

Simona Maria Stănescu, Sorin Cace, Filip Alexandrescu (editors), Vlad Achimescu, Ionuț Ardeleanu, Daniel Arpinte, Florin Botonogu, Cosmin Briciu, Gabriela Dima, Simona Ilie, Flavius Mihalache, Gabriela Neagu, Ramona Pavel, Ana Maria Preoteasa, Mihnea Preotesi, Iulian Stănescu, Gabriel Stănilă, Ștefan Corneliu Ștefănescu, Cristina Tomescu, Laura Tufă, *Demand and Supply of Social Economy – Two Development Regions of Romania*, ProUniversitaria, Bucharest, 2013, 398 p.

In most cases, the results of social research are published in one of the following formats: as an original paper in a scientific journal, as part of a collection of studies that share the same theoretical or subject area interest, as a PhD-based, single author book, as a compilation of articles from an established institution (author) or as a deliverable to a research project beneficiary. *Demand and supply of social economy: Two developmental regions of Romania* (Simona Maria Stănescu, Sorin Cace, Filip Alexandrescu, eds, Pro Universitaria Press, București) has reached the general public as a printed book in 2013, and it embodies the following characteristics: it was written by a team of established authors and researchers from a Romanian Academy institute, it is a collection of chapters that discuss various aspect of the novelty that is “social economy” in the Romanian sociological literature, it has the tone of a deliverable to the research project beneficiary and the general feel of a PhD-inspired author book.

The title is somewhat misleading, as it first calls to mind the general phrase “demand and supply” from the economical texts books, and then the socially strict delimitation of only “two developmental” regions of the country. One might imagine that the mechanisms describing “social economy” will be explained in terms of expanded equations for each of the counties that comprise the aforementioned territory. In effect, the market equilibrium equations are slightly abandoned, in favor of descriptions based on informed social statistics, mentioning more social realities than the ones present in the South-East and Bucuresti-Ilfov regions’ geographical confinements.

A sober book cover and a fragmented table of contents suggest the format of a text book

study manual that doubles as a practical and compressed statistical yearbook, with more than 50 pages of tables and inserts that refer to the period from 2010 to 2013. With the addition of the high credentials of the authors, it is easy to imagine the content of each chapter as a possible bibliographical requirement for sociology students interested in the Romanian labor market, vulnerable or socially deprived groups, or mutual aid institutions of historical reference or modern development.

Social students and social researchers alike may well consider purchasing this item, in terms of a worthy investment, based on the fact that the text, in its entirety, is a snapshot of Romanian economic and social disparities taken moments after the onset of a developing crisis. In addition, the struggle of the authors to pin down a subject study that seems to elude practical contours is a constant reminder of the importance of methodology and definitions in the social sciences. Is economy not, by definition, a social activity? If so, how come the term “social economy” is not considered an oxymoronic one? And how is “social economy” different from regular, plain “economy”? Is there a part of “economy” that is not “social”?

With these questions in mind, a curious reader might open either the first, introductory chapter or the final, conclusive one. However, the answer he/she is rapidly searching for seems nowhere in sight. The first chapter discusses the term “social entrepreneur” and the last chapter is a condensed version of informed advice from the editors on how a cycle of development for social economy can be established.

At first glance, the mental pairing of these chapters might suggest that, from the beginning to the end, the book underlines that, if the “social economy” is to succeed, it needs “social

entrepreneurs”. In this respect, there are similar aspects between economy and its “social” twin. Let us assume that the reader is more diligent than initially presumed and he/she delves deeper into the contents of the book. As it is the reviewer’s task to provide a map to the potential reader, I suggest the journey through this book is to start from section II.9. “Typology of the entities supplying social economy services” (Cosmin Briciu, Mihnea Preotesi). This is where the part describing how or what is “social economy” (S E– social economy), patiently awaits our curious eyes. For purely informative purposes on the notion of the “social economy” it is advisable to stop at section II.9.1, once you have read the five types of entities providing SE: NGOs, CARs, COOPs, APU and credit COOPs.

Once the operational typology is understood, visit the chapters II.1 “Regulations regarding the social economy entities in Romania” (Gabriel Stanilă) and the following II.2 “Perception of the institutional and legislative framework by the representatives of the social economy entities” (Simona Maria Stănescu, Sorin Căce), in order to fully grasp the slippery and narrow track that the SE entities and their employees must observe in order to develop activities suitable to transform vulnerable groups into program beneficiaries.

Turn to pg. 27 and continue reading the “Methodological Framework” (Vlad Achimescu, Sorin Căce, Simona Maria Stănescu, Filip Alexandrescu, Daniel Arpinte). The description of the two sample sizes, the three different research instruments for each social economy entity, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data, the connectivity between the Integrat (2011) and Proactiv (2009) projects’ purposes and limits, attest, with no ambiguity, that the team conducting the actual research has a strong preference for quality data collection and interpretation, although a bit skewed on the quantitative side. The complete questionnaire outline would have been interesting addition/annexes, as this methodological prelude is abruptly cut short.

Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that the editors give a fair warning: “the book addresses

mainly to the ones involved in SE”. For the novice in SE entities and practices, it is advisable to keep the abbreviation list on page 24 always in plain sight.

Chapter I. 8 “The socially deprived categories: needed support in the perception of the population” (Ștefan Corneliu Ștefănescu) is a very interesting chapter that restates the idea of competence in handling statistical data introduced in the methodology section, and serves as a connecting point between chapters. First, it disconnects the SE entities (NGO, CARs, COOPs, APUs and credit COOPs) (chapter II. 9) from the general population. The data analyzed only takes into consideration the population’s answer to one single question from the AJUT section of the research questionnaire. A series of data processing and third level statistical nuancing, and the answer is simple, yet striking: help those in need, yet not the Roma. Second, this blunt “remark” immediately turns the readers’ attention to investigate what makes this category so different (chapter I. 6), and third, it raises the question of the distinction between “socially deprived” and “vulnerable” persons (chapter I. 1)

Chapter I. 6 “The Roma: Inclusion through social economy” (Cristina Tomescu, Florin Botonogu) describes the active regulations promoted in order to reduce social risks that affect the Roma minority in the last two decades, after 1990, at international and national levels. The authors actively stress the importance of the potential of SE entities to promote the visibility of the Roma minority as a working group, involved in local decision making processes.

However, the low education level characterizing the large share of the minority is the main problem to be addressed, together with elevating the motivation for active integration on the labor market.

Only a small percentage (approx. 16%) of the Roma declare themselves employed, and the incentive to work on the black market is stronger than participation in legal terms. Successful factors identified for Roma integration may be, if adequately supported, a collection of efficient

national coordination of politics, supportive multi-annual programs and the creation of monitoring and evaluation of program impact. This can be achieved by adapting the focus of Roma NGO's to include sustainable financial programs directed at creating SE type of infrastructures in the communities, i.e., mutual support houses for employees or craft COOPs.

If the last examined chapter seems to suggest that active measures to promote social inclusion for the minorities may only be successful when they are conducted under a large, even national framework of active measures, it is interesting to note that another viable solution for vulnerable groups may be the support from a social entrepreneur.

Chapter I. 1 "Social entrepreneurship and vulnerable groups" (Ramona Pavel) details the theoretical assumptions that support this alternative. The blend between financial acumen and the willingness to invest resources into strategies and activities that provide social services, without the purpose of generating self-profit is the general sketch of the social entrepreneur. If such a combination of skill and determination might be achieved, the vulnerable groups (young people, the women, Roma minority, the disabled persons, the immigrants, the elderly and the rural people) will be less dependent on the system or labor market that, through structural mechanisms, excludes them. While a clear portrait of each vulnerable group is determined on various statistical data, there is no discussion on the number of Romanian entrepreneurs, in general, nor on the incentives that could determine them to invest in non-profit generation activities.

The source of social vulnerability and potential deprivation are the imperfect mechanisms of the labor market. As the capitalist economy is predominantly an economy based on wage earning workers that consume the surplus of their work productivity, persons or groups that are in danger of not participating fully, will find themselves in a position of facing more than just a temporal state of unemployment. Chapter I. 3 "Labor market integration of vulnerable groups"

(Ana-Maria Preoteasa) reflects some concerning data. Underemployment – a combination of low income, lack of social security, low social status and the lowering of the professional capacity, affects persons of young age 30-32 years old, mostly women of both rural and urban residence. Within the two analyzed regions, the persons that do not have a current job, are facing a situation of long term unemployment, a situation perpetuating at the national level. Incomes of housekeepers are low, and are considered insufficient to cover basic needs. Lifelong learning is not of particular interest to the registered or unregistered unemployed persons, yet the optimism for a better future prevails.

The general living level, the family relations, the health state and the trust in one's own ability to succeed, are negatively affected by the loss of a job. Registered unemployed persons appear more active in finding job opportunities, and those who have given up the search cite "family responsibilities" or "having no chance in finding a job" as the main reasons. When corroborated with the data in chapter I. 2 "Labor market segmentation and the social economy" (Iulian Stanescu), the situation appears rather bleak. Men dominate the skilled manual workers category; women are predominant in the non-manual work that requires higher education or at least secondary level of education (retails and services).

As the demands of the public sector centers around non-manual labor skills and an university education at low wage earnings, while the public sector requires people with only secondary education and higher earning possibilities, it appears that immediate changes are slow to develop, as the ones who are most successful in getting jobs, in times of economic crisis, are the ones that settle for lower wages, have a high school degree, live in the urban areas and are not burdened by family responsibilities.

Counterintuitive as it may be, the most successful SE entities in providing financial help to vulnerable groups are CARs and CARPs, mutual aid organizations of employees or former employees, at retirement age.

It seems that, once again, the most advantaged persons are the ones that either hold a position in the job market or have been employed up to retirement. Chapters II. 4 “The mutual aid organization of the employees: between tradition and modernity, between crisis and prosperity” (Gabriela Neagu) and II. 5 “Mutual aid organization of the pensioners – traditional social economy entities in the Romanian Society” (Ionuț Ardeleanu) establish the fact that these types of SE have continued to maintain a strong position as a go-to organization to help with unexpected financial responsibilities. Established in the communist regime, CARs and CARPs were initially designed to assure total dependency of the population on the provisions that the state system issued. In addition, as unemployment was not recognized as an option, the member activity within a CAR or CARP was a given, rather than a choice. In present times, even though the CARs and CARPs are more democratic in terms of member participation, they are still closed groups that serve, with prevalence but not equally, their own. CARPs are the ones that allow vulnerable persons (social aid beneficiary) to access a limited array of small financial aids.

Chapter I. 4 “The social economy – meeting social needs” (Simona Ilie) provides a series of example as CAR and CARPs are currently expanding to provide much more than financial aid to their members, offering personal grooming services (hair dresser, tailor), household care and telecommunication assistance. Interestingly enough, the CARPs are the SE entities with the growing number of volunteers, members, collaborators and will continue to stand as a center of social solidarity. In turn, CARs appear to further develop their activity as an alternative to bank loans, furthering their ability to attract different kinds of members, potentially those who are economically vulnerable for a brief period of time.

COOPs are the SE entities that provide the benefits of financial aid similarly, but not as substantial as the CARs, while cumulating the function of employers to their respective members.

Documentation for the social role, establishment and current functioning of these institutions in the Romanian economy sector is provided in chapters II. 6 “The social function of Romanian Cooperatives in the development regions of Bucharest-Ilfov and South-East” (Filip Alexandrescu) and II. 7 “Cooperatives in Bucharest- Ilfov and South-East development regions” (Flavius Mihalache). Combining quantitative and qualitative data, the authors conclude that the diminished activity of these institutions implies that their survival requires adjustments to the current economical market, or a strong advocacy to support important shifts in the legislation of SE entities. Also, I would add that a strong strategy to attract and maintain a stable number of members, to continue the Coops’ activities and revive the ideas of social solidarity of workers, might help COOPs escape the fate of deserted “social refuge”.

NGOs represent the newest addition to the landscape of SE entities, and are the most dynamic in terms of member additions. The presence of NGOs varies within territorial distribution, and sources of NGO income vary from sponsorships, economic activities, requests for non-reimbursable financing, direct request to a financier, subsidies from public and local authorities, membership fees and the 2% campaign. Chapter II. 3 “Profile of economic activities in Non-governmental organization” (Daniel Arpinte, Laura Tufă) underlines the dependency of the NGOs budget to the European Financial scheme, in the absence of other substantial income sources or own income generating activities and their subsequent ability to provide help to vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, if we were to make a matrix between the main types of SE providers and the vulnerable groups they particularly target, then the result will be as follows: woman and the Roma are a key target of NGOs, CAR and CARP help the working poor in urban areas, COOPs in various forms help rural members and additional consumers, while APUs and sometimes CARPs are the main resorts to get by from an economical perspective for the disabled.

As the analysis develops, it is plain to see that under current legislation, in order to provide sustainable means for their members, all of the SE entities must, in higher or lesser degree, either prepare their members for integration/re-integration into the labor market, or become,

for their members, a surrogate of an employer. Is it really social solidarity or just another way to suggest that the dominance of the labor market is absolute?

Monica Costache