

# THE PERSPECTIVE HAD BY THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE PROJECT “THE SOCIAL ECONOMY MODEL IN ROMANIA”<sup>[1]</sup>

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## Summary

Being implemented at national level, the project named “The social economy model in Romania” has represented a framework of the activities carried out during March 2011 – December 2014 that have contributed to the strengthening of the strategic capacity of the social economy sector and to the growth of the inclusion level for the disadvantaged groups on the labor market and to the development of the Romanian human capital by training specialists for the social economy field. The project has viewed and involved, in the same time, all the relevant players within the social economy matter from Romania: central governmental institutions with responsibilities in this area, social economy experts, social workers, entrepreneurs who desire to develop social economy enterprises, persons working in the local public administration and people from the academic environment, enthusiastic students interested to have a career in this field and last but not least the vulnerable persons – the disadvantaged groups from the labor market. Each activity had an evaluation part that has monitored the feedback of the target groups. The partners involved in the development of the project – the Alternative Sociale Association, the University “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” from Iași, the Academy of Economical Studies from Bucharest and the United Nations Program for Development have rendered these data valuable and used them as primary sources for the development of a “Guide of good practices for social economy” and of a “Recommendations report regarding social economy”.

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Social workers, psychologists, psycho-pedagogues, persons working in the academic environment, representatives of the non-governmental organizations and of the social enterprises have all participated in 2013 to the Social Economy Summer School, organized by the University "Alexandru Ioan Cuza". This activity has represented for the participants an opportunity to consolidate their knowledge on social economy and to establish new collaborations in order to promote this relatively new concept in Romania. Rozica Tiță from World Vision Romania has stated after the end of the event: "This summer school has represented for me a good opportunity to know and establish a collaboration relationship with the specialists from the social economy field. I am very interested in this subject because I want to set up a social enterprise in a village from the county of Iași, one that shall provide jobs for the disadvantaged women from the rural environment. To this end, I have received some very useful and practical piece of advice from the speakers of this event". The success stories of some social businesses, concrete examples and case studies have represented a key point in the agenda of the event, as Amalia Tudorache, social worker has emphasized: "I liked that were presented some very interesting case studies, concrete examples and success models and stories of some social economy enterprises that managed to obtain high performance and to integrate on the labor market the various categories of vulnerable persons. All the sessions were extremely interactive and fascinating".

The training courses have represented another activity that has involved specialists from the field of social economy and social inclusion from Romania, both from the private sector and from the public sector. The Alternative Sociale Association has organized in Iași two free of charge training courses for the "Trainer" occupation, which are applicable in the field of social economy, during the period 25<sup>th</sup> -29<sup>th</sup> of March 2013 and during the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2013. Following the program, some 40 specialists were trained – social workers, psychologists, psycho-pedagogues, representatives of NGOs, of public institutions and of the protected units from Romania, who have developed skills in the training of trainers field with application in social economy, and also practical abilities for setting up and managing services in the social economy area. The participants of this course have found out

specific information about the field of social economy, perspectives of the Romanian social economy, the legislation in the field, models of good practices from the European Union Countries and integrating approach strategies for equity and social inclusion. "I was very much impressed by the practical side of the course, the case studies and the European social economy models that were presented. These examples have inspired me and I shall try to import them in the social economy activities that we carry out. While attending this course, I came up with the idea to set up a social economy enterprise in the field of recycling where we shall employ persons with disabilities. In the same time, during this course I have learned many interesting and useful things regarding the legislation that regulates the Romanian social economy field and which has many shortcomings and is extremely complicated", stated Iulian Zinovei, training counselor within the Estuar Foundation Bucharest. In his turn, Cristian Eugeniu Gelea from the National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection has pointed out the novelty of the presented information and also the usefulness of such events for the professional development of the specialists that are active in this field: "The learning of methods and procedures which are necessary to carry out training activity for adults, and also the discovery of some social business models that can provide jobs to the vulnerable persons, represent the reasons for which I am very pleased to have participated in this course. On this opportunity, I have met special people and I have learned that it is much easier to develop your qualities, than to remove your shortcomings".

The series of training courses has continued for the personnel working in the public local administration. The trainings were organized by the Alternative Sociale Association in 2013, in Iași, Brăila and Târgu Mureș. The participants of these courses said that the most interesting subject was the presentation of the good practices models within the social economy field throughout the European Union and the explanations regarding the legislative framework of the Romanian social economy field. They were interested to find out which are the organization forms for a social economy entity, the financing and implementing possibilities of the projects that have in view social inclusion policies. The participants pointed out the necessity to create a social economy

law that would regulate some financial facilities for those who desire to set up a social economy entity.

Following the process of training and development of the employees from the social inclusion field, the University "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" from Iași and the Academy of Economical Studies from Bucharest have created a social economy curriculum for post-graduate studies that was carried out in these two universities during the school year 2102 – 2013. The participants have presented at the end of this free post-graduate course a graduation project where they have developed social inclusion innovative models in the field of social economy, which they shall practically use in their professional activity.

The seminars named "Social Economy – Profit for People" have recorded a high interest shown by the central and local authorities, the persons from public institutions working in the fields of social assistance and inclusion and also the representatives of the social economy entities. The seminars were organized by the United Nations Program for Development during the years 2012 and 2013 in Bacău, Târgoviște, Curtea de Argeș, Galați and București and were part of the information and awareness campaign regarding the importance of social economy and the financing opportunities within this field of activity.

The social inclusion specialists, but also other entrepreneurs from Craiova, Bacău, Sfântu Gheorghe interested to obtain support to set up a social enterprise or to develop a social economy initiative, have participated during the month of October 2013 in some experience exchanges organized in Bucharest by the United Nations Program for Development. They have stated that they were interested to learn about success models of social enterprises from Romania and from abroad, and also about the secrets of their sustainability. "We had the opportunity to discuss directly with those who have succeeded, to see in a concrete manner how does a social economy enterprise function in Romania, to ask questions and to strengthen the relationships we have built between us. This experience exchange has provided us with the opportunity that each participant shares and learns from the experiences of the others, to analyze together the factors that support or influence the development of the social economy units, in the current context of economical crisis", stated Cristina Bălănescu, area manager

World Vision Romania. The participants said that these experience exchanges helped them identify the variables, the challenges, the risks and the opportunities that lay in the setting up of social enterprises, taking account of the risks and of the experience gathered at national level. "The successful social economy models that were presented have helped me build some collaboration relationships with very experienced people from the field of social economy. I have received many practical information that I shall be able to use in our future projects", said Adolf Papp, director of the National Society Red Cross Romania. Also, these experience exchanges lead to the shaping up of ideas to create sustainable social economy projects. The participants emphasized the fact that the support coming from the local and regional authorities is a factor that contributes to the sustainability of the social economy initiatives. "Our organization has strengthened its knowledge regarding social economy and the concept of management efficiency in this field. The usefulness of the event has resulted also from the diversity and the expertise of the invited organizations, because we were able to learn good practices and to develop new initiatives for the future, together with other organizations in this field", said the representative of the Window Association Romania.

The initiatives presented during these experience exchanges were put into practice within the social economy incubators that were set up in 2013 by the United Nations Program for Development Romania, in Sfântu Gheorghe, Bacău and Craiova. These incubators were welcomed with great openness and appreciation by the local authorities and communities. "Setting up a social economy incubator in Craiova represents an inspired activity for our city. The only way to create jobs for the disadvantaged people is by getting involved in the development of social economy; this is the only way to strengthen the economical, social and regional cohesion, by developing the human capital and promoting active citizenship and social solidarity, principles that must function in all European societies", stated Ionuț Pârvulescu, spokesperson of the Craiova Mayor Office. The representatives of the local authorities have pointed out the importance of these incubators for providing jobs and for increasing the quality of life in the area. "Having among its objectives to ease the access on the labor market of the

disadvantaged groups and to promote an inclusive and cohesive society in order to ensure the welfare of all citizens, the city of Sfântu Gheorghe considers that it is convenient and necessary to develop the strategic capacity of the social economy sector [...] We shall contribute to the sustainability of the incubator by integrating the solutions identified in the socio-economical development plans of the future”, said Vilmos Tankó, Director of the Community Assistance Department of Sfântu Gheorghe.

The persons included in the disadvantaged groups (Roma people, disabled people, beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum income and young people over 18 years old who leave the institutionalized system of child protection), but also the local authorities from Costești, Curtea de Argeș, Cluj Napoca, Târgoviște, Bistrița, Galați, Buzău, Călărași, Bacău, în comunele Ocnița, Gura Ocniței, Ludești, Cluj-Pata Rât, Crângurile, Costeștii din Vale and Comișani were informed about the opportunities offered by the field of social economy to a community, during the work meetings organized by the experts of the United Nations Program for Development. These meetings showed a high interest for the social economy projects that have as objective the integration of the vulnerable groups. The most social problems identified for the insertion of these people on the labor market referred to the obstacles connected to the mentality of the employers, the limited work experience, the prejudice of society towards disabled persons, health problems, negative views on the skills and abilities of the disabled people. The participants signaled a lack of financial means or insufficient means for setting up entrepreneurial activities. With reference to the young people over 18 years old who leave the institutionalized system of child protection, the meetings showed that they develop independent life skills, but in the same time they have a certain dependence on the protection system. This dependence comes also from the fact that the insertion on the labor market is done with great difficulty and the job awards for vulnerable groups are missing. From the view point of the opportunity to initiate a social economy activity, the participants in these meetings have a low entrepreneurial potential; they prefer employment, rather than starting a business of their own.

As a conclusion, we could say that the persons included in the disadvantaged groups on the labor market, were interested to participate to some information sessions where they can discuss the problems faced in their attempts to integrate on the labor market, but also to other entrepreneurial trainings, that would allow them to develop social economy enterprises. The importance of the ideas and experience exchanges between the players involved in social economy and the streamlining of parallel activities within the projects financed by the Social European Fund in the field of social economy development are the main issues underlined by the social economy specialists who have participated to the activities organized by the project "The social economy model in Romania".