loss of work’s meaning, obtaining perverted effects associated with negative connotations.

2) Encouragement of laziness, of inactivity, lack of responsibility and dishonesty by a false hierarchy and equality (equal retribution for unequal work). This “equality for everything” made that responsibility to be equally divided this meaning to be of everyone and nobody’s.

3) The lack of work’s ethics and its professionalizing.

4) The idea of the right to work of everyone led – during the communism regime – to a situation of obligation. Everything was taking place under the idea of patriotic work and group solidarity was purely formal.

5) Another deficit is represented by the bad organization and planning of work. This led to “forging” an economy and especially to a failure of the mentality, where the production is done without any meaning. The work’s utility was just a slogan.

6) The breakdown of the society into social classes (workers, peasants and intellectuals) productive or not, led to attitudes and social representations that promote false hierarchies.

In conclusion, in the case of communism we cannot talk about the ethics of work, but about pseudo-ethics. It is the expression of the promoted mediocrity, the one that sustained and controlled the system. Thus, communism got to the “performance” to prove itself corrupted and bankrupted. The socialist ideas of freedom, equality, happiness and wealth have been valuable at an ideological level. In the Eastern Europe the trials to build associations and cooperatives which to value solidarity and communitarian spirit did not have a great success. But they have another situation in the western area.
They appear more as a replica to the consuming liberalism and have an important support.

The industrial society, compared to the communism, reduces the human nature to the simple condition of a simple *thing, merchandise*. The anatomy of merchandise seems to be the fundament of the industrial society. The contemporary social and politic crises brought to foreground the idea of work. For many people it becomes an opportunity to rediscover their own identity and the other. “If the human being finally has to discover himself, he tries in vain to look for the ways that made him distance from himself”. (Bataille, 1994: 128) – the Protestants consider. Though, finding the identity and the intimacy through work has its own limits. Finding himself, the man becomes a lonely person in the middle of a whole crowd. This is the reason why the communitarian spirit and group solidarity are being resuscitated by all kinds of projects of social economy. It becomes a form of recovery of the individual and of the communitarian spirit within a lonely society.

The critics of the post industrial civilization state that “The Civilization of wealth based on consumption was the great historical undertaker of the glorious ideology of duty. In the second half of the century, the mass consumption annihilated the universe of the moralizing preaches, abolished the tough imperatives and produces some cultures in which the happiness is more important than moral prescriptions, pleasure is more important than interdiction and seduction than obligation”. (Lipovetsky, 1996: 61-62).

Compared to the post moralist culture, the moralist one mainly promoted the own and the other sacrifice. *The work was a holy duty that had to be respected and accomplished as it should.* “The modern industrial societies gave an exemplary value to work as well as to family. During the 14th century the bourgeoisies, the Puritans and the laic spirits, the liberal societies shared the same religion of work, all sung the same anthem for the Progress God, the older son of Work God.” (Lipovetsky, 1996: 64).
Later on, the Republicans defined work by everyone’s *solidarity* with the others and being necessary to progress. Thus, the idea of *well-done work*, the duty of being *useful* to the society, is brought into attention, laziness being condemned and marginalized.

Preaching the work’s moral in different ways, the many orientations have fully contributed to empty its human and sacred dimensions. Hence, the principle of human duty has been systematically eliminated.

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The images and the representations presented by us prove that work has a dual character: it is moralistic and materialistic; rigorous and scientific; idealistic and rationalized. From this perspective, the new social paradigms, presented a series of currents as: materialism, scientism, rationalism. The results led to one direction: “work is less and less associated to the idea of individual objective duty”. (Lipovetsky, 1996: 197). The social economy might be one of the remedial ideas. It could be valid both for the central and eastern European countries, as well as for the western ones. And this happens not only because it can “wear” different “ideological clothes” but because it values, first of all, deep feelings of human and communitarian solidarity.

Nowadays, the Romanians are in sort of a paradoxical situation: on one hand we can not talk about a work’s ethics in a religious meaning as in the case of Protestants; on the other hand we cannot either talk about a work’s moral in laic meaning or about a “post morality of work”. To a traditional perspective on work some institutional type models have overlapped, but have not integrated perfectly within the Romanian society. In the end, this view has been enough altered by the communist moral of work – actually *pseudo-moral*.

In such a context, the model of the social economy might bring back to life the real dimensions of the traditional spirit that placed in the centre: the community, the communion, the solidarity, the family, the other and mutual help etc. Each of these values is, actually, a main ingredient for the model of the
social economy. It is possible that such a construction may generate authentic collaboration and progress models and to generate not only success, but also solid ethic and moral structures in which work and inter human relations to be real guidance marks.

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