SOCIAL ECONOMY. COMPARED ANALYSIS IN EIGHT MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Victor Nicolăescu,
Sorin Cace, Eleftheria Koumalatsou, Simona Stănescu,
Expert Printing House, Bucharest, 2011

Mihaela Pitea[1]

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

Victor Nicolăescu signs this material together with three other persons with experience in the field of social economy, and these are: Sorin Cace, Eleftheria Koumalatsou and Simona Stănescu.

The Introduction describes the general objective, the specific objectives, the beneficiaries and the activities of the project.

Chapter 1: The context of social economy in the European Union

The authors make a short presentation of the history of the term social economy in Europe. This approach is found also in the report Profit for people. Opening Report within the Project The Social Economy Model Project in Romania where the authors specify that “the initiative at European and international level have as objective to stimulate this type of traditional players but also to attract the business sector in this area” (Stănescu ș.a 2012, p. 54).

[1] Sociologist, Coordinator Centre of Resources in Social Economy, Association Social Alternatives, 24, Nicolina Road, Iași; tel.: 0735840022; e-mail: mpitea@alternativesociale.ro.
When the acknowledgement of social economy is discussed, there are four components that are being analyzed: conceptual, normative, institutional and academic. The part dedicated to the social economy forms includes the definitions of cooperative societies, mutual societies, associations, foundations, social enterprises and hybrid entities of social economy with an emphasis on the evolution of social enterprises. The definition of the social economy forms has been a subject approached in many studies of the field. For this purpose, the React Association has defined the Mutual Aid Funds as being “the most representative social economy entities for Romania” (Pascaru 2012, p. 159).

The last part of this chapter closes with the presentation of the following theories: the theory of the public sector failure/the failure of the free market and the theory of interdependence; the theories of trust; the theory of the welfare state and the theory of supply.

Chapter 2: The national coordinates of social economy (eight member states of the European Union)

The authors present the defining features of the political approach in social economy and also its contribution to the social inclusion in each of the studied countries.

The rest of the chapter describes eight countries from the perspective of the national frameworks of social economy:

- **Great Britain** is the country where social enterprises and social companies are very much spread. Social enterprises include cooperatives, community businesses, trade organizations, associations and more recently social companies;
- **Portugal** is represented in this field by the integration campaigns because social enterprise is still a concept that is missing, both in the mass politics and also in the scientific debates. The integration campaigns receive technical and financial public support, being the only form of organization that has both economic and social purposes;
- **Spain**, the social economy organizations take the form of integration enterprises divided in four types: special employment centers, occupational centers, enterprises of the National Organi-
zation for Blind People and social integration enterprises for the persons with social exclusion risk;

- **Italy** is represented in the social economy sector by the social cooperatives that respond to the integration needs of the various vulnerable groups. The cooperation is Italy is the subject approached by many specialists in this field. “The current values of the cooperation are: cooperative democracy, reciprocity, equality, mutuality and solidarity, cooperative profit and inter-generosity, equity, respect and trust, worth, attention for the others and modesty, inter-cooperation, peace, social responsibility, sustainable development, freedom, subsidiarity, mutual aid” (Pitea 2012, p. 169).

- **Poland** is presented by the authors through the „old” and „new” forms of social economy organizations;

- In **Greece**, the social cooperatives with limited liability are the most encountered. We must mention the fact that although the social economy organizations under the form of agriculture cooperatives or consumers cooperatives are present for a long time, social economy remains unknown in this country;

- **Belgium** is represented by the key-features of social economy because this country has a long history in the field of social economy and its organizations are recognized at international level. Belgium stands out by the fact that the cooperation between the social economy sector and the other sectors is functioning;

- **Romania** is represented by the cooperative societies, non-profit organizations (associations and foundations), mutual aid funds and authorized protected units.

- The authors remind of the support measures for sustaining this sector in the studied countries, more precisely: legal regulations (privileges connected to taxes or the new approved laws), financial support (subsidies) and development strategies (education and formation).
Chapter 3: Social economy – a compared analysis of projects and organizations in eight member states of the European Union

The first part of this chapter presents the methodological framework used within the compared analysis. Hereinafter are presented the initiatives in the field of social economy from the analyzed countries, of which we remind: Food Banks (food banks) from Poland, the Networks system REAS from Spain, the Crest Cooperative from Great Britain etc.

Also in this chapter there is a detailed presentation containing the results of the projects and organizations analysis. The main conclusions are:

- the social economy organizations are the consequence of the public partnership and of the private clients;
- these organizations are like a network that produces new services in order to respond to the social needs;
- the private sector represents the resource of profit, etc.

In Romania this field is in a continuous development, and the social enterprise is seen as a way to support the communities of disadvantaged persons or the persons with social exclusion risk.

Chapter 4: Social economy – from the European level to the regional level

The authors mention the approaches of Cooch and Kramer connected to the social investments proposed by Anheier. Hereinafter, the authors review the success initiatives recorded in the implementation of the Social European Fund and the objectives of the Strategy 2020.

This material closes by pointing out the way in which the project „INTEGRAT – Resources for the socially excluded Roma women and groups” has the role in transferring the social economy models identified in other countries within the area viewed by the project from the country.

This publication targets the persons who are active in the field of social economy and who desire to find out more information on how exactly the institutions of this field function.

The authors have chosen eight countries for detailing the selected themes. It is a book that contains much theoretical information that
blends very well with the practical ideas and this is why it is worth reading.

References

