

EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

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Abstract: *In Europe, social economy consists of a lot of actors and it manages to produce social usefulness and to cover needs that the public sector or the business environment fail to meet. The organisational forms, the social objectives and the areas of activity of the social enterprises can vary from one country to another because they may be involved in activities helping local development or promoting the environmental activities; they may provide services, manage finances, or they may apply commercial rules in order to encourage the international development. This paper approaches the social economy at European level considering the typology of the welfare systems and the peculiarities of each individual state. The portability and transferability of this organisational form may become a hindrance when the attention focuses only on the formal aspect regarding the mechanical transfer of some patterns from the European level to the regional level.*

Keywords: *social economy, welfare, development, social enterprise, non-profit*

1. Introduction

The definition of social economy is not an easy thing because this expression is used to define a complex world and a system of relations that govern the third sector and the non-profit enterprises: creation of flexible jobs, active citizenship, services for the people, decentralised social assistance, human rights safety, consolidated policies for local development and social cooperation. It is thus considered to be an economy with the most different actors, spanning from cooperatives to mutual aid associations,

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foundations and voluntaries associations and to other organisations whose common feature is their not-for-profit character.

The concept of social enterprise appeared in Europe around the 1990 years together with the identification of the third sector – established in order to meet the social needs which the public services of the enterprises working for profit failed to solve, or solved improperly – as driving force of the social entrepreneurship. It is noteworthy that, in contrast with the USA tradition, the European tradition considers that the third sector joins the cooperatives, the associations, mutual societies and the foundations or, in other words, all non-profit organisations labelled with the term of “social economy” in some European countries (Evers & Laville, 2004).

The perspective of the social enterprise in dynamics suggests that the notions of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship should be used as conceptual and analytical framework for the new perspective on the evolution of the third sector: establishment of new organisations or reorientation of the already existing organisations towards then entrepreneurial activity. Such approach doesn't accept drawing clear limits and, consequently, one tries to identify some “subsectors of the social enterprises”. Other approaches try to encompass a whole set of organisations that can be described as social enterprises which implement specific programs of the public policies. Anyhow, when making a detailed analysis of the context, it seems that most initiatives that are not covered by definitions can also be analysed in terms of social enterprises. It results that it is easier to take an approach on dynamic bases than a constructive and complementary perspective relying on statistics of social enterprises.

The organisational forms, the social objectives and the areas of activity of the social enterprises can vary from one country to another because they may work to facilitate the local development, to promote the environmental activities, to provide services, to do business administration, to apply commercial rules that encourage the international development.

2. Typology of the welfare systems

Behind this diversity of socio-economic objectives and areas, there are dynamic forces that play an important role within the European socio-economic context. More precisely, the persistence of the structural unemployment in many European countries, the need to cut down the state budget deficit, the need for more active policies of integration raise questions regarding how much the third sector can be of assistance in coping with these challenges. The social actors such as the social workers and the associative militants are hampered by the lack of efficient frameworks of public policies dealing with the increasing exclusion of some groups of people from the labour market or from society in general.

In the 1980 and 1990 years, this global context was common to all countries and it helped the entrepreneurial dynamics assert in the third sector as response to these challenges (Cace S., 2004). Anyhow, the forms of these initiatives vary according to the specificity of the different European patterns of the welfare state. The definition of the “welfare state” is rather difficult, some authors claiming that it is an “undefined abstraction” (R. Titmuss, 1968, p. 124). Other authors consider that the “welfare state” refers to four of the main activities of the state: cash benefits, health care, education and feeding, dwelling and other welfare activities (benefits in kind) (N. Barr, 1992, p. 742). According to A. Briggs (1961), the welfare state is characterised as a state which exists for four main reasons: guarantee a minimal income for the families, provide safety mechanisms against the social risks (incapacity of making an income in case of disease or because of old age) and to preserve some equality of the social services. Therefore, the welfare state is a “state whose organised power is used deliberately (via policies and administration) with the purpose to modify the market force play in at least three directions – first, by guaranteeing a minimal income to the individual families irrespective of the value of their work or of the state of poverty, second, by decreasing the social unsafeness of the people and families and third, by making sure that all citizens, irrespective of their status or class, are offered the best possible available standards for a particular social service” (A. Briggs, 1961, p. 222).

The classical typology of Esping-Andersen identifies the different configurations of the welfare systems.

Esping-Andersen’s typology (1990) for the European countries

Liberal system	Conservative-corporatist system	Social-democrat system
Ireland United Kingdom	Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Spain	Denmark, Finland, Sweden

Source: Esping-Andersen, G., *The three worlds of the welfare capitalism*, 1990.

Even though this typology is not enough to characterise the evolution of welfare in Europe (Evers, 2010), it remains a starting point in the attempt to understand the role of the third sector in a variety of European countries and of different social environments in which the social enterprises are enrooted.

Esping-Andersen distinguishes three major types of the welfare state, related to the different historical development of the different western countries. The “liberal” or

“Anglo-Saxon” regime is a system in which the “market” is responsible for the “social work” services. The social-democratic regime provides a wide range of social work services organised by the state at universal scale. According to Esping-Andersen, the conservative states focus on the preservation of order and status, and to do this, the funds for social insurances reward the work performance and the status. In these countries, the public insurance funds and the social work services have been established and regulated by the government or by the non-profit organisations.

3. European social economy patterns

3.1. The Scandinavian pattern

The purpose of the Scandinavian pattern is to meet the need for social work of the community and to promote social solidarity and gender equality by involving the democratic organisations in sound social movements whose demands are included by the state in the social legislation (Anheier, K.H., 2002, p. 6).

In the Scandinavian countries, the new organisations reacted differently than the traditional associations and abandoned the political and cultural approach which dominated the 1970 years, proposing, in the 1980 years, “new forms and solutions of organisation for the local social problems”. (Cace, S., 2010, p. 93).

Denmark

The „social enterprise” (*social virksomhed*) as notion is still new in Denmark, being on the brink of entering the common vocabulary and the Danish discourse about social cohesion (Hulgård, L.; Bisballe, T., 2004). So far, it is used primarily by the researchers of the third sector, by the entrepreneurs and by the third sector representatives. The politicians use the concept as part of an active labour market policy, proposing to make the traditional enterprises – particularly the small and medium enterprises – much more responsible socially in matters of integrating the unemployed people on the labour market (Liveng, A , 2001).

The social enterprises and the social economy organisations can be classified in four main groups depending on their area of activity (Liveng, A , 2001):

1. Organisations which provide voluntary social support, such as the crisis centres and the shelters for maltreated women, “support groups” for all areas of social and/or psychological crisis (divorce, suicide, serious diseases etc.), or economy shops belonging to the religious communities.
2. Cooperatives and companies with democratic affiliation, whose members must not necessarily work for that company; they just influence the decisions by casting their vote.

3. Organisations providing education and on-the-job training to the groups of vulnerable people or to the people excluded from the labour market.
4. Projects of local development and of urban renewing, which establish local partnerships between the representatives of the different sectors (public, private and the third sector).

3.2. The continental European pattern

The continental pattern of the social economy focuses on the public supply of social work. In Germany and Austria, the initiatives were called “self-support”, in the endeavour to reflect the attempt to empower the involved people. The initiatives can be divided into three sub-sectors: semi-informal groups, self-support groups and groups supporting the cause of the people not included in the support network (they are mainly voluntary activities, the paid work being just complementary; Cace, S., 2010, p. 94). Furthermore, the German tradition of subsidies provides a comprehensive framework for the relation between the state and the third sector for the supply of social work (Anheier, K.H., 2002, p. 7). In France and Belgium, the efforts focused on the development of new ways of supplying associative services, knowing that the lack of incentive does not ensure the respect for the user. The accent of the French notion of “social economy” is distributed on the economic aspects, on mutualism and communal economy (Anheier, K.H., 2002, p. 7).

France

In France, the concept of “social enterprise” (*entreprise sociale*) still is a new concept, whose use and understanding remain limited to a range of experts and social entrepreneurs; it is not used as key-concept by the politicians and it is not known by the public at large. The notion of social enterprise is far from gaining the acknowledgement similar to that gained by the concept of “social economy based on solidarity”, which received the consensus of the participants in the groups of analysis over the past twenty years.

The limits between associations and cooperatives are increasingly unclear; this evolution led to the creation of new legal forms which focus on the concept of social enterprise (Fraise, L., 2011).

Obviously, France – like the other EU countries – predicted the development of the different types of “social enterprises for integration in the labour market” (Eme, B.; Gardin, L., 2002). In their fight against the different forms of exclusion, the social enterprises for integration in the labour market were in the 1980 and 1990 years a strategy of struggle against unemployment and exclusion, which proved to be

innovating in terms of the establishment of enterprises serving a social purpose: integration of the disadvantaged people (unemployed, people receiving social benefits, low-skilled young workers, people with disabilities etc.) in the labour market.

In 2004, the 2,300 registered organisations which were supplying services of integration in the labour market – enterprise for integration in labour (*entreprises d'insertion*), enterprise for temporary integration in labour (*entreprises de travail temporaire d'insertion*), intermediating associations (*associations intermédiaires*) and work sites for integration in labour (*chantiers d'insertion*) – employed about 220,000 paid workers (Dares, 2006).

Belgium

The concept of social enterprise is still unclear in Belgium, but it is increasingly used to emphasize the entrepreneurial approach adopted by an increasing number of organisations from the third sector. The introduction of the legal framework of the “company with social purpose”, in 1996, is definitely linked to this trend. Strictly speaking, this framework is not a legal form; actually, all types of commercial corporations can adopt the label of “company with social purpose”, on condition it doesn't focuses on the enrichment of its members and on condition that their statute observe several conditions. However, between 1996 and 2006, the legal status (reviewed in 2007) has been adopted by about 400 enterprises; this is so, maybe because once adopted, this statute brings about a large number of additional requirements compared to the legal form of traditional company (Nyssens, M., 2001).

The relevant types of social enterprises in Flanders are the social workshops (*sociale Werkplaatsen* or SWPs), the centres for labour medicine (*arbeidszorgcentra* or AZCs), enterprises for labour integration (*invoegbedrijven* or IBs) and protected workshops (*beschutswerkplaatsen* or BWs) (Gregoire, O., 2008). They target very different groups: BW workshops provide jobs for the people with physical, mental or sensorial disabilities. The centres for labour medicine ensure long-term jobs for a much more diversified target group whose main characteristic is that its members suffer of different problems (low skilling or drug addiction). The social workshops SWP focus on the people who were inactive during the past five years. Finally, the IB enterprises, whose entrepreneurial dimension is stronger, employ, with contracts on undetermined period, workers able to achieve a particular level of productivity. This diversity of the target groups resulted from the will of the public authorities to cover as much as possible the heterogeneity of the people excluded from the market labour and who are seeking a job.

In Wallonia and Brussels, the initiatives for integration in the labour market usually are the responsibility of the different regional authorities, but they are very

resembling, which explains why the initiatives from the two regions are grouped together for each type of social enterprise. The different types of initiatives include the enterprises for integration in the labour market (*entreprises d'insertion* or EIs), the enterprises for on-the-job formation (*entreprises de formation par le travail* or EFTs), adapted work enterprises (*entreprises de travail adapté* or ETAs) – previously known as “protected workshops” (*ateliers protégés*) – and social enterprises for the integration of the unrecognised work (Gregoire, O., 2008). Except for the enterprises for on-the-job formation (EFT), which provide training courses for a maximum of 18 months, all the other types of social enterprises for integration in the labour market from Brussels and Wallonia provide permanent jobs for the people excluded from the labour market due to different reasons: disability, low skilling level, psycho-social problems etc.

3.3. South-European pattern

In Italy, in the 1970 years, the social cooperatives were established in many regions due to their capacity to perform functions that were previously not done, such as ensuring jobs for the people excluded from the labour market and development of a range of services for these people. Even though the social economy from Italy is less substantial than in other countries because of the dominant position of the state in sectors such as education and health care, the recent dynamic activity of the cooperatives based on “social solidarity” is significant (Cace, S. 2010, p. 95). It is noteworthy to mention the notion of association (“Associationism”) in Italy, which is seen as a conservative power against both the power at the local level of the church and of the state (Anheier, K.H., 2002, p. 7).

In Portugal, the law of cooperatives on the basis of social solidarity (promulgated in 1998) joins the goods and services with the “paid” members, with the beneficiaries of services and with the “voluntary” members. The social cooperatives which were established in Spain (after the promulgation of the relevant law in 1999) provide social services of education, health care and insertion on the labour market, while also covering other social needs that are not covered by the market (Cace, S., 2010, p. 95).

Spain

In Spain, the cooperatives, voluntary organisations, foundations and other non-profit organisations are part, for many years, of the enterprises which generate income for social purposes rather for commercial purposes. Starting with the 1990 years, such enterprises have been classified as “social economy”. The term refers to any economic phenomenon which has a social dimension or any social phenomenon that has an economic dimension (Defourne, J.; Develtere, P., 1999).

The role assigned to the social economy within the Spanish system of social support underwent adaptations and changes over the past twenty years. Until the mid-1980 years, the traditional non-profit organisations which supplied services to the vulnerable people were regarded a rudimentary and vanishing species, like the large historic charity organisations such as the Red Cross and the Catholic organisation Cáritas (Vidal, I.; Claver, 2003).

The leaders of the country considered that the system of social assistance built at that time could take over the management, design, financing and administration of all the social, health and educational needs.

In contrast with this opinion and in parallel with the construction of the new Spanish system of free social aid, new organisations appeared within the civil society, which were also covering new areas of activity. The period with the largest increase of the number of non-profit associations and organisations extended from the 1980 to the 1990 years, period which actually coincided with the construction of that system of free social assistance.

In 2006, Spain had over 51,500 enterprises of social economy, with over 2.4 employees, more than 25% of the total active population in Spain (Li, S.; Wong, T., 2007).

About 51,000 enterprises of social economy are represented by a confederation called the Confederation of Spanish Social Economy Businesses (CEPES), established in 1992. Including 25 organisations of a member confederation, CEPES ensured a platform for the dialogue between the social economy enterprises and the public authorities. Furthermore, CEPES represents the network of the Spanish social economy within the European forums and coordinates the "Euro-Mediterranean network of the social economy" which includes Spain, Greece, Italy, France and Portugal.

Economic and social aspects of the social economy enterprises

The economic aspects (Vidal, I., 2005) of the Spanish social economy enterprises are the following:

1. They are directly and continuously involved in the production of goods and services.
2. They are established on a voluntary basis and are led by a group of entities that are not submitted to the control of the public or private organisations, although they can be subsidised from public grants.
3. Their financial viability depends on the efforts of the members and workers to guarantee enough resources.

4. They hold much or an increasing part of the market activities and incomes or from contracts with the public authorities.
5. They have a minimal number of employees.

The social aspects (Vidal, I., 2005) of the Spanish social economy enterprises are the following:

1. They promote a sense of social responsibility in order to serve the community or a specific group of local people.
2. They are established by a group of people who share specific needs or objectives and who want to contribute, one way or another, to the welfare of the society.
3. The profit will not be shared or will be shared in a specific proportion among the members.
4. They have a democratic management and their clients or consumers are represented in the managing bodies.

Role of the government

The development of the social economy was largely guided by the government. In 1985, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs established the Secretariat-General for workforce employment whose task was to tackle the problems of employment, including the development of the social economy. The Secretariat-General for workforce employment has a specialised structure (Directorate-General for the promotion of social economy and of the European Social Fund), which coordinates the governmental departments which promote the social economy, draws agreements and contracts of social economy with the 17 autonomous regions of Spain (such as the National Public Service for Labour Force Employment) and facilitates the financing of the social economy enterprises and associations (Li, S.; Wong, T., 2007).

The Spanish government regarded the social economy as an instrument for the fight against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. In Spain, the unemployment rate increased from about 2% during the early 1970 years to over 10% at the end of the 1970 years, peaking at 24.2% in 1994. The unemployment rate decreased gradually from 18.8% in 1998 to 8.5% in 2006. According to the government, an important reason for the decrease of the unemployment rate was the growth of the social economy (Li, S.; Wong, T., 2007). The statistics of the Directorate-General for the promotion of social work and of the European Social Fund showed that from 1995 to 2005, the social economy sector created a total of 420,000 jobs representing a 67% increase (higher than the corresponding increase of 41% on the labour market in general).

Italy

Once with the political unification of Italy (1861), the presence of the state was rather deficient in terms of social policies such as social work or health care. Formal and informal non-profit organisations have been established and have thus legitimated their activities which started hundreds of years before (Messina, A.; Meneguzzo, M.; Carrera, D., 2007) (such as: “Opere pie”, “Società di mutuo soccorso”, “Casse di risparmio”, forms of private non-profit organisations, cooperatives characterised by religious and political ideologies). The network of Italian cooperatives (“Lega nazionale delle cooperative”) has been established at the end of 1880 and had available a strong social basis consisting of over 300 cooperatives located mainly in northern Italy. Another organisation that has been established was the “Confederazione delle cooperative italiane”, with a clear Catholic orientation (Zamagni, V., 2000). Even though they had different “ideational” approaches and had unequal territorial distribution in some areas, the cooperative movement and the solidary way of supplying services were ultimately acknowledged (Borzaga, C.; Ianes, A., 2006).

Until the 1980 years, the solidarity movement of the Italian cooperatives displayed several limitations:

1. Mutual regime, according to which all activities had to be dedicated exclusively to the associates;
2. The entire sector has been characterised by a strong contribution of the voluntary organisations, according to which (particularly for the Catholic ones), all of these services could not be ensured by observing the entrepreneurial dynamics
3. The distribution of these organisations focused on few Italian regions, particularly in the central and northern regions
4. The public sector was rather distrustful in the official acknowledgment of the importance of this new and effervescent entity; it tested laws and norms with the purpose to preserve the political consensus and took into consideration the pressures of the two different Italian political movements (left wing and the democrats) (Messina, A.; Meneguzzo, M.; Carrera, 2007).

Development of the third sector

The institutional purpose of the cooperatives is the mutual interest of their members and shareholders, who are statutory, but not exclusive beneficiaries, of the goods and services that are produced. More precisely, the cooperative enterprise is characterised by five principles of establishment: internal mutuality, external mutuality, non-profit distribution, inter-generational solidarity and inter-cooperative

solidarity. Due to these principles, the main objective of the cooperatives is not necessarily to obtain the highest returns from the capital investments, but to meet an existing requirement or demand, so as to provide a higher economic advantage to its shareholders or members than they could obtain separately (Thomas, A., 2004).

A new form of cooperative has been established in 1991, the social cooperative (Law 381), with the purpose to assist particularly the voluntary organisations involved in the improved implementation of human resources and in the integration of the disfavoured people. Observing the cooperative principles highlighted above, the social cooperatives include either *medical activities* (management of the services of health care and education, residential assistance for the people at risk, children-care services, cultural initiatives and environmental protection) or *training activities* (present the employment opportunities and the activity of the enterprises to the disadvantaged people who are not able to penetrate the productive areas).

In 2005, there were over 7,300 social cooperatives with over 244,000 workers (Borzaga, C.; Galera, G.; Zandonai, F., 2001). However, this impressive development of the social cooperatives didn't prevent other types of third sector organisations to develop entrepreneurial activities, or the adoption of a law for the social enterprises (Law 118/2005), a point of reference in the history of the Italian third sector (Borzaga, C.; Galera, G.; Zandonai, F., 2001). The new law includes the principle of the multiple forms of organisation and doesn't stipulate that the form of organisation is eligibility condition for a social enterprise. The law divides the eligible organisations in two subsectors: companies and non-company organisations. The innovative character of the law results from the openness towards new sectors of activity, other than social work, and from the variety of the types of organisation eligible to become social enterprises.

3.4. The Anglo-Saxon pattern

The Anglo-Saxon pattern relies on the concept of non-profit organisations. The non-profit organisations (NPO) and the non-profit sector sparked again the interest for the third sector in the Anglo-Saxon countries. It is therefore useful to emphasize their contribution to the analysis of the social economy (Defourny, J.; Develtere, P., 1999). This pattern differentiates the social enterprises from the private sector. With voluntary support and with the support of the beneficiaries the activities focus on the disadvantaged areas or on the vulnerable groups, often involving community development through the efficient use of the financial and human resources. (Cace, S., 2010, p. 92).

The term of *non-profit sector* can be further explained by the following characteristics:

- The non-profit organisations have a formal, official character, meaning that they are institutionalised to a specific degree, which implies that they have legal personality;
- They are private and, consequently, different from the state structures and from the organisations directly related to the government;
- They are independent, meaning that they have to set their own rules and own decision-making authority;
- They cannot share the profit among the membership or leadership (this commitment of not sharing the profit is constantly reinforced within this sector);
- Their activities must involve volunteers and donators (the members of these organisations should also be volunteers) (Defourny, J.; Develtere, P., 1999).

The conceptual core of the non-profit approach is interdicting profit sharing and this is the key to understanding the non-profit associations, while the concept of the social economy relies largely on the principles of cooperation, of seeking an economic democracy (Defourny, J.; Develtere, P., 1999, pp. 18-19).

United Kingdom

The term of “social economy” acquired some popularity along the 1980 years, but it never entered the common British vocabulary. The term of “third sector” is categorically better known and it includes the voluntary sector, the associations, the cooperatives, foundations and social enterprises (Cace, S., 2010, p. 109). The third sector, at the highest level of generality, refers to the organisations situated between the market and the state in terms of control and property right. It also includes the self-governing organisations which are constitutionally independent; there is no sharing of the profit and there also is a large share of voluntarism (Kendall, J., 2005, p. 25). The comparative statistics show that the United Kingdom is among the top countries in terms of the social economy contribution to the economic activity and employment (Cace, S., 2010, p. 109).

The announcements from November 1998 and January 1999 regarding a major improvement of the unity within the central government responsible for the third sector brought a major change in the relation between the third sector and the central government of the United Kingdom. The development of the partnership relation with the third sector is a calculated attempt to set for the first time a proactive and significantly “horizontal” position of the policy towards the sector *per se*, to expand beyond the support structures ensured by the legal and fiscal system, and to supplement the agreements of the “vertical” policy in specific areas of activity which dominated in the past (Kendall, J., 2005, p. 22).

A three-year strategy was launched in July 2002 by publishing *Social Enterprise: A Strategy for Success*. The strategy involves interventions in three areas: establishment of an environment favourable; better economic performance of the social enterprises and determination of the value of the social enterprise. Its structure assimilated the Active Community Unit from the Home Office, thus forming the Office of the Third Sector – OTS, located within the department of coordination which reports directly to the Prime Minister (Cabinet Office) (Cace, S., 2010, p. 110).

The coordination department published in 2007 a report, *The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration: Final Report* with the purpose of supplying information on the governmental policies for the third sector. This report gives a new definition and classification of the third sector: the government defined the third sector as nongovernmental organisations relying on values and which, in principle, reinvest the surplus in social, environmental and cultural objectives. There is a large variety of organisations forming the third sector and it is important that the relation between the government and the third sector reflects this diversity. The sector can be classified simply as follows:

Community and voluntary organisations (CVO), represented by charity organisations (registered or not registered) and non-charity organisations (at the end of 2006, in England and Wales there were 168,600 recorded charity organisations, not counting the 21,800 branches of the charity organisations). They range from organisations bearing the name of a household, such as Barnardo's (one of the 630 charity organisations with annual revenues in excess of 10 million), to small warehouses financed in order to assist a particular parish (specific to the 35,300 registered charity organisations which have an annual revenue less than 1,000 British Pounds). A recent estimation suggests that there are about 110,000 unregistered charity organisations (they include universities, museums and national galleries, some social work organisations and many small size educational and religious organisations).

The information on the non-charity organisations is vague; many of them operate without being known to the public organisations or to the researchers. Their variety in terms of size and activities resembles largely with that of the charity organisations, although they refer to some particular types of organisations (such as community sports clubs for amateurs or political organisations such as Amnesty International, which operate outside the purpose of charity). The common features of the organisations included in this category concern the fact that they exist and function more for an altruist purpose than for making private benefits, that they have been established and could be consolidated without needing state permission and that they rely more or less on voluntary support.

Social enterprises: in 2005 there were more than 55,000 social enterprises, some of them CVO or cooperatives. The annual turnover of the social enterprises was of about

27 billion Sterling and they contributed with about 8.4 billion Sterling to the GDP. The social enterprises are active in a wide range of economic activities in sectors such as professional training, social work, health care, social dwellings, leisure activities and child care. They include organisations which sell goods using fair trade (such as „Cafi Direct”), organisations established in order to ensure employment opportunities for the disadvantaged people (social companies) and development funds.

Cooperatives and the mutual organisations – in 2005 there were over 8,100 industrial and sparing societies registered with the Financial Services Authority, with about 19 million members. The most important are the consumption and production cooperatives, the cooperative consortia, the agricultural cooperatives and the social work cooperatives. In September 2006 there were 567 credit unions with almost half million members.

3.5. Pattern of the Central and East-European countries

The case of the Central and East-European countries differs from the above mentioned cases because of the following obstacles that slow down the growth of the social economy organisations, as identified by J. Defourny (EMES, 1999):

- Influence of the “transition myth”, which induced so far policies which were very dependent of the establishment of a free market, failing to understand the value of the “alternative” organisations for the local and national development;
- Cultural opposition to the cooperatives and the opinion that they are somehow politically conservative. In many countries there is a negative perception of the old cooperatives as organisations related to the former communist regimes – even though many of these organisations were actually established before the communist period;
- Excessive dependency of the social enterprises on the donors, combined with a limited view of the role of the alternative organisations;
- Lack of the legal framework which to regulate the status of the cooperatives and of other non-profit organisations;
- General distrust in the solidarity movements – the concept of solidarity being used mostly to describe the relation of a person with his/her family and friends – and the perception of the economic activity as being oriented more towards personal profit than towards benefits for the whole community;
- Predomination of a “parochial” political culture which induces a trend of limiting the activity of the social economy actors to the achievement of the immediate interests;

- Difficulty of mobilising the human resources.

However, despite the cultural, political and legal difficulties confronting them, both the traditional cooperatives and the new generation of the non-profit organisations have a real potential for development.

Poland

The concept of social enterprise is a developing term in Poland; as yet there is no common definition of the concept which to originate in the concepts of the third sector, of the non-profit sector and of the cooperatives. The specificity of the social enterprises, compared to the third sector, with the non-profit organisations or with the cooperatives in general, relies in the fact that they produce profit (however, not to maximise the profit) and in the fact that they focus more on the general interest / community interests (not just on the objectives of the mutual interests).

The social enterprises are yet a rare subject of the political discourses and they are just partially integrated in policies and laws. Recently, some political debates acknowledged the potential of the third sector and of the social enterprises to establish services for households and communities and to create jobs for the groups of people that are “difficult to employ” (Les, E., 2001).

Most social enterprises from Poland run their activity while observing the legal framework of the associations or of other voluntary organisations, foundations or cooperatives.

Poland has recently introduced a new legal form particularly for the social enterprises for integration on the labour market. The law of the social cooperatives, promulgated in April 2006, allows the selected needy groups of people (such as former prisoners, long-term unemployed people, people with disabilities, former drug or alcohol addicts) to establish a social cooperative. This law is an important innovation of the policy for the employment of the disadvantaged groups. The social cooperatives have the right to assume and fulfil public duties similarly to the associations and foundations, and to produce goods and services, while observing the principle of limiting-maximizing the profits of the persons/cooperative members (Leś, E.; Jeliaskova, M., 2005).

4. Conclusions

In Europe, the development of innovative and entrepreneurial organisations paves the way towards an explicit reference of the social enterprises (Nicolăescu V., Căce S., Koumalatsou E., Stănescu S., 2011), being clear that the changes in the public financing of the third sector played their role in the development of new attitudes and

strategies for the social economy. In the USA, the public support for the non-profit organisations decreased, while the sharing of the commercial profit increased significantly (Kerlin, 2006).

Various forms of dividing the public funds have been noticed in Western Europe, these public funds being transformed into benefits for the community. In the corporatist-conservative countries, the labour market programs determined the dynamicity of the associative entrepreneurship. In contrast, the development of quasi-market in the “liberal” countries allowed the development of contractual relations between the associations and the public authorities within a more competitive environment. Both in the social-democrat countries, and in the Mediterranean countries, the organisations of the third sector, particularly the cooperatives, became suppliers of social work services.

During the recent decades, the social economy has proved its capacity to contribute efficiently to solving the newly-emerging problems, managing to consolidate its position of sector necessary for the balanced and stable growth of the state and of the business environment. The social economy entities succeeded to reduce somehow the differences between classes, to compensate the deficiencies of the state in providing various services, to support the labour market by inserting the different vulnerable groups, actually to improve the standard of living of the people and to foster democracy. In Europe, social economy consists of a multitude of actors; it succeeded to produce social utility and to cover the needs for which both the public sector and the business environment failed to find solutions. Social economy addresses all forms of social needs and the funds for these activities are obtained either from donations and grants, or, as lately desired, by running economic activities whose profit is directed towards such services.

The increasing interest for the social economy organisations may paradoxically decrease if their impact on the long-term sustainability is not taken into consideration and if the operational context is not evaluated adequately (Neguț A., Nicolăescu V. Preoteasa A.M., Căce C., 2011). What was an advantage before – the portability and transferability of this microeconomic organisational form – becomes an obstacle when the attention focuses only on the formal aspect of transferring specific patterns from the European to the regional level. Thus, the complex problem of the viability of the economic activity and the need for support structures should be taken into consideration. The sustainability of the social economy organisations capacity to empower the citizens economically, socially and culturally is complex and requires human resources (Căce C., Nicolăescu V., Katsikaris L., Parcharidis I., 2012) and financial resources (Nicolăescu V., Căce C., Hatzantonis D., 2012), and also the activation of an environment of public policies that demands this innovation.

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CHALLENGING IMPLICIT GENDER BIAS IN SCIENCE: POSITIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE SCIENTISTS IN FICTION

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Abstract: *Despite decades of research and affirmative action, women continue to be under-represented in the sciences. Cultural assumptions and stereotypes are a key factor impacting women's entry into and retention in the sciences, indicating the need for improved role models for girls in science education. This paper reviews the critical research on Media representations of female scientists, and argues that more positive role models are found in fiction. This research examines the kind of cultural work such representations might perform, analysing a diverse sample of texts from 1905 to the present. These images of female scientists provide numerous examples of positive, non-traditional role models, examples of egalitarian scientific cultures, and critiques of contemporary science. Informed by this analysis, the article considers how these representations might be used to challenge stereotypical assumptions concerning women's role in the sciences.*

Key-words: *Gender, science education, female scientists, representation, role models*

For more than three decades, researchers and scientists have debated the “women in science” issue. Despite improvements in their position, the status of women in the sciences continues to provoke concern, as women remain underrepresented in most areas of science, have low rates of retention and are less likely to reach the higher echelons of research and academic positions.

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