IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH SOCIAL ECONOMY. IDENTIFYING THE BEST PRACTICES AND SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Victor Nicolăescu et. all,
Editura Expert, Bucharest, 2011

Mihaela Pitea[1]

The study was made within the project “INTEGRAT – Resources for women and for the socially excluded Romani groups” co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Operational Sectorial Programme the Development of Human Resources 2007-2013 and is implemented by the Association for Socio-Economical Development and Promotion CATALACTICA, the Bucharest branch.

The title piques the interest of the reader because it is transparent and provides information on what is going to be found in the pages of this guide.

The Foreword present the project in which this material is included, the general objective, the specific objectives and also the purpose of this work document.

First chapter: Introduction in the field of good practices regarding social economy. The chapter is divided in two parts; the first part focuses on the theoretical approach and on the typology of the good practices within the field of social economy and the second part is descriptive. When the authors are talking about good practices they have reservations because there is no strict and universal accepted definition of the term.

Further on, the chapter presents the view points of the United Nations Organization with regards to the characteristics of good practi-

[1] Sociologist, Coordinator of the Centre of Resources in Social Economy, The Social Alternatives Association, 24, Nicolina Road, Iași; Tel.: 0735840022; e-mail: mpitea@alternativesociale.ro.
ces. There are also given several examples from the field of social inclusion, such as: the Greek Unit of the Management Organization (MOU), Best Practices and Local Leadership (BLP), the IMPART Network etc.

The authors emphasize the best practices within the social enterprise and the social cooperatives, marking the steps that they must follow. Among the institutions that are mentioned, we remind: the Cooperative of the Townsmen Apicultures from Denmark, the Company of Equitable Chocolate Commerce Kuapa Kokoo from Ghana, The Ethics Bank from Padova etc.

Second chapter: The conceptualization of the good practice idea. When we talk of good practice we must specify that there are several definitions of this term. Nevertheless, all the definitions have in common the fact that an activity is considered to be a good practice if it presents the superior results of a field.

The subchapter 2.1 The definition and the criteria of “best practices” applied to the socio-economical context presents several initiatives. The first program that is presented is the Economical Development and Employment at local level (EDEL) and the one carried out by the Organization for Economical Cooperation and Development (OECD). It also presents the list of the criteria regarding the collaboration between the Federal German Ministry of Transportation, Constructions and Urban Affairs regarding the support given to the entrepreneurship at university level in Eastern Germany, more precisely: the strategy, the resources, the support infrastructure, the entrepreneurship education, the support for launching and the evaluation.

EQUAL is a community initiative within the European Social Fund, and the authors of the book present the fact that this program was an experimental one, for learning based on tests.

The best practices and the local leadership program (BLP) represent a global network of institutions dedicated to identify and exchange successful solutions. The criteria and the considerations for a best practice presented by the authors are the following: impact, partnership, sustainability, promoting leadership and the community, equal opportunities and social inclusion, innovation in the local context and the transmittable features and the transfers.
The conclusions of the authors linked to the detailed initiatives were that their common point was to identify a list of models and to show the validity of the best practices.

Subchapter 2.2 Identifying the criteria for the typology of best practices in social economy, mentions that there is no list of good practices criteria agreed at European level. The author specifies that social innovation is important to be supported because it responds to the social need and because it provides power to the people through the creation of new social relationships and collaboration models.

Chapter three: Positive examples for the improvement of the social inclusion of women and of the Romani people by activating social economy.

Within this chapter there are presented successful cases that are pointing out: general information, time frames, budget and financing sources, human resources, activities, partners, successful factors, building of websites and contact information. The first part of the chapter presents projects addressed to women and to the Romani groups from countries such as: Greece, Lithuania, Hungary, Spain and Bulgaria.

Hereinafter this chapter there are described social enterprises, social cooperatives and foundation, out of which we mention: the Honey Cooperative of the City of Copenhagen - Denmark, COP(M)ADAM – Turkey, the Social Enterprise SOFA, the Popular and Ethic & Anti-Mall Bank, the VINCI Foundation for Community etc.

The subchapter that presents the Innovation Networks analyzes two initiatives: The Social Innovation Exchange and the Euclid Network.

The last part of the chapter, called Innovations in social economy – an international perspective, describes the following initiatives: Living Consumption CO-OP, China: Community support for agriculture, Ghana: the Commercial Chocolate Campaign and the USA: Opportunity partnerships for qualifying through technology in Latin America and the Caribbean area.

Fourth chapter: Recommendations for the transfer of good practices in the social economy field.

In this chapter the authors mention the fact that none of the programs that they have presented are a perfect practice because they
were chosen due to some specific identified elements. Within this material, the experts have selected the practices using a combination of criteria, emphasizing two features:

- the practices must reach their objectives, must have clear, well defined results that can be measured through an evaluation;
- the practices can be transferred to other locations, within the same country or between other states.

The main provider for projects in these fields is the national public authorities and the non-governmental organizations, and the financing sources are the community, national, regional, local funds and private support.

The authors divide the best practices in projects implemented by governmental institutions (national actions) and by non-governmental organizations (local level).

The recommendations of the authors for the project INTEGRAT – Resources for women and for the socially excluded Romani groups are to continue the identification of good practices in the social economy field following four directions: a data base of the good practices in the field, international workshops and work groups, the dissemination of good practices, the participation at international and European social inclusion networks, social economy and gender equality.

The material is recommended to the specialists that work within the area of social economy and who desire to identify the examples of good practices in the field. Plus, the value of the book is given by the fact that it can be read also by the public at large who wants to find out more information regarding this subject, due to the clear and accessible language.

We have to appreciate the fact that the authors announce their readers that the examples of good practices presented in the book must be considered good practices from the point of view of the criteria selected to be analyzed and are not generally accepted.

The book is worth reading by the people who desire to diversify their knowledge in the field of social economy good practices.