

# **SOCIAL ECONOMY, SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

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## **Abstract**

This article presents the factors influencing the adoption of the social enterprise concept in the Czech Republic. The field of social economy, solidarity economy and social enterprises in the academic intellectual inquiry, is still in its infancy. The author conducted a review of Czech social enterprise models using the methodology and definition of social enterprises used in the international research project of the European Research Society EMES. Knowledge of foreign theory, practice, and methodology of research on social enterprises helps to spread the ideas of social economy in the Czech Republic and supports the emergence of Czech social enterprises.

## **Keywords**

social economy, solidarity economy, social enterprise, EMES, democratization of the economy, sustainable development, social innovation

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The field of social economy, solidarity economy and social enterprises in the academic intellectual inquiry, is still in its infancy. "We do not yet have the deep, rich explanatory or prescriptive theories that characterize a more mature academic field. The existing literature focuses primarily on practical considerations, with many descriptive case studies, stories of lessons learned, and 'how to' guides." (Dees and Anderson, 2006). The topics of social economy, solidarity economy and social enterprises are not systematically included in the teaching of economic subjects in Czech schools and are relatively little known to the public. The issues are partially implemented in education, for example in Prague at the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University or at the University

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of Economics. Learning about foreign concepts and experiences, especially from the European Union and the USA, is the basis of the Czech concept of social and solidarity economy and social enterprises.

The aim of the paper is to present the international definition of social enterprises used in the international project of the Belgian Research Society EMES (The Emergence of Social Enterprises in Europe) and to introduce the factors influencing the adoption of the concept of social enterprises in the Czech Republic. The last International Comparative Social Enterprise Models (ICSEM) international project involved 60 countries. The ICSEM project revealed several models of social enterprises.

The term "social enterprise" is used in the Czech Republic even though it has no legal basis. Private entities of various legal forms, including non-state non-profit organizations, are called social enterprises if they carry out continuous economic activities and pursue social and/or environmental benefits (Borzaga and Tortia, 2007; Dees, 1998). It is a social enterprise or socially beneficial enterprise. There are different from traditional commercial companies. Traditional enterprises (for-profit business corporations) are private entities, mostly commercial companies, and entrepreneurs, which primarily focus on making a profit and consolidating their position on the market.

Social enterprises in the Czech Republic emerge from a "bottom-up" approach; they are based on citizens' voluntary initiatives (Dohnalová et al., 2021).

Western European countries had high expectations of the Czech Republic. In 2002, Prague became the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to host a world conference on the social economy. Participants from 33 countries discussed the need to create a model of global change based on deep respect for people, free enterprise, and intergenerational solidarity.

One of the outputs of this conference was the "Declaration of Prague", which highlights three major features of social enterprise: social enterprise is not based on capital but on participatory democracy; the object is not the pursuit of profit but mutual support; and social enterprise can make a significant contribution to the inclusion of disadvantaged people into society.

The conference did not bring any incentives for the development of social enterprises, but it was an important point for the Czech social economy, as it helped to get acquainted with foreign practices, to understand foreign concepts and to spread ideas about social economy and entrepreneurship, which subsequently led to the creation of the first Czech social enterprises (Dohnalová, 2010). An informal group of experts and interested parties was formed with the aim of defining the social economy and social enterprise. The first research on social enterprises as subjects of the social economy was carried out.

## **SOCIAL ECONOMY, SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES**

**The social economy** is part of the national economy alongside the public sector and the market sector and is associated with the third sector. Various names are used for the third sector, in the Czech Republic the non-profit (civil) sector.

The values of the social economy and its actors are in line with the ideas of solidarity and humanism. The influence of philosophical, religious, and economic thought and the impact on the emergence and development of the foundations of the social economy have been described by Defourny, Fonteneau and Develtere (1999).

They highlight the ideological pluralism of the social economy in the 19th century (Laville, 2011), when numerous self-help associations and initiatives were inspired by different ideological currents (Defourny, Fonteneau and Develtere, 1999). They cite the ideas of the utopian socialism of Owen, King, Fourier, Saint-Simon and Proudhon or the values and social ideas of Christianity (Laville, 2011; Hart, Laville and Cattani, 2010). A favorable attitude towards the social economy was evident in some liberal thinkers. For example, Leon Walras, who was a supporter of rural societies, and John Stuart Mill came up with proposals that the wage system should be replaced by workers' associations. Joseph Alois Schumpeter had a demand for businessmen to be not only business owners but also persons responsible for change (innovations) in several ways (Schumpeter, 1976).

Contemporary European economists include Jacques Defourny (Belgium), Jean-Louis Laville (France), Carlo Borzaga (Italy) and others who combine the ideas of social, solidarity, ethical or humane economics with an emphasis on the importance of local social enterprises and social entrepreneurship (Hart, Laville and Cattani, 2010).

In Europe, the "cradle" of the social economy is France. It has a long tradition here and many French people are now actively involved in the social economy. The social economy also has a long tradition in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Sweden, the UK and other countries. Outside Europe, the social economy is also being developed in other parts of the world in the USA, Latin America, and Canada (Kearns, 2000; Steinberg, 2004).

**The solidarity economy** refers to an alternative economic system that prioritizes the principles of social justice, cooperation, and sustainability. The concept of the solidarity economy emerged as a response to the limitations and negative impacts of conventional capitalist systems, which often favor profit maximization and individualistic competition. The solidarity economy seeks to create a more democratic economy that values cooperation, reciprocity, and solidarity among its participants. Economic theories of social enterprise emphasize a pluralist economy (Steinberg, 2004).

According to Jean-Louis Laville (Laville, Levesque and Mendell, 2007) the solidarity economy includes activities involving clients that combine market, non-market (government subsidies and donations) and non-monetary (volunteer labour) resources. The solidarity economy is defined as a set of activities that contribute to the democratization of economies through citizen participation (Laville, Levesque and Mendell, 2007). It is a way of organizing economic activities to address inequalities and promote the well-being of individuals and communities. The solidarity economy has a dual function: to offer products and services and to create social bonds and solidarity between members of social groups, as well as solidarity between groups and society.

Typical of the solidarity economy are cooperatives in which workers collectively own and run the enterprise. These enterprises priorities democratic decision-making, fair distribution of profits and often focus on meeting the needs of the community, not just the pursuit of profit.

## Social economy in the European Union

The main European social economy actor is Social Economy Europe. "The social economy is made up of a diversity of enterprises and organizations such as cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations and social enterprises among other forms that can be specific to each country. They are united around the values of primacy of people and the social objective over capital, democratic governance, solidarity and the reinvestment of most profits to carry out sustainable development objectives).

In the countries of the European Union are 2,8 million enterprises and organizations, 13,6 million Jobs and 8% EU GDP (SEE, 2023)."

In 2002, Social Economy Europe, adopted the Social Economy Charter, defining the identity, core values and characteristics shared by all social economy actors.

A diverse sector united by shared principles and common characteristics The legal form a social economy enterprise or organization may take varies from one Member State to another. However, the social economy is distinguished from capital-based companies by shared principles and common characteristics, in particular:

- Primacy of people and of the social objective over capital
- Democratic control by the membership
- Voluntary and open membership
- The combination of the interest of members/user and/ society (general interest)
- The defense and application of the principles of solidarity and responsibility
- Autonomous management and independence from public authorities
- Reinvestment of the essential surplus to carry out sustainable development objectives, services of interest to members or of general interest (The Social Economy Charter, 2023)

The result of the growing interest of scientists and academics is the publication *Encyclopedia of the Social and Solidarity Economy* (Yi, 2023). A Collective Work of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on SSE (UNTFSSSE).<sup>2</sup>

## SOCIAL ENTERPRISES – INTERNATIONAL DEFINITION

By social entrepreneurship we understand diverse activities of entities of various legal and organizational forms. Therefore, it is important to specify, define and determine characteristics of a social enterprise (Nicholls, 2010). Diversity and wide range of activities of social enterprises together with diversity of their organization types and legal forms call for the classification of social enterprises (Defourny, 2001; Nicholls, 2010; Galera and Borzaga, 2009; Ridley-Duff, 2010; Teasdale, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> "The Encyclopedia of the Social and Solidarity Economy is a comprehensive reference text that explores how the social and solidarity economy (SSE) plays a significant role in creating and developing economic activities in alternative ways. In contrast to processes involving commodification, commercialization, bu-reaucratization and corporatization, the SSE reasserts the place of ethics, social well-being and democratic decision-making in economic activities and governance. Identifying and analyzing a myriad of issues and topics associated with the SSE, the Encyclopedia broadens the knowledge base of diverse actors of the SSE, including practitioners, activists, and policymakers" (<https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/encyclopedia-of-the-social-and-solidarity-economy-9781803920917.html>).

The European concept and definition by European institutions represent an initial starting point for the Czech environment being part of the European Union. It primarily involves findings of the Belgian EMES researchers (The Emergence of Social Enterprises in Europe) and their projects of both global dimensions and impacts. The last *International Comparative Social Enterprise Models* (ICSEM) international project.

ICSEM project ran from 2013 to 2020 and involved 60 countries. The output of the project is four books that contain chapters for each participating country. The publications are: Gaiger, L. I., Nyssens, M., Wanderley, F. (eds.) *Social Enterprise in Latin America: Theory, Models and Practice*. Routledge 2019; Bidet E., Defourny, J., (eds.) *Social Enterprise in Asia*. Routledge 2019; Defourny, J., Nyssens, M. (eds.) *Social Enterprise in Western Europe Theory, Models and Practice*, Routledge 2021; Defourny, J., Nyssens, M. (eds.) *Social Enterprise in Central and Eastern Europe. Theory, Models and Practice*. Routledge 2021 (ICSEM, 2023).

The aim of the project was to create a database of social enterprise models identified by all project partners, to identify social enterprise models in an international perspective, to conduct a comparative analysis across sectors and regions, and to create a robust and reliable global typology of social enterprise models.

A unified methodology was used in the research. These are social enterprise indicators. Nine indicators were identified, and they were first presented in two subsets: a list of four economic indicators and a list of five social indicators. Defourny and Nyssens (2017) subsequently considered it more appropriate to present these nine indicators in three subsets rather than two, which made it possible to highlight forms of governance that are specific to social enterprises.

The researchers adopted the EMES approach, the three groups of indicators are as follows (Nyssens, Defourny and Adam, 2023).

Economic and entrepreneurial dimension of social enterprises

- A continuous activity producing goods and/or selling services
- A significant level of economic risk
- A minimum amount of paid work

Social dimension of social enterprises

- An explicit aim to benefit the community
- An initiative launched by a group of citizens or civil society organizations
- A limited profit distribution

Participatory governance of social enterprises

- A high degree of autonomy
- A decision-making power not based on capital ownership
- A participatory nature, which involves various parties affected by the activity

## THE STRENGTHS AND OBSTACLES OF THE ADOPTION OF THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CONCEPT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

**The strength of the social enterprise** theme is conditioned by two main reasons: historical background for development of social economy, and the return of civil liberty and the collapse of the Communist Party after 1989.

1/ The background for development of social economy in the Czech Republic is a long and rich tradition of solidarity, mutual-help organizations, foundations, and cooperatives; such organizations have indeed existed under different forms in the country for over 100 years. Efforts to establish associations and cooperatives, which seem to constitute the “roots” of Czech social enterprises, are documented in the country at the beginning of the 19th century already. Well-known figures who formulated basic principles of economic individualism and solidarity were Kampelík, Chleborad and Engliš<sup>3</sup> (Dohnalová, 2010).

The First Republic of Czechoslovakia, under the presidency of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937), created a friendly environment for the development of civil organizations. The high number of associations between World War I and World War II was linked to the civil activities started in the 18th and 19th centuries and related to the Czech National Revival.

In that period, Czechoslovakia was one of the world’s ten most industrialized countries. Associations and public organisations’ growth was mainly related to the development of Czech small and medium enterprises in the second half of the 19th century; the new social class of Czech wealthy businessmen played an important role in philanthropy.

Many cooperatives were developed in every business sector at the end of the 19th century, and the period between World War I and World War II is considered as the “golden years” of Czech cooperatives. All associations, foundations and cooperatives quickly resumed their activities after World War II, but February 1948 brought about significant changes. The economy was characterized by comprehensive central planning and the abolition of private ownership of capital. The 1970s brought about a more authoritarian socialism, in which all public life was under control and no public organizations were allowed to operate. This situation persisted until the end of communism, in November 1989.

2/ The “Velvet Revolution” brought about civil liberty and the collapse of the Communist Party. This regime changeover triggered the renewal of many civil associations. The development of the civil sector after 1989 constituted the basis for the emergence of today’s social enterprises (Dohnalová et al., 2021). A wide range of new associations and cooperatives of a social type were founded. Social enterprises are created by a bottom-up initiative – These private enterprises have gained experience in social entrepreneurship from abroad and call themselves social enterprises.

The accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union in 2004 encouraged changes under the influence of European policy and made it possible to benefit from financial support from the European Structural Funds. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

<sup>3</sup> František Cyril Kampelík (1805–1872), František Ladislav Chleborad (1839–1911) and Karel Engliš (1880–1961).

of the Czech Republic offers the opportunity to submit projects for the work-integration social enterprise within the framework of employment and social inclusion policy for disadvantaged people.

**The obstacles of social enterprises** in the Czech Republic can be related to the following facts highlighted by Borzaga, Galera and Nogales (2008) in their analysis of the situation in post-communist countries. For example:

- government policies relying on the strength of the free market and underestimating the value of alternative organizations and enterprises, particularly regarding regional development;
- deficiencies of the legislative framework that should regulate the profit-generating activities of the third sector;
- distrust in cooperatives caused by a negative understanding of cooperatives as organizations' connected with the communist regime (even though there are cooperatives that were established before the communist era);
- high dependence of social-sector NGOs on the state;
- general lack of trust in solidarity (the concept of solidarity is understood as applying to the relationship of an individual with friends and family; the vision of economic activity is connected with individual targets rather than with possible positive effects for the entire society);
- continuing influence of the political culture of the previous regime, in which the activity of social-economy actors was limited to their members' own interests.

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ADOPTION OF THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CONCEPT AND MODELS CZECH SOCIAL ENTERPRISES**

Regarding the strengths and obstacles of adopting the social enterprise concept, two approaches can be identified based on the steps taken so far. Both approaches are influenced by the foreign concepts of the authors (Defourny, Fonteneau and Develtere, 1999; Dohnalová et al., 2012).

A) The first approach is consistent with the EMES definitions, which are based on the European tradition of associations, mutuals and cooperatives. The role of social enterprises is to address social and environmental problems and to measure the social impact of economic activities in each locality. Social enterprises are created through a bottom-up approach; the activity is carried out by the actors themselves. People who initiate social enterprises often have experience of social enterprises from abroad and therefore refer to their initiatives as 'social enterprises'.

Financial support from the European Social Fund, which has been allocated to projects for the creation of new social enterprises under the 'Social Economy' call. In the current programming period (2021–2027), social enterprises are supported by the European Social Fund's operational programs related to combating poverty, promoting employment, social inclusion.

**Models of social enterprises are:**

**Civil-sector model**, (associative model, entrepreneurial non-profits, commercial non-profit approach). The trading activity could simply be considered as a source of income. Civil sector social enterprises are defined as: -private, they are institutionally separate from the government, although they may receive public funding; -self-governing, they are able to manage their own activities; -non-profit, they may generate profits, but these must be put back into the core mission of the organization and cannot be distributed to the owners, members, founders or governing bodies of the organization; -voluntary, which means two things: firstly, that membership of these organizations is neither compulsory nor legally enforced and secondly, that volunteers must be involved in their operation or management. In the Czech context, the following organizations fulfil the previous conditions: - associations; - public benefit societies; - institutes; - foundations; - legal persons established by churches and religious societies.

**Cooperative-sector model.** This cooperative is a community of people set up to support each of its members or third parties, or to run a business. "A 'social cooperative' is a specific type of cooperative which consistently carries out charitable activities aimed at promoting social cohesion for the professional and social integration of disadvantaged people. Its main objective is to meet local needs using local resources, depending on the location of the organization and the scope of its activities. Social cooperatives operate mainly in the fields of social services and health care, education, housing, and sustainable development. Unlike all legal persons formed under the Civil Code (associations, foundations, endowments, and institutes), cooperatives cannot in practice carry out ancillary economic activities: a cooperative can only carry out the activity for which it was established.

**Work-integration model.** The Work-integration social enterprise (WISE) is currently the only officially defined and recognized form of social enterprise in the Czech Republic. Work-integration social enterprises are independent economic entities whose aim is the labour integration of unemployed persons who have problems to succeed on the labour market and are at risk of long-term exclusion from the labour market. The integration of these people back into society is achieved by creating new jobs and employing them.

B) The second approach places more emphasis on the role of social enterprises in promoting social change. It covers topics such as social innovation, sustainability, social responsibility and utility, business tools and market principles. The second approach is identified the American concept, it is close to the importance of entrepreneurship too which brings its own resources, especially to non-profit organizations (Alter, 2006).

**The social enterprise model is:**

**Business-sector model.** For-profit business corporations developing social responsibility programs in which social objectives play a strategic role. Business corporations are legal



entities that are primarily established for the purpose of doing business, that is, they work systematically to make a profit. Some commercial companies also contribute to social public benefit and adhere to environmental principles. This model is emerging globally because of a UN initiative – the adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Sustainability and socially responsible business is becoming an alternative to traditional commercial business (Nicholls, 2006).

The American concept of social enterprise and the European concept of social enterprise are beginning to converge. In recent years, papers comparing the two traditions have been published and platforms for the exchange of knowledge and experience have been created (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010; Kerlin, 2006).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The European and American traditions, the history and roots of charities, voluntary organizations and foundations, the traditions of mutualism, cooperatives and other organized aid are important for the social and solidarity economy, for social enterprises. The social economy is now being credited with other functions, including addressing the problems of the welfare state or mitigating the effects of the current economic crisis. It is becoming an alternative to the capitalist economy.

Social enterprises carry out economic activities but differ from for-profit entities in the market sector in that they pursue social and environmental objectives simultaneously. They are private, and in a mixed economy they are in the third sector (social economy) alongside the state and the market. The solidarity economy creates the conditions for democratization of the economy, making people more visible.

In the Czech Republic, the “Velvet Revolution” and the development of civil society after 1989, as well as the opportunity to learn about foreign concepts and approaches, were the basis for the creation of contemporary social enterprises. Social enterprises are founded by bottom-up non-profit organizations or cooperatives. The accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union is associated with funding from European funds. This leads to the emergence of The Work Integration Social Enterprise model – the predominant model of social enterprise. In the Czech Republic, the use of the term social economy for the third sector is limited, the social economy is not defined by legislation, and there is no formal definition of social enterprises. The demand for the adoption of the concept of social economy and social enterprises in the Czech environment is driven not only by European initiatives, but also by domestic processes related to saving public budgets, the need to increase employment, contribute to social inclusion and to sustainable local development and regional stability (Dohnalová and Průša, 2011).

All social enterprise models respond to specific problems and needs of citizens. Under the influence of the European approach, the associative model, the cooperative model, or the WISE model and the business model influenced by the American approach, create economic and social value, and contribute to the sustainability of the economy. European

and American concepts converge on the theme of socially responsible business. The 2015 UN Summit Conclusions and the Sustainable Development Goals call for governments to foster an ecosystem for economic actors that do not only pursue economic profit but behave in a socially responsible manner. The space for a mixed economy is expanding.

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