

IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL ECONOMY ENTERPRISES, AN ESSENTIAL FACTOR FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Our scientific approach aims to capture the current state of the conceptual and methodological approaches regarding the social economy and the representative organizations of this sector, which has become increasingly clear in recent years, in order to propose a new model of social economy enterprise adapted to Romanian local communities, but not limited to this geographical area.

The main objective of our work-paper was to prefigure a new model of the social economy enterprise using alternatives offered by the behaviour of seemingly tiny creatures but with a great solidarity.

At first quick look the rules of behaviour that these creatures seem to strictly mathematically respect, appeared to be similar to the values promoted, in the human society by the social economy (solidarity, responsibility, communion of interests, autonomous management etc.). The answers to the questions we made themselves was outlined in successive stages we have undergone in our research, respectively: (1) identifying approaches to the current state of the social economy and current approaches regarding to the management of social economy enterprises; (2) identifying the degree of knowledge of the social economy in Romania; (3) deepening and nuance of the results of the research, by the content analyse of the registered responses to a questionnaire, that target above all the areas that define the individual-community relationship; (4) the elaboration of a conceptual model of the social economy enterprise as a network of people and relationships, having as inspiration the model of organizing bee life in the hive; (5) designing the mathematical model of the social economy enterprise, type honeycomb network and its benefits.

KEYWORDS: *exploratory analysis, community, collaborative economy, social economy enterprise, social innovation*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *C10, J29, L30*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social economy enterprises are economic entities characterized by specific values and principles as:

1. Are constituted as a result of a *collective initiative* with *private patrimony* and *function as a revenue-generating business* in order to achieve social objectives;
2. Are governed by an *entrepreneurial spirit* based on *solidarity* and *collaboration* among members;
3. Are characterized by *autonomous and participatory management*;
4. *Decisions* are *democratically adopted* on the principle of "one man, one vote" in the spirit of *responsibility towards members and the community*;

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5. The *surplus* is distributed as a priority for *achieving the social goal*.

Stimulating participatory activities leading to *collaborative communities* is possible given that management functions are tailored to the specifics and needs of the community. The profound transformations that our society goes through, marked by the informational era and the emergence of new technologies, have generated new needs for modern man, including the need to reinvigorate the *collaborative economy* by creating of new forms of profit-generating collaboration, using sharing resources in areas that did not exist a decade ago. At the same time, the "virtual" proximity of communities and the expansion and diversification of forms of remote collaboration between *network-connected groups* via the Internet simultaneously led to an adequate *reinvention of management*. Thus, the conditions for the emergence of *new concepts of collaboration*, some of them rapidly assimilated by the social economy enterprises, have been created, of which we consider the most important models concerning *crowdfunding, sharing economy, sharing city, cryptocurrency, production networks* and *outsourcing*.

The analysis of current approaches to the management of social economy enterprises allowed us to identify the *significant gaps* in the literature regarding the management of social economy enterprises. The most up-to-date issues that we have identified in the management of social economy enterprises approach a vast topic from which I have remarked: social entrepreneurship, performance management, IT&C management, social enterprise management and social value, financial management, strategic orientation and social responsibility.

There are also some relevant gaps to future qualitative studies on the management of social economy enterprises in areas of greatest interest for the changing economic reality: *performance management, social responsibility, competitiveness, social impact, social innovation, work relations, social enterprise sustainability* or *telework*.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is agreed that the genesis of the term "social economy" is attributed to Charles Dunoyer, French economist, the author of the Treaty on Social Economy that emerged in 1830, in which Dunoyer pleaded for the moral approach of the economy (Cace et al, 2010).

Social economy emerged in the XVIII - XIXth centuries, with the development of industrial capitalism, in response to the hard living conditions of the workers at that time (Cace et al, 2010).

According to Cace et al., there are five representative stages of the evolution of the concept of social economy: (1) the first stage begins from the French Revolution to the Second Republic (1789-1848) and is characterized by: claiming the right to work and association against the competition that arose with the development of the capitalist manufactures; the emergence of workers' associations; establishment of the first cooperative of jewellery workers; the influence of the socialist trend known as utopian socialism appears, having as promoters on Claude-Henri de Saint Simon, Charles Fourier and Louis Blanc; (2) between 1850 and 1900, groups fighting against social insecurity began to be recognized: trade unions, cooperatives and mutual societies; (3) the first half of the 20th century is characterized by activities aimed at strengthening sectoral organizations, promoting outdoor activities for employees, the right to rest, and fight against price hikes; (4) between 1945 and 1975, known as the *Fordist Economy*, characterized by the fact that the associated enterprises participate in the development of society, having the support of the public power, which determine them to bear more and more "the social costs of economic growth"; (5) the fifth stage, extended to the present day, characterized by the fact that associative enterprises have to restructure so as to cope with the extensive development of economy and multinational capitalism.

We have not identified a definition of the social economy, unanimously recognized, but only palliatives designed to highlight the particularities of this economic sector, as it is known in our days. Thus, the current concept of social economy was prefigured around organizations regarded as representative (cooperatives, mutual societies, social enterprises, NGOs or social inclusion enterprises)

and is defined by a series of terms that suggest rather the place assigned to it on a scale of economic values than the purpose it has in society ("third sector", "third way", "non-profit sector", "solidarity economy"). However, the most common definition of the social economy is that assigned to the International Centre for Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC) which refers directly to the organizations considered representative and to the organizational features of these organizations:

"The set of private enterprises set up on an official basis, with decision-making autonomy and freedom of membership, created to meet the requirements of their members on the market by producing goods and providing services, insurance and financial support, where decision-making and any distribution of profits or surplus between members is not directly related to the capital or the amounts contributed by each member, each of them having one vote. The social economy also includes private organizations set up on an official basis with decision-making autonomy and freedom of belonging that produce non-market services for households and whose surpluses, if any, cannot be taken by the economic agents that create, control or finances them" (Chaves and Campos, 2012).

As online sources we have used both the Google search engine and recognised peer-reviewed literature databases: *Google Scholar*, *Web of Science* and *Scopus*. The results from Google's search for social economy expression consisted of displaying 4,350,000 papers in Romanian, and 32,500,000 papers in English. The enormous amount of work displayed has forced the search filters to be applied; we also restricted the search for specialized databases in the publication of the peer-reviewed literature. As a result of the use of search filters and keywords ("economie socială", "social economy", "social enterprise" and "social enterprise management" in area of interest, management, business and accounting), the number of displayed papers has substantially decreased. Thus, were displayed 199 papers indexed in the Web of Science database and 83 papers indexed in the Scopus database, to which were added with 68 papers addressing the issue of social economy enterprises and 37 papers addressing the issue of business management of the social economy. Processing the resulting database, have aimed at eliminating duplicates and works that no longer meet the standards required by Scopus and Web of Science databases, has led to the creation of a database of 232 evaluated works in the field of interest business and management, published between 1998 and 2017, some of them quoted in various papers.

The lack of a common core of terms for defining the social economy and the obvious difference between the number of papers addressing concrete, applicative issues of the social economy (of tens of millions!) and the academic papers that address the conceptual-methodological side (only dozens of thousands!) constrained me to use the systematic integrative analysis method of the scientific literature, that helped me to identify the current state of the research. In order to do this, I have used a working algorithm that included the selection of relevant articles, ISI indexed in Scopus and Web of Science databases, I have elaborating a list of descriptors that define the investigated area, I have extracting the content from articles starting from all key words and phrases of the text, I have elaborating the database of the articles (cases) and the descriptors (variables) and I have processing the results in the IBM SPSS application (González-Loureiro, 2016).

Of the total over 3.000 descriptors and keywords that emerged from the analysis, I have retained four significant *descriptors* for my research: 1. the *social economy* descriptor, with the concepts conceptual approaches and theoretical approaches; 2. the *representative organizations* descriptor, with institutional framework concept; 3. the *management* descriptor, with management concept; 4. the *specific objectives* descriptor, with the concepts: included groups, innovation, methodology, objectives, collaborative practices, principles and challenges.

After completing the integrative analysis of the literature, we came to the conclusion that the *social economy is a field of study in the early phase*, for which there is *no unitary approach leading to a unanimously accepted definition of the concept*. There is no common ideological, conceptual and theoretical core that facilitates the definition of social economy concept.

In present, there are conjectural definitions, closely related to the purpose and objectives of the activities carried out, the organizations involved and the profile of the researcher. The same tendency is taken up in the many common works that address the social economy, most of them conducted in order to achieve specific programs that will allow them to obtain public funding.

Regarding social economy organizations, according to the analysis that I had managed the most well-known organization is the social enterprise. Cooperatives, hybrid organizations and non-profit organizations are also known as active organizations in the social economy sector. To these there are adding the organizations that I have identified in the study stage: mutualities, professional colleges, companies owned by employee, agricultural households, solidarity groups, social inclusion enterprise, inter-religious organizations, financial organizations and Mutual societies.

At the international level, the problems created by the economic crisis that started in 2007 have brought the social economy back to the attention of specialists and policy-makers. Research networks of specialists from complementary areas (management, economics, history, sociology, psychology, etc.) have been created and have been developed public policies and programs studying the specifics of the social economy and encourage the formation of social economy enterprises.

The lack of consensus in defining the social economy, or sometimes the appropriate regulatory framework at national level, does not prevent any of the world's states from raising the issue of social economy. On the contrary, in order to clarify the problems that concern the conceptualization of the social economy, have been set up research networks, and for the implementation of specific programs have been developed public policies for the development of the social economy.

Among the most well-known networks at European level are: research network *Émergence de l'entreprise sociale* (EMES), created in 1996 by an international group of researchers sponsored by the European Union, with the declared aim of building an international corpus of theoretical and empirical knowledge in disciplines grouped around the concept of social economy: social enterprises, solidarity economy, social economy, social innovation, social entrepreneurship, solidarity economy (EMES <<http://emes.net/who-we-are/>>, n.d.).

The most important achievement of this group of researchers, which has become a reference in defining the social economy enterprise, is the establishment of a group of three indicators specific to social economy enterprises (Defourny and Borzaga, 2001): 1. specific indicators to the economic and entrepreneurial dimension; 2. specific indicators to the social dimension; 3. specific indicators to participatory governance.

The International Centre for Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC), an international scientific organization, whose objective is to guarantee, promote and collect information, scientific research and publication of papers on economic sectors, including the social economy (cooperatives, non-profit economy, mutual societies, non-profit organizations).

Two important conclusions emerged at the end of the integrative analysis of the literature: 1. *current approaches* to social economy enterprises management are in their *infancy*; 2. *there is a significant gap in the literature* on the management of social economy enterprises. These conclusions have confirmed to me that there is a very generous space for future approaches to the management of social economy enterprises.

3. OBJECTIVE, WORKING ASSUMPTIONS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main objective of our paper is circumscribed in the scientific approach regarding to "Improving the management of social economy enterprises, essential factor for the responsible development of local communities" and consists in elaborating of a *social economy enterprise model*, as a *network of people and relationships*, adapted to Romanian local communities, inspired by the mode of organizing living, natural systems.

Careful observation of the behaviour and particularities of how to organize the socio-economic life of living, of natural systems living in communities has stimulated our curiosity to understand their "functioning" so that we can realize a replication to their way of life in the form of an *economic structure* characterized by an *organizational structure adapted to the environment in which it operates, reliability, and efficiency*.

The research question to which we will answer in this paper is formulated as follows: "We are the only beings able to organize themselves according to economic efficiency rules, or there are natural models that are alternative to the human model of organization"?

This question attracts many others; the first one makes direct reference to the mechanisms by which a number of species survive over time while others disappear and possible responses could be: *intelligence with which they organize their socio-economic life, responsibility and solidarity of individuals* which make up them. Understanding these aspects allowed us to observe the following significant details of the living, natural systems:

- most of the creatures *produce and store as far as they provide their consumption needs* (individual, family, or for the entire community), ensuring that species survives in *relative safety*, such *preserving* in this way their habitat;
- each creature has its well-defined role in the trophic chain, starting from the grass followed by herbivores and necrophages (whose role is the "sanitary" of the place);
- the specific behaviour of each species leads to an interrelation which, at the level of the macro system becomes the homonym of the concept of *environmental management*, specific to human activities, and which is well established by the way of functioning of the laws of nature.

At the first glance, the rules of behaviour respected by creatures that develop in communities appear to be similar to the values promoted in the human society by the social economy: *solidarity, responsibility, communion of interests, management autonomy*, etc.

The brief argumentation we have presented has the role of supporting the importance of our approach through we have proposed "to copy" the natural life patterns and adapting them to the specificities of socio-economic activities developed by people.

In order to achieve the main objective of the paper, we proceeded from the **hypothesis** that nature, through its complexity, offers us a multitude of organizational models tailored to the level of development of each living system, which can be constituted in alternatives viable to the human organizational model.

The working methodology consists in running an *algorithm* elaborated in five successive stages at the end of which we will be able to select the living, natural system, which will serve us as a *conceptual model* of *social economy enterprise, network type of people and relations*, having as criterion of selection the *level of socio-economic organization*:

1. Establishing the research items concerning the behaviour of living, natural systems selected for study;
2. The successive elimination from the study of the living system containing the most of unknown items;
3. Compiling the matrix of the characteristics of the living systems remaining in the study;
4. Selection of the model of living, natural system which will serve as a conceptual model of the *social economy enterprise, type network of people and relationships*;
5. Replicating the selected model into a social economy structure, specific to the Romanian local communities.

In order to answer the research question we have formulated, we have selected three living, natural systems living and developing in communities, each symbolically coming from a different living environment (earth, water, air): **ants, fish** and **bees**. For each of the three living systems, we have tried to understand their individual and group behaviour.

We then put forward a set of preliminary questions that contained information on the organization of community life and information on the organizational architecture of each living system (table 1).

In order to solve the research problem, we have formulated the questions in such a way that they correspond to both social criteria and organizational criteria:

1. *social criteria*:

- social being;
- social cohesion;
- the social division of labour;
- the ability of individuals to communicate.

2. *organizational criteria*:

- the existence of a hierarchy and social rank;
- the existence of individual tasks;
- coordination of individual efforts;
- the existence of collective tasks;
- own organizational architecture.

This workflow has helped us to remove from the study the category of beings about which we hold the least amount of information and to continue research by identifying the specific features of the other living systems that remain in the study.

4. RESULTS

We began studying the behaviour of the three living systems selected for our study - *ants*, *fish* and *bees* - through a practice that is frequently used in situations where we do not have much information about a field of study: we have formulated a series of questions (research items) to which we have tried to respond according to the current level of knowledge.

1. Establishing the research items on the behaviour of living, natural systems, selected for study (table 1).

Table 1. Preliminary questions on the organization of social life of the studied species

	Ants	Fishes	Bees
1. Is a social being?	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. It is distinguishable the individual tasks?	Yes	I don't	Yes
3. It is distinguishable the collective tasks?	Yes	I don't	Yes
4. Is it characterized by its own organizational architecture?	Yes	I don't	Yes
5. Is it characterised by social cohesion?	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. It is distinguishable the ability to coordinate the individual efforts?	Yes	I don't	Yes
7. It is a hierarchy an social ranks?	Yes	I don't	Yes
8. It is the social division of work?	Yes	Yes	Yes
9. It is distinguishable the ability of individuals to communicate?	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Questions formulated by the authors according to the working algorithm

2. The successive elimination from the study of the living system containing the most of unknown items. According to the established work algorithm, we removed from the study that category of beings about we had the fewest information at the time of the study. Thus, the answers in table 1 allowed us to eliminate *fishes* - the category with the majority of negative responses.

Documentary research continued with the identification of the specific traits to the two living systems studied: *ants* and *bees*.

3. Compiling the matrix of the living system characteristics remaining in the study. The two "civilizations" qualified for the superior stage of the study are characterized by a series of common features that recommend them as an optimal solution to the management problem that we formulated at the beginning of the paper (elaboration of a *model of a social economy enterprise*, as a *network of people and relationships*): organized social life; values and principles that concern

work for the common good; ability to collaborate; communication capacity; the social division of labour, to the level of super-specialization; collective intelligence; existence and respect of the hierarchy around the queen; the feeling of belonging to the group; the ability to perform precise tasks in a group; the ability to "memorize", etc.

The characteristics of the two systems analyzed are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Specific features of the living systems analyzed

1. Family organisation	Ants Between hundreds of individuals up to ... millions; - there is at least one queen (Hasegan, N. < http://www.zooland.ro/curiozitati-despre-furnici-3951 >);
	Bees 10.000 - 80.000 individuals; - queen; drones; bees with different specializations (Curiozitati din viata albinelor, < http://api-therapy.ro/ro/site/display/carte/3 >);
2. Duties	Ants - working ants have a high degree of specialization that allows them to perform various roles: guards, gatherers, hunters, nurses, garbage collectors, soldiers etc (Passera, L., 2012, < http://www.futura-sciences.com/magazines/nature/infos/dossiers/d/zoologie-fourmi-secrets-fourmilier-1404/ >);
	Bees - are genetically programmed, each working bee fulfilling its tasks one by one, depending on age: collector's, water carrier, sanitary, military
3. Hierarchies	Ants - yes, the life of the colony develops around the queen;
	Bees - yes, the life of the beehive develops around the queen;
4. Social cohesion	Ants - yes;
	Bees - yes;
5. Ability to communicate	Ants - yes, through specific pheromones;
	Bees - yes, through specific pheromones;
6. Coordination of individual efforts	Ants - yes, according to the specific "social" rules;
	Bees - yes, according to the specific "social" rules;
7. Own organizational architecture	Ants - yes, the ant-hill. Tend to capture any space. Expansion can reach the level of true mega polis.
	Bees - yes, the hive. Very rigorous, organized having the queen in the centre. High degree of space utilization.

Source: Synthesis achieved by authors



Figure 1. The organizational architecture of the two "civilizations".

a) Ant-hill

b) Bee-hive

Source: Images from the Internet

The documentary research conducted for this purpose highlighted the fact that the *beehive* is the **optimal model of organization**, which is recommended as a conceptual model for the social economy enterprise (Figure 1).

The implementation of the algorithm that we developed at the beginning of the paper *confirms*, as we expected, *the hypothesis* according to, the nature provides us with efficient organizational models that can be constituted in viable alternatives to the human model of organization.

5. Replication of the selected model at a level of a social economy structure specific to the Romanian local communities.

The scientific approach that we have initiated about "*Improving the management of social economy enterprises, key factor for the responsible development of local communities*" is built on the axiom according to, the social economy enterprise *stimulates collective action, facilitates the creation of collaborative networks* and engages in finding *long-term responses to the problems of local communities*.

As a civil society private entity, the *social economy enterprise* is responsibly assuming the role of a *vector of progress* in local communities and, at the same time, facilitating the *consolidation of collaborative communities*.

The conceptual model of social economy enterprise proposed, copies the hexagonal organizational structure of the bee hive. In this way we have created a socio-economic unit, people and relationships, structured around a *coordinator* who manages *six economic actors* (fig. 2).

By extension in horizontal plane is made up a *honeycomb fractal structure* out of *autonomous units*, characterized by *self-similarity* and *self-organization*, with *their own decision-making power, open and collaborative*.

Social economy enterprise, *type network*, so constructed is a *socio-economic structure* made up of *economic actors* (individuals or organizations) interconnected by the nature of common values and interests: economic, social, professional, moral, cultural etc.

The network of people and relationships that underlies the *conceptual model of social economy enterprise* that we propose is an application of social networks that are defined by a finite set of actors, the nodes of the network, along with the relationship or relationships defined by them, represented by the ties of the network (Wasserman and Faust, 1994).

The honeycomb social economy network consists of *structural units* made up of *meshes* and nodes (figure 2); the nodes are represented by the economic actors, and the meshes are formed by the ties established between them.

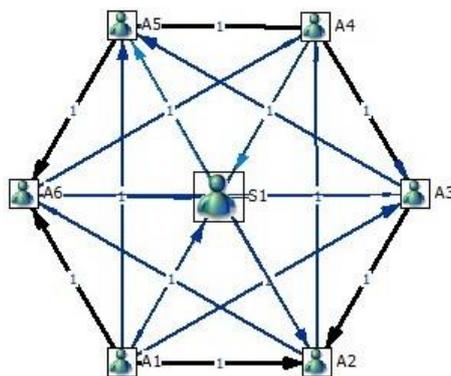


Figure 2. Unitary network of meshes and nodes, with the central element: sponsor (S) and six peripheral elements (A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6), called resources (R)

Source: Conceptual model proposed by authors.

The emplacement of the economic actors in the social economy network takes place around a *coordinator*, generically named *sponsor* due to its attributes, which forms a team of 6 *collaborators*, generically called *resources*, in order to fulfil the objectives that social economy enterprise has assumed in the local community.

The sponsor (S) is, by definition, the person who provides support to his collaborators and contributes with them to the achievement of the goals set by the social economy enterprise. The sponsor is the one who *guarantee* for each collaborator (resource) of his team. At the same time, the sponsor participates in establishing the objectives of the social economy enterprise, playing the role of a buffer between the team (the basic structural unit of the social economy network), the other teams on the same level and the teams of the higher hierarchical levels.

Resources (R) are individual or legal persons, integrated into the core structural unit, which enjoys the *sponsor's warrantee* and benefits from its support to carry out its tasks. From a formal point of view, the resources can be individuals (employees or *volunteers*), authorized individuals or organizations.

The fractal structure that is formed through the involvement of the local community is based on the collaboration and solidarity of the economic actors and draw, in time, a new way of life, generating the *knowledge-based society*.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our work is a pioneering activity in the field of management. Starting from a dilemma of the present, which is meant to answer the question: "*people are the only beings able to organize themselves efficiently*", we have carried out a comparative analysis of living, natural systems in order to identify in the world of living a model of organization that can serve as a source of inspiration for the design of the organizational structure of a social economy enterprise adapted to the specifics of Romanian local communities.

From the three living systems analyzed, has highlighted, through its qualities, the *bee swarm* - a *true living organism in action*, that is distinguished by: rigorous organization in the hive, the assumption of social roles, the social division of labour, dedication, diligence, the spirit of sacrifice for the common good, the collaboration, to which was added the defining element given by the *specific hexagonal organizational architecture*, type fractal of the hive, which is formed around the core represented by the queen.

The social economy enterprise that we have designed, inspired by the beehive organization, is a *network of people and relationships* that develop horizontally and / or, as the case may be, vertically in the local community, engaging economic actors in solving the problems specific of each community.

The *conceptual model* of honeycomb social economy enterprise is an *innovative, original model* that follows the fractal pattern of nature organization at all levels.

The *organizational structure* of social economy enterprise, type honeycomb is composed of *autonomous interconnected units* characterized by *self-similarity* and *self-organization*, with its own decision-making power, open and *collaborative*.

The paper we are presenting gives rise to a series of challenges in the field, each representing as many *research directions* for the future.

The main challenge is addressing to the management of enterprise from a network management perspective. The study of the vulnerabilities of the network of people and relationships is another challenge specific to the conceptual model of network type enterprise.

Finally, another challenge (of course, not the last!) that we are addressing to management specialists is the *management approach from the perspective of fractal geometry*, able of *completing or correcting* the current models based on absolute predictability and hierarchical control.

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