



HUMAN RESOURCES FORMATION IN THE SECTOR OF SOCIAL ECONOMY

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Abstract: *Presently, social economy adds, if not multiplies the social values in social and economic terms. This article highlights the importance and particular role of the educational programs in the transfer of values which impact on the long term and in a positive way the contemporary communities. The human resources involved in social economy have a strong will to return the social benefits to the community and society as a whole, as they are not driven by the accumulation of profit and personal gain. Within the context in which the fact that the universities are educational structures which transform societies is acknowledged, it is important to direct our attention towards the promotion and running of sustainable educational programs in the field of social economy.*

Keywords: *social economy; educational programs, human resources; universities; competencies*

Introduction

Social economy run along a very interesting path over the past three decades in Europe, and Romania displays an institutional and academic emulation. Although there are gaps in the regulation of the social economy sector both at the European and at the national levels, the multitude of forms and activities specific to these interventions of the social economy require the existence of specialised human resources.

Obviously, social economy has a much wealthier reflection at the level of the practices and a much more limited one at the level of the educational programs. This article tries to make a picture of the general stage of social economy development and to approach the dimension of the human resources involved in social economy activities. It also highlights the importance of developing and running educational programs which to deal distinctly with the social economy sector with the purpose to ensure a sustainable and innovating environment for the future interventions.

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Social economy development

Presently, the importance of social economy for the economies of the countries worldwide is yet to be acknowledged; there still are distinct levels of support for the consolidation of this sector. Thus, one may analyse the acknowledgement of the social economy sector in terms of four components (Nicolăescu *et al.*, 2011, 13-24): conceptual component (drawing up definitions and typologies); normative component (adoption of new legislative initiatives at the European and national levels); institutional component (establishment and proliferation of the representative structures which promote, develop and monitor the specific policies); academic component (establishment of the aggregate scientific resources based on evidences).

According to some Romanian authors, social economy includes all the organisations operating between the public and private sectors in terms of organisation, operation and stated principles (Pîrvu *et al.*, 2009: 53).

Social economy provides solutions to reduce social exclusion by increasing the employment rate of the vulnerable people and by developing mechanisms which to support these people (Arpinte *et al.*, 2010b:66). At the European level, the Lisbon European Council (2000) approached the control of social exclusion, through a coherent package of policies in the field of social and employment areas and in economic policies, all of them highly interlocked (Lambro M., 2010: 165); in Romania “a considerable level of expertise in the measurement of the poverty and social inclusion has been achieved by the academic and governmental bodies, as well as a rich history of using indicators of poverty and social inclusion (Briciu 2009: 165). Within this context, social economy fosters its role of bringing economic and social benefits within the society (Anca, 2012:15).

Social economy documented its capabilities to contribute efficiently to solving the newly emerging problems, succeeding to consolidate its position of sector necessary for the balanced and stable development of the state and of the business environment. The social economy organisations managed somehow to reduce the differences between classes, to compensate the lacks which the state manifested in the provision of services, to support the labour market by including the different vulnerable groups (Nicolăescu V., Căce S., Koutmalasou E., Preoteasa A.M., 2011), thus improving the standard of life of the people and fostering democracy.

Worldwide, mostly in Europe, social economy experienced a strong development in practice, on the background of a capitalist economy which no longer copes with the new problems of the world (Căce, Căce, Cojocaru, Sfetcu, 2013: 18). In Europe, social economy consists of a multitude of actors and it succeeds to produce social usefulness and to cover the needs which the public sector or the business environment fail to cover. Social economy addresses all forms of social needs and the funds required for these activities are collected either through donations or grants, or, as it is desired, by doing economic activities whose profit is directed towards such services.

Strategy Europa 2020, approved in March 2010 by the Council of Europe is a new strategy for employment and growth, relying on the consolidation and a better

coordination of the socio-economic policies according to clear goals (Table 1) set according to the following priorities (COM, 2010):

- Smart growth – „consolidation of knowledge and innovation as drive of our future growth”;
- Sustainable growth – „more efficient promotion of the resources, of a greener and more competitive economy”;
- Inclusive growth (this term is used for the first time in the official European documents) – „establishment of an economy with a high employment rate, thus ensuring the social and territorial cohesion”, „empowering the people by a high level of employment, investing in improved competencies, fighting against poverty and modernising the labour market, social formation and protection, supporting the citizens to administrate and anticipate the changes, to build an inclusive society”.

Within the context in which a strong accent falls on the practical implementation of Strategy Europe 2020, which is associated with the definition of social economy as a reliable partner for the civil society and the state (Zamfir E., Fitzek S. 2010, p. 8), it extremely necessary to monitor and evaluate the running social economy initiatives and to present the mechanisms which establish a healthy and vibrating ecosystem through this form of economy which supports the innovating social entrepreneurs (Cace S., Arpinte D., Cace C., Cojocaru Ș., 2011, p. 65; Neagu A., Nicolăescu V. Preoteasa A.M., Cace C., 2011).

Human resources involved in social economy

In Romania, in 2008 there were 27,319 active social economy organisations covering a diversity of non-profit associative forms such as associations, foundations, cooperative unions (Lambriu *et al.*, 2011: 104). According to recent data from the accounting statements for 2010, the statistics give a number of 29,226 social economy organisations (26,332 non-governmental organisations – including the agricultural and common associations, 2,017 cooperatives and 887 mutual aid units), which employed a total of 116,379 people (Petrescu *et al.*, 2013: 60-61). The non-governmental, or “third sector” revives within the civil Romanian society, the Romanian culture having a history of association (Chișea *et al.*, 2010: 93). A full picture of the social economy organisations from Romania can be found in the Atlas of the Social Economy from Romania 2012 (Constantinescu, 2012). Social economy developed initially as a major area of intervention by structural projects, which subsequently consolidated as a conceptual pattern (Cozarescu, 2012: 133). Although there is a significant involvement of the civil society, a campaign of information and awareness-raising about the social economy organisations would be necessary for the public at large (Achimescu, Cace, Stănescu, 2011: 110).

Within the context in which the modern social enterprises are promoted intensely, it is important that the involved human resources – associates, directors and volunteers – have a strong will to return the social benefits to the community and the society as a

whole, since they are not driven by the accumulation of profit and persona gain (Cace, Nicolăescu, Katsikaris, Parcharidis, 2013: 135).

With the purpose to ensure a proper professional training of the human resources, the exchange of good practices also involves a special professional education of the participants, as shown by the following knowledge and competencies (Nicolăescu, 2013: 39-40):

- Knowledge about and experience within the local society.
- Social competencies of communication and development of relations.
- If the network refers to labour force employment and entrepreneurship, besides the qualifications in the fields of psychology, economy and legal sciences, it is very important to prove a capacity to use competencies of consultancy in order to supply reliable and valid information.
- Capacity for self-development, to cultivate positive values, interests, special aptitudes etc., and to use these skills and confidence in self to establish relations and develop networks.
- Enough knowledge and updated information regarding the demand and offer from the labour market, educational and training programs, programs supporting the entrepreneurship and any other information falling within the scope of the network.
- Knowledge about the basic concepts related to local development.
- Solid knowledge of research and use of resources, materials and techniques needed in different situations.
- Enough knowledge of communication and IT systems for the establishment, archiving, collecting and disseminating information.
- Solid knowledge about the social roles of men and women, about the existing social differences and about the (re)production of stereotypes/discrimination between genders within the contemporary societies.
- Solid knowledge of the problems regarding the equality of genders and their protection at the institutional level.
- Capacity to highlight the special competencies, interests, principles and characteristics of the members.
- Capacity to identify and select working and valid methods of evaluation.
- Capacity to evaluate and analyse the results of using methods and means of evaluation.
- Knowledge of the social, economic and cultural environment.
- Knowledge of the profile and activity of the institutions.

Within this conglomerate of knowledge, we should remind that the proper use of the local resources is the most facile, fast and cheap approach (Neamțu G., 2009: 76); it is therefore important to focus on the promotion of sustainable educational programs in the field of social economy.

Educational programs of social economy

Social economy has a beneficial impact on the local community resulting largely from the economic and social benefits derived from the services supplied by the social enterprise and category of supplied services; from how much they respond to the social problems (complementarity of the new services with the existing ones, the innovating aspect of these services); creation of new, quality jobs on the labour market and improvement of the quality of life of the employees and their families, improvement of the employment rate; improved health care and social services within the society and improved the cultural environment (Cace, Enachescu, 2010: 4).

Social economy is presently a sector confronted with challenges in its recent evolution; there are new elements that mark its trends of development, and the mobilization of the social capital is of utmost importance. Thus, the social economy organisations focus on the strategic development of the human resources, which involves the introduction, elimination, modification, direction and coordination of the processes so that all the people and teams have the skills, knowledge and competencies necessary to accomplish the current and future tasks set by the organisation (Cace, Nicolăescu, Katsikaris, Parcharidis, 2013: 129). The term of specialist in social economy has been frequently used recently; it refers to the employees involved in all aspects related to the development of social economy organisations, from social work to finances and banks. From this perspective, a specialist in social economy should first have training in economy and management, then knowledge of public policies, regarding the disfavoured categories particularly, knowledge of policy and administration (Formation of entrepreneurs, in Social Economy, 2013: 9). The current context recommends the support of knowledge by participation in training courses or in different forms of education (Stănescu, 2013:33). Social economy can use forms of informal education based on experience, as well as forms of formal education, which are of similar importance. Unlike the informal education, which is done on the job, formal education is planned, systematic and it uses structured training programs, which consist of training and practice and which can be coordinated at the place of work or outside the place of work (Cace, Nicolăescu, Katsikaris, Parcharidis, 2013: 107-108).

The social economy sector needs programs of continuous formation accessible to the adult people and to pupils at all levels of training, aiming to develop applied thinking, with problem-solving abilities and the capacity to apply knowledge and ideas (Stoica, 2009: 125).

From the perspective of university curricula, it is important to acknowledge that universities are educational structures which transform societies involving changes in curricula, quality and standards, diversification, change of access policies, profile and experience of students, academic responses adequate to change (Brenan, King, Lebeau, 2004: 56).

Because the post-university training courses run by higher education institutions from Romania use a wide range of teaching techniques, one may conclude that this educational framework responds to several major challenges: reaching a qualitative level which can pass the test of international comparisons and improve the management and responsibility, increase the financing and diversify the sources of financing (Badea, Rogojanu, 2012:139). The training materials cover the educational component which refers, on the one hand, to the development of university manuals for social economy and, on the other hand, to the education of the public specialised in this field (Lambriu, Petrescu, 2010: 105).

Conclusions

The importance of continuous learning in the field of social economy draws an alarm signal addressing the teachers and students from higher education, the specialists in social economy, the licenced trainers, the mass-media representatives and the public at large, to enhance the level of information and awareness about the importance of the innovative socio-economic sector.

The educational activities must define educational necessities of the organisations and of the groups and persons within them; it is therefore important to pay special attention to avoid educational inconsistencies in the social enterprises in which the economic resources are rather insufficient.

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