

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY TO THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Starting from the idea that the European Union aims to reduce the disparities among the member countries, to help them reach a level of development which can lead to a high level of employment, of productivity and of a good social cohesion, the problem of a durable development still remains a global objective of the countries that are members of the EU, objective that can be attained by an international cooperation which aims towards economic growth, social development and protection of the environment. After an analysis of the socio-economic background and the investment level in Romania, new tendencies were identified which can be edited, financed and developed in Romania, and which can determine a real, constant and long term economic growth. The problem of the social economy, still not well enough regulated in Romania, can lead to the adoption of innovative actions to capacitate disadvantaged categories. In this direction, premises can be created to support disadvantaged categories, which will determine an increase of the rate of employment and which can offer solutions to fight poverty. An essential role in facing the challenges raised by the medium and long-term development is played by the funds assigned to Romania within the operational programs which can lead to the decrease of the regional and social differences now present in Romania. This paper presents the good practice activities in the system of social economy present in other member countries as well as the measures taken by some member countries for good governance

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1. Introduction

According to “the country report of Romania for 2016, as well as a detailed evaluation regarding the prevention and the correction of the macro economical disequilibrium”, because of the socio – economic context which affected the whole Europe in 2010 – 2012, although it made progress in most areas of activity, Romania did not succeed in reaching all the goals regarding the use of the funds granted in the period 2007-2014. (European Commission, 2016). Taking into account the risks of maintaining the disequilibrium, for the medium-term EU has adopted The Strategy Europe 2020, a document that regulates the priorities and the corrective actions per areas of activity for the next 10 years. Starting from the premise that one of the objectives of The Strategy Europe 2020 is that of ensuring a “Growth favorable to inclusion – an economy with a high rate of employment which ensures the economic, social and territorial cohesion” and the directions that The Strategy Europe 2020 traces for the near future are: poverty minimization, social inclusion and the objective of 75% employment rate for the people aged 24-64, all these have become recommendations, strategies and objectives in the operational programs for Romania and in the Framework Document of Implementation. (European Commission, 2017). The National Strategic Plan of Reference 2007-2013 (NSPR) sets a correlation between the priorities at the European level and the national priorities of development established in the National Plan of Development (NPD) 2007-2013.

The strategy of NPD is based on the Communitarian Strategic Orientations regarding Cohesion and on the Lisbon Agenda goals: increase of competitiveness, full employment and durable environment protection. One of the six national priorities of development of The National Strategic Plan of Development 2007-2013 is globally the decrease of the differences of development in comparison with the EU by developing the human resources. Another important element is the national and European legislation regarding social economy.

2. Literature review

Analyzing the socio-economic context within the member countries, especially the notion of social economy, it has been noticed that the concept of social economy has been correlated with the concept of social enterprise, which represents a form of entrepreneurial structure based on elements taken from the experiences of the third sector.

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According to the study „Forms of Organization existent in the social economy of the developed countries of the EU” issued by the Center of Resources in Social Assistance in Romania, the European Network for the activities of the Social Enterprises has identified the possibility of creating an interdependence between economic characteristics and social characteristics, social enterprises being able to take several juridical forms:

Table 1. Countries and legal forms of social enterprises

| Legal form | Social Economy Structures | Applicable country | Legal basis |
|---|--|------------------------|---|
| Joint-business | Social joint-businesses | Italy | Law 381/1991 |
| | Social joint-businesses Solidarity | Portugal | Law 22.12.1997 |
| | The Commercial Society with Limited Responsibility | Greece | Law 2716/1999, |
| | Cooperatist Company | France | Law 624/2001), |
| | European Cooperative | The European community | Regulation – EU, no. 1435/2003 |
| Commercial society owner of capital (SRL, SA) | | | |
| Commercial Enterprise | The Company of Social Feasibility | Belgium | Law 13/4/1995 from the Code of Commercial Companies |
| | the Company with a communitarian purpose | Great Britain | Law 28.10.2004 |
| „Open juridical form” | Social Enterprise of Integration | Finland | Law 1351/2003 |
| | Social Enterprise | Italy | Decree 155/2006 |

Source: The table presents own processed data based on the sources below

Low 8 novembre 1991, n. 381 (1). Pubblicata nella Gazz. Uff. 3 dicembre 1991, n. 283.

<http://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/99068l.htm>,

Council of the European Union, 2003, Brussels, Regulation (EU), No. 1435/2003

Other types of successful enterprises for the social economy: Enterprises providing social services (Austria), Labor cooperatives (Finland), “a finalite” social enterprises (Belgium), a Enterprises for Social Integration of Labor (WISEs) (Spain), Cooperatives of general interest (France), Work integration (Germany), Ethical Banks for -the Social Economy (UK), Social cooperatives (Italy).

The common characteristics of the enterprises in Social Economy are: pursuing both economic and social objectives, entrepreneurial characteristic which prevents social exclusion and taking active part in decreasing the rate of unemployment, identifying feasible solutions which lead to the consolidation of social cohesion and economic development.

As economic units, social enterprises use 30 million people as labor force in the European Union. According to a survey of the International Cooperatist Union, the movement of cooperation was represented in fifteen countries, members of the European Union, that is

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131.314 cooperatives which gathered a number of 85.348.798 members and 2.500.000 employees. Among these enterprises: 35.4% belonged to the primary sector (agriculture, fishing, forests exploitation) with 12.45% members and 31.3% employees; 20.6% belonged to the secondary sector (craftsmanship, labor) with 1% members and 23.3 employees; 44% belonged to the tertiary sector (banks, loan institutions, insurance, commerce and associations of consumers, cooperatives in the domain of health, living, transportation, etc.) with 86.55% members and 45.40% employees.

Among the main results obtained by other states can mention: the groups of mutual help which are especially present in the fields of social assistance and health; cooperatives of workers (which are to be found in Sweden and Spain) which assist the persons affected by social exclusion, Work Integration Social enterprises (WISEs) or social companies (social cooperatives type B in Italy) which function as “intermediary labor force market” for the beginners in order to facilitate their transition towards the labor market and also offers long term employment to the persons with physical or mental disabilities (Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection, 2011).

Social economy structures are relevant actors in the process of social innovation through their effects on the entire local development process. Social enterprises contribute at local level to improving the standard of living of individuals in vulnerable groups by increasing their employment and production levels and increasing their demand for quasi-public goods. (Borzaga, Tortia, 2009, p.212) Occupation within social enterprises is important for the opportunity for people belonging to vulnerable groups - women, young people, people with disabilities - who do not have a very high occupational mobility. It does not matter so much the number of employees, but the fact that they are employed. (Petrescu, 2013).

3. Methodology

Based on the used methodology which consisted mainly in documentation, analysis, comparison and verification of the state of the existing social context, I have identified some possible solutions to the existing limitations/constraints by creating an experimental basis that I have used to substantiate the conclusions of this article.

In this respect, we can state that social innovation, as a factor of socio-economic development, faces in Romania an important lack of culture and supportive competence, with poor legislative, organizational and political mechanisms, Romania placing itself being found on a lower level in the euro classifications on the level of production, assimilation and dissemination of social innovation. (Stoica, 2009)

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The present study presents the role and importance of identifying, legislating and applying social economy forms as a factor of social innovation in reducing social problems and implicitly in economic growth.

Regarding the socio-economic context in Romania, given the social problems caused by high unemployment, it is known that Romania faces a high level of poverty, the people in the vulnerable group being easily identified in view of the environment in which they live.

The vast majority of this disadvantaged group face a strong inferiority complex, can not find a job or work without official documents, cannot benefit from social insurance, or do not have the right professional training.

Lack of training for people from vulnerable groups makes it harder for them to work, most of them being employed for short periods of time. Some of these people can benefit from state subsidies (minimum guaranteed income).

The social assistance system in Romania does not have specialized structures at national, regional or local level to facilitate the identification, reporting and support of these people in order to prepare and facilitate access to employment opportunities. The causes can be: economic crisis, social assistance reform, and poor budgets.

A solution to facilitate the socio-professional insertion of these vulnerable groups is considered social entrepreneurship, regarded as a form that could add value to the current economy.

Social entrepreneurship is a viable solution capable of promoting the social economy and facilitating the long-term employment of people from vulnerable groups, given that social entrepreneurship is a much-promoted form in the EU.

In the current socio-economic context, social entrepreneurship is a viable solution, given that by creating this structure, vulnerable people will be able to hold skills both in the business area and in the social area.

This implemented solution can help reduce social inequalities through the professional insertion of people from vulnerable groups.

Considering the role the social economy can play in solving social problems and the economic development of Romania, we have started from defining the social economy, the legal forms that a social economy structure can have, as it is regulated by Law 219/2015 on the social

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economy, corroborated by the measures taken by Romania to support the development of these forms as a result of accessing the non-reimbursable financing under the operational programs (POCU - Priority Axis 4, Specific Objective 4.16.) (Ministry of European Funds, 2017).

In this respect, according to the provisions of Law 219/2015, Art. 2, paragraph (1) "Social economy is the set of activities organized independently of the public sector, whose purpose is to serve the general interest, interests of a community and / or personal interests by increasing the employment of vulnerable group members and / or the production and supply of goods, the provision of services and / or the execution of works. " (Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection, 2011).

The table no. 2 present the legal forms that social enterprises can have according to Law 219/2015 respectively:

Table 2. Legal forms of social enterprises in Romania

| No. | The legal form of the social enterprise | The legal basis in which it operates |
|-----|---|--|
| 1. | cooperative society of first grade | Law no. 1/2005 concerning the organization and functioning of the cooperative, republished |
| 2. | credit cooperatives | Government Emergency Ordinance no. 99/2006 |
| 3. | associations and foundations | Government Ordinance no. 26/2000, Law no. 246/2005 |
| 4. | the mutual benefit homes of the employees | Law no. 122/1996 |
| 5. | mutual benefit homes for pensioners | Law no. 540/2002 |
| 6. | agricultural companies | Law no. 36/1991 |

Source: The table presents own processed data based on the sources below

Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection (2011),

Research report on the social economy in Romania from a comparative European perspective

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296735148_Raport_de_cercetare_privind_economia_sociala_in_Romania_din_perspectiva_europeana_comparata

Considered in complementarity with other measures necessary to meet the main objectives proposed by Romania in order to achieve the objectives set in the 2020 Europe Strategy, we have analyzed how, through the actions undertaken to support the development of the social economy, they can help to participate in strengthening economic and social cohesion, the employment of vulnerable group people, the development of social services.

Last but not least, we have analyzed how all these measures converge towards the expected outcome, which is to lead to economic growth and to the fulfillment of the assumed country obligations that are necessary for the policemen to achieve structural, economic and budgetary reform.

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The European Commission annually monitors and analyzes the budgetary and structural reform policies formulated and implemented by the Member States, identifies malfunctions, and makes recommendations for improving the implementation framework and monitors their implementation in order to stimulate the economic growth and job creation. (European Commission, 2017).

According to the General Report on the European Union's activities, issued by the European Commission for 2014, based on the analysis of each Member State, the Commission has proposed a series of economic policy recommendations to the Member State in order to strengthen the economic recovery and, at the same time, formulated guidelines on how to stimulate the economic growth, boost competitiveness and create jobs in the coming period.

The recommendations made for the Member States were based on the progress made after the round of recommendations in 2013, and they also emphasized the identified needs for further structural reforms of the Union's economies, proposing new measures of: reducing unemployment, eradicating social inequalities and combating poverty; modifying tax policies to boost employment; promoting public policies to increase the competitiveness of the economies, stimulating private investment, debt reduction measures.

Analyzing the socio-economic context in the Member States, as it was also included in the Report of the European Commission (European Commission, 2014) an important role in the economic development would have the field of employment and social development in this respect, these developments in this area have been monitored, and although progress has been registered, modernizing the labor market and integrating a growing number of people into the labor market are a priority.

The recommendations were aimed at supporting and ensuring the vocational training of the unemployed, improving public employment services and introducing guarantees for young people, as well as modernizing education systems.

In order to better empower and involve stakeholders, including the social partners, in identifying solutions to eliminate the risks that affect the labor market and social trends, the Joint Employment Report proposing to the member states measures and employment indicators.

At the same time, recommended printer measures, the Commission also recommended continuing economic policies based on the three pioneers: new commitments on structural reforms, budgeting and investment stimulation.

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According to "Romania's Country Report for 2016, including a detailed evaluation on the prevention and correction of the macro-economic imbalances" due to the socio-economic context that affected Europe in 2010-2012, Romania, although it made progress in most of the sectors of activity, did not manage to fully meet the targets for the indicators achieved as a result of the use of the funds allocated during the programming period 2007-2014. (European Commission, 2016).

Given the risk of imbalances, the EU has adopted the Europe 2020 strategy on medium term, a framework document regulating the priorities and corrective actions on sectors for the next 10 years. Starting from the premise that one of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy is to ensure a "Growth favorable for inclusion- a high employment economy, ensuring economic, social and territorial cohesion" and the directions that the Europe 2020 Strategy follows for the next period: poverty reduction, social inclusion and the 75% employment target for people aged 64, they have been included into recommendations, strategies and objectives within the negotiated operational programs regarding Romania and in the Implementation Framework Document. (European Commission, 2017)

The 2014-2020 Partnership Agreement (PA) includes five European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI funds): the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). (European Commission, 2014).

The funds allocated to Romania in the 2014-2020 period are: for cohesion policy, under the ERDF, ESF programs, approximately 22.4 billion euros; for the Youth Employment Initiative, approximately 106 million EUR from (together with an identical allocation from the ESF); for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), approximately 168 million EUR.

The purpose of allocating these funds is to provide Romania with the capacity to cope with medium and long-term development challenges, reduce existing regional and social disparities in Romania, provide viable solutions to social challenges and fight against poverty.

In this respect, given the priorities assumed in the PA, investment in research, development of enterprise innovation is essential to meet the requirements and facilitate cooperation with the business sector. The impact of these investments can lead to an increase in the number of jobs addressed to young graduates. Thus, they can contribute to the development of human capital by increasing the employment rate among graduates.

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These investments will be essential to helping Romania respond to the Europe 2020 Strategy priorities and country-specific recommendations as well as to the related policy reforms in the education, employment, social inclusion and public administration sectors.

One of the operational programs that provides for financial allocation that is able to respond directly to static actions to improve the situation of disadvantaged categories is the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020. (Ministry of European Funds, 2016).

Financial allocation / region category related to Priority Axis 4 Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (within the Human Capital Operational Program) is as follows in table no.3:

Table 3. Countries and legal forms of social enterprises

| Priority axis | Source | Region category | The EU contribution | Source | Region category |
|--|--------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| AP 4 - Social Inclusion and Poverty Fighting | ESF | Developed region | 50.535.114 | 12.633.779 | 63.168.893 |
| | | Less developed region | 889.970.370 | 157.053.595 | 1.047.023.965 |

Source: *Guidelines for accessing funding under the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020 (2016)*

<http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/images/files/programe/CU/POCU-2014/20.04/ORIENTARI.GENERALE.POCU.pdf>

4. Results

In spite of the impact that the structures of the social economy have upon the communities where they are active, but also upon the society in general, there are still a lot of obstacles they face.

The first one is the little visibility which still affects this segment of the economy (including in the mass media), which leads to a lack of awareness and recognition of the social value that it generates. In conclusion, the tendency of the present economic culture of the society is based on the personal interest and the individual initiative as opposed to a collective and altruistic behavior.

The poor visibility is not only due to the poor representation in the mass-media, but rather due to the lack of education in this direction. While there are more classes of entrepreneurship in the curricula of the educational programs, from secondary schools to business schools, formal education and the education regarding social entrepreneurship and social economy are often absent in these programs. This means that the structures of social economy have difficulties in identifying people and management who possess beliefs, abilities and competences necessary in this domain, in contrast with the organizations of the conventional economy. Another element which is not developed enough in comparison with

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the conventional economy is that of the infrastructure and the networks of support which should provide adequate assistance for the development of the business. The assistance can go from a strategic planning and providing advice to incubators of businesses adapted to the specific and to the needs of the economy and social entrepreneurship.

The access to finance is another important aspect that affects the organizations of the social economy which often have difficulties in getting access to the same type of finances available to the conventional enterprises, due to their specific. There is an increased attention given to this aspect on a European level. New options of finance are developed, from the level of investments with a social impact to special financial instruments (for example, The European Fund of Social Entrepreneurship). Another obstacle is the lack of a unitary legislation in the domain at a European level. In contrast to the conventional businesses, the structures that gravitate in the social economy are regulated and recognized in a different way in the European countries, which represents a significant barrier on the way of their development, especially those exceeding national boundaries. Even within the country, many structures of the social economy have evolved from bottom to top without a public politics or a regulation frame for this domain, which could have sustained them or could have helped their development. (Eurostat, 2015).

According to the European survey, it is considered that social economy in Europe employs over 14.5 million people, which represents 6.5% of the total of labor force in the 28 countries members of EU. In Romania the total is under 2%. (The European Economic and Social Committee, 2017).

Table 4. Share of paid jobs in the social economy sector, out of total paid jobs. The European Union (2014-2015)

| No. | The country | Jobs related to social economy structures | Total jobs | % |
|-----|----------------|---|------------|------|
| 1 | Lithuania | 7332 | 1301000 | 0,6% |
| 2 | Croatia | 15848 | 1559000 | 1,0% |
| 3 | Slovenia | 10710 | 902000 | 1,2% |
| 4 | Malta | 2404 | 182000 | 1,3% |
| 5 | Romania | 136385 | 8235000 | 1,7% |
| 6 | Cyprus | 6984 | 350000 | 2,0% |
| 7 | Slovakia | 51611 | 2405000 | 2,1% |
| 8 | Latvia | 19341 | 868000 | 2,2% |
| 9 | Poland | 365900 | 15812000 | 2,3% |
| 10 | Bulgaria | 82050 | 2974000 | 2,8% |
| 11 | Czech Republic | 162921 | 4934000 | 3,3% |
| 12 | Greece | 117516 | 3548000 | 3,3% |
| 13 | Sweden | 195832 | 4660000 | 4,2% |
| 14 | Ireland | 95147 | 1899000 | 5,0% |
| 15 | Portugal | 215963 | 4309000 | 5,0% |

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| | | | | |
|----|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------|
| 16 | Hungary | 234747 | 4176000 | 5,6% |
| 17 | United Kingdom | 1694710 | 30028000 | 5,6% |
| 18 | Denmark | 158961 | 2678000 | 5,9% |
| 19 | Estonia | 38036 | 613000 | 6,2% |
| 20 | Germany | 2635980 | 39176000 | 6,7% |
| 21 | Austria | 308050 | 4068000 | 7,60% |
| 22 | Finland | 182105 | 2368000 | 7,7% |
| 23 | Spain | 1358401 | 17717000 | 7,7% |
| 24 | Italy | 1923745 | 21973000 | 8,8% |
| 25 | Belgium | 403921 | 4499000 | 9,0% |
| 26 | France | 2372812 | 26118000 | 9,1% |
| 27 | Netherlands | 798778 | 8115000 | 9,8% |
| 28 | Luxembourg | 25345 | 255000 | 9,9% |
| | Total EU -28 | 13621535 | 215722000 | 6,3% |

Source: Remunerated workplaces, 15- and 65-year-olds (Eurostat, 2015)
<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-04-17-876-ro-n.pdf>

One way to improve the visibility of the organizations of the social economy and that of the social entrepreneurship in order to make people aware of them and to make visible their impact upon society is to promote a better research in this domain, starting with a systematic collection of data. This can also be done by increasing the power of the organizations of social economy by introducing certain programs of specific study in the academic field.

In order to understand the elements that govern the social economy, as well as the resemblances and differences among the European countries, some research networks have conducted a certain amount of studies. Their conclusions have been introduced in support educational programs, such as UnLtd, which cooperates with more than 40% of the universities in Great Britain to help them encompass a culture of the social entrepreneurship or back up the students who intend to set up a social enterprise.

Some universities even build new research centers in this field, often in cooperation with organizations of the social economy, and even organize post academic programs, such as the management of a social enterprise or social innovation. Another aspect which can be improved is the relationship between the economy and the social entrepreneurship on the one hand and the institutions of the public sector and the private operators on the other hand.

All the initiatives can contribute to the improvement of the relationship among the representatives of the organizations that activate in the domain of the economy and the social entrepreneurship and the institutions in the public sector that have responsibilities in this domain. (Matei A., 2009).

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5. Conclusions

Given the changes that have taken place over the last decades and the social environment, there has been identified the need to act towards the reorganization of social, economic and political activity by outlining new policies and governing strategies at a local, regional and national level which can be tailored to respond to real needs and the newly identified social phenomena.

An analysis of the nonprofit institutions and organizations and the correlation between the public and the private sector have made it necessary to adapt legislation so as to allow the emergence of new areas of interest such as social entrepreneurship by introducing new legal regulations for the structures of the social economy and establishing rules for their operation so as to be implemented.

Last but not least, the development of the entrepreneurial culture in the field of social economy should be taken into account by including in the curricula a distinct discipline aimed at the social entrepreneurship and the social economy so that they can be deepened by continuing the studies in the higher education structures.

Increasing the knowledge and adaptability of those interested in the field of social economy together with the development of the legal and financial framework that will support and encourage as much as possible the creation and development of the social economy structures can lead to the increase of the employment level and the participation of the largest number of members belonging to disadvantaged groups, becoming a participatory factor in the economic development.

Taking into account the financial support allocated to Romania, as an EU member state, for this sector of activity, through the Operational Programs in Romania, respectively the POCU, we can say that these are essential for the development of the social economy structures. POCU will finance the proposed social economy structures if they are perceived as social innovations being able: provide a viable solution to an unsatisfied social need or respond to a social problem; to propose an innovative aspect, a change through the activities or products / services offered regardless of whether they relate to a process, product or services that can be perceived as new in the context in which they are applied; identify and establish ways to lead to a social, cultural, normative or regulatory change in society; to produce a macro-benefit for groups of individuals, communities, society as a whole; respond to a corresponding social need that innovation can be distributed through organizations, individuals or enterprises whose main purpose is social.

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Considering the evolution of the social economy in relation to the economic and social potential as well as the importance of this type of economic entity, the future directions of research will refer to comparative analyses of the economic activity that meet the collective needs in additional areas:

- environment (ecological agriculture, environmental protection services, food processing) in countries such as Malta, the Czech Republic and Romania;
- serving the community in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands;
- cultural and sports activities (arts, crafts, music, tourism) in Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, etc.

Under the Cohesion Policy, the social economy is an important pillar in the context of the need to reduce social disparities between the respective member states and also between the regions of each country.

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