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Ioana Prodan

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Ioana Prodan, PhD Candidate
Doctoral School of Sociology
University of Bucharest

1. Introduction

This paper addresses the social enterprises' role in social services innovation process in Romania by referring to the legal and public policy context as well as to the results of a primary and secondary research carried out by the author at the national level in 2022. The first section contains the literature review on social innovation and social entrepreneurship, the brief presentation of the theoretical framework and research methodology. The following sections mainly focus on the results of the public policy analysis, primary and secondary data analysis, including the discussion of the results by reference to the theoretical framework.

The transversal objective of the research, around which I elaborated this paper, was to explore the relationship between innovation processes in the field of social services and social entrepreneurship, whereas the specific objectives aimed at analysing the degree of institutionalisation of social innovation and social entrepreneurship concepts, mapping innovations and analysing social innovation process in the field of social services. The following research questions will find its answers in this paper: How social policies have influenced the degree of institutionalisation of social innovation and social entrepreneurship concepts? How does the degree of institutionalisation of social entrepreneurship influence the development of innovations in the field of social services? What is the role of social enterprises in the social services innovation process?

2. Literature review on social innovation and social entrepreneurship

2.1. Social innovation or new social practices that generate social change

Within the industrial society innovation represented a socio-technological solution for development but in postmodernity, or in the knowledge society, innovation is approached as an opportunity to promote inventions generated at the level of the community or civil society in order to solve social problems (Schubert 2018: 371-372). The concept of social innovation

was a subject approached since the 19th century by Tarde who analysed social change from the perspective of innovation and micro social phenomena, respectively Tarde considered that imitation practices shape social phenomena which leads over time to social change (Howaldt *et al.* 2015: 31, 32, 36). In the 20th century, Ogburn (1937 *apud* Howaldt *et al.* 2015: 36) wrote about the social consequences of technological innovations and Schumpeter (1964 *apud* Howaldt *et al.* 2015: 36) about economic and technological innovation. In Ogburn's view (1922 *apud* Schubert 2018: 373) material cultural factors, respectively technical and economic factors are the ones that determine social change, a process that is also influenced by non-material cultural factors, i.e. by the institutions that materialise through social values, norms or routines. Later, Schumpeter (1942 *apud* Schubert 2018: 373) promoted the phrase "creative destruction" by which he referred to the role of the creative force of entrepreneurship in the process of transformation and economic development (Schubert 2018: 373-374). Therefore, since the middle of the 20th century we distinguish two paradigms in terms of social innovation, respectively social adjustments can be determined including by public policies and regulations according to Ogburn or by entrepreneurial activities according to Schumpeter (Schubert 2018: 374). In the latter part of the 20th century, Zapf (1968: 23) explained how the institutionalisation of innovations generates social change and whether innovations are protected by institutionalisation or are modified in the process of social change.

More recently, in the 21st century, researchers such as Jürgen Howaldt, Michael Schwarz and Ralf Kopp have clarified the relationship between social change and social innovation. If social innovation is a process composed of planned actions that can generate new social practices, social change is an unintentional process by which the social structure within a society changes (Howaldt and Schwarz 2011: 212-213). Thus "social innovation is a central driver and element of social change" (Howaldt *et al.* 2015: 38). The clearest explanation of the relationship between those concepts was provided by Howaldt and Schwarz (2016: 6), respectively "social innovations relate to the change (of social practices) in 'society', and social change relates to the change of 'society'. Social innovation is the mechanism by which 'society' changes". Through actions initiated, planned and implemented by an actor or a group of actors, are generated social innovations that reflect in new social practices, and through the institutionalisation and deinstitutionalization of social practices, complex and lasting changes are determined at the level of social structures, meaning social change (Howaldt and Schwarz 2016: 59).

Howaldt and Schwarz (2016: 14-16) consider that social innovations are treated marginally within the theory of social change, Zapf and Ogburn being among the few who have

addressed them in relation to the process of modernization within societies or cultural development. Social innovation as a distinct field of research slowly distances itself from the field of social entrepreneurship, in the context where, starting from Schumpeter's conceptual approach, the Anglo-Saxon school of thought about social innovation promoted social entrepreneurship as a source of social change (Howaldt and Schwarz 2016: 8). However, the results of the SI-DRIVE project, which aimed to map social innovations globally, show that social enterprises played a marginal role in the social innovation processes that were developed by private companies, public organisations and non-governmental organisations (Howaldt 2019: 40).

2.2. From social innovation to social service innovation

Social innovation was defined by the Young Foundation (2012: 17-18) as new solutions that are made with the aim of meeting social needs in a more efficient manner and increasing society's capacity to act. The process (through which new services, products, models, forms of collaboration are designed and implemented), the product (the social needs met) and the impact at the level of society are the pillars that underlie social innovation.

Nicholls and Murdock (2012: 2-3) identified three levels of social innovation, namely incremental innovation, institutional innovation and disruptive innovation. Incremental innovation, through the process of improving already existing products and services, addresses market failures to provide basic products and services to the population. Institutional innovation, through the introduction of new products and services, involves the use of new technologies for social purposes rather than for the fulfilment of purely economic objectives. Disruptive innovation, by institutionalising new practices, alters social structures and systems. We observe that social innovation is conceptualised both as a process of social change and as a response to the market failures to meet societal needs (Nicholls *et al.* 2015: 2-3).

The conceptual framework of the "social innovation continuum" proposed by De Bruin and Stangl (2013: 8) makes us understand the complexity and flexibility of the social innovation process. On the social innovation continuum we can find several forms of social innovation, which manifest themselves at different levels but have the same result, namely the creation of solutions to social problems. The movement of social innovation along the continuum is determined by the scalability of the solutions, meaning the transition from solutions for local social problems, which can be the result of incremental innovation, to disruptive social innovation with system-level and societal-level impact.

In the specialised literature we identify a growing interest in defining social innovation in relation to social work activities in general or social services in particular. Crepaldi *et al.* (2012: 25) consider that social services innovation is constituted as a type of process aimed at either new social services or new practices related to pre-existing social services. Heales and Green (2017: 5) define social innovation in social care as "the process of responding to new social expectations and/or social values by developing models of care that are entirely new in their context, even though they may have existed previously in other contexts". In a similar way Parpan-Blaser and Hüttemann (2019: 80) define "innovation in social work as a variant of social innovation that is characterised by the participation of social work professionals in the innovation process. In order to mark the difference between social innovation and innovation in social work, we will speak of innovation in social work when it comes to novel developments in social work".

At the European and international level three research projects regarding the measurement of social innovation in the field of social services stand out. The first research project aimed to measure the innovation capacity of UK voluntary and not-for-profit organisations in the field of social services (Osborne, 1998). The second research project, namely INNOSERV¹, was implemented in the period 2012-2014 and was financed from the Seventh framework program for research of the European Union. INNOSERV experts studied the approaches to innovation in nine European countries and in three areas related to social services, namely health, education and welfare (Eurich and Strifler 2014). SI-DRIVE², the third research project, had as its main objective the mapping of social practices at global level, including those regarding social care, which can be categorised as social innovation. The project was implemented in the period 2014-2017 and was also financed from the Seventh framework program for research of the European Union, the research results being included in two Atlases of social innovation³ (Howaldt *et al.* (eds.) 2018; 2019).

2.3. Social entrepreneurship as a source of social innovation

Social entrepreneurs can be agents of social change if they engage in a continuous process of innovation with the mission of creating social value by providing solutions to social problems (Dees 2001: 4; Dacin *et al.* 2011: 1207). Therefore, the theoretical construction of the social entrepreneurship field can have multiple advantages if treated transdisciplinary (Dees and Battle Anderson 2006: 40), based on the theory of social enterprise (the efforts of private sector and non-governmental sector organisations to find

¹ <http://www.innoserv-project.eu/>

² <https://www.si-drive.eu/>

³ <https://www.socialinnovationatlas.net/>

new sources of financing or profit) and the theory of social innovation (identifying new methods by which social problems can be solved). In the specialised literature we identify three conceptual approaches regarding social entrepreneurship (Mair and Marti, 2006: 37; Haynes 2012: 59): social entrepreneurship seen as an initiative of non-governmental organisations in search of alternative financing resources; social entrepreneurship seen as a practice of social responsibility of the commercial sector; social entrepreneurship seen as a means of alleviating social problems and a catalyst for social transformation through innovation.

Researchers in the EMES⁴ network laid the theoretical and empirical foundations of social enterprise analysis (Borzaga and Defourny 2001). The EMES approach (Defourny and Nyssens 2012: 11) resulted from interdisciplinary dialogue (economics, sociology, political science and management), taking into account the various national traditions and existing trends at the level of the European Union regarding entrepreneurial activities with a social purpose. The EMES approach comprises three sets of indicators (the economic and entrepreneurial dimension, the social dimension and the participatory governance dimension) that analysts can use to identify or position entities as social enterprises (Defourny and Nyssen, 2012: 12-15). More recently, Defourny and Nyssens (2016: 12-17) analysed existing entrepreneurial models with a social mission and proposed a typology consisting of four social enterprise models, namely non-profit entrepreneurship, public sector social enterprise, social cooperative and social business.

3. Theoretical framework

Social innovation develops at the intersection of third sector organisations with institutional and public policy environments (Osborne 1998 *apud* Osborne 2010). In order to carry out the analysis of the institutional environment, I used two neo-institutionalist approaches, namely the sociological one that emphasises the explanation of the process of creating institutions and the political science one that emphasises the effects of institutions (Peters 1999).

The stages of the institutionalisation process were proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) and developed by Tolbert and Zucker (1996). Both the level of knowledge and perceptions of social work specialists regarding social innovation and social entrepreneurship, as well as public policies regarding the reform of social services provide indications of the institutional maturity of the concepts under discussion. Tolbert and Zucker (1996: 181-184) proposed three stages of institutionalisation, namely pre-institutionalization (the stage characterised by a limited number of followers of the new structure and

⁴ <http://emes.net/>

organisations and low degree of implementation), semi-institutionalization (the stage in which consensus is developed at the decision-making level regarding the values of the respective structure and the degree of implementation at the organisational level increases) and the full institutionalisation stage (the structure has a history, has been perpetuated over multiple generations of members, has cultural support and low resistance from opposing groups).

The evolution of the Romanian legal framework and public policies in the social field and its impact on the degree of institutionalisation of social innovation and social entrepreneurship concepts can be explained through historical institutionalism (Skocpol 1995; Skocpol and Pierson 2002). This approach envisages analysing macro-level contexts and test hypotheses about the effects of institutions and processes over time on politics, governance and public policy (Skocpol and Pierson 2002). Historical institutionalists have found that the implementation of similar measures in several geographical areas leads to different results according to "path dependence", meaning contextual and historical features (Skocpol and Pierson 2002). Behind the processes that are dependent on a certain path is the logic of the "critical junction", namely those critical moments that determine the emergence of a certain pattern in the future (Skocpol and Pierson, 2002). Thoenig (2003) presents this dependence as related to the old institutional arrangements and political choices that influence the public policy outcomes of the present. Kerlin (2006) used the theory to understand the reasons that led to the different conceptualization of social enterprises in the United States of America and in Europe. The analysis of the institutional environment reflected the involvement of the private sector in the development of the social entrepreneurship model in the United States of America and the involvement of the public sector in the development of the European one, which is why American social enterprises provide a more varied range of services (such as social services, services dedicated to the protection of environment, etc.) and European social enterprises mainly provide social and labour market integration services for vulnerable people (Kerlin 2006: 250-251).

4. Methodology

The research was carried out in 2022 through multiple triangulation (Denzin 1978; Denzin 2009), respectively through theoretical, methodological and data triangulation. Both documents and secondary data were analysed, as well as primary data that were collected based on a mixed research methodology, developed according to the sequential explanatory model (Creswell 2014: 224), which involved understanding and completing the quantitative data collected through a questionnaire with qualitative data collected by applying a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire was mainly designed to map innovations

in the field of social services and was completed by 298 accredited social services providers, representing approximately 15% of social services providers who had at least one licensed social service at the end of 2021. In addition 21 interviews were conducted, of which 10 with representatives of social services private providers (associations and foundations) and 11 with representatives of social services public providers from the central and local public administration, with the aim of analysing the identified innovation processes (including the role of social enterprises in these processes).

In order to carry out the primary research, a working definition was developed starting from the main ideas presented by Osborne (1998: 64-65), Nicholls and Murdock (2012: 4-5), Young Foundation (2012: 33- 41), Crepaldi *et al.* (2012: 25-26), De Bruin and Stangl (2013: 8), Schröder *et al.* (2014: 12) and Howaldt *et al.* (2016a: 25-26; 2016b: 4). The process of social innovation in the field of social services can be represented in the form of an incremental innovation - disruptive innovation continuum in which a single type or several types of social innovations can be generated following the interaction of different actors at an intra-organizational and/or inter-organizational level. Incremental innovation generates organisational development because the methods of providing existing social services to a group of existing beneficiaries are made more efficient through the identified solutions. Institutional innovation generates changes at the organisational level that are either total (new social services that are provided to new groups of beneficiaries), expansionary (existing social services that are provided to new groups of beneficiaries) or evolutionary (new social services that are provided to existing groups of beneficiaries). Institutional innovation can turn into disruptive innovation and cause systemic change by introducing new public policies, new social practices, or new organisational forms/hybrid organisational forms that are accepted, diffused, and institutionalised. Although social services providers are the main actors in the social services innovation process, they collaborate with beneficiaries, financiers, representatives of organisational networks in the field and with representatives of public authorities to manage existing or newly emerging social needs by introducing new social services or new activities related to existing social services. To the extent that social services providers collaborate with other actors involved in the process for the diffusion and institutionalisation of innovations, these can become accepted and implemented practices at the system level.

Regarding secondary data analysis, national registers of accredited social services providers, social enterprises and authorised protected units were consulted. In addition, in the absence of publicly available information, data were requested from the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity regarding social enterprises/ social insertion enterprises/

protected units that hold authorization for the provision of social services and have licensed social services. In addition to the primary and secondary research, documents were analysed (government programs, legislation and public policy documents from the period 1990-2020), using the model of public policy paradigms (Hall 1993; Daigneault 2014a; Nicholls and Teasdale 2017), to understand the influence of the political-economic macro-paradigm on public policy decisions regarding social innovation and social entrepreneurship at the national level. The analysis of the public policy paradigm was completed with statistical situations and other information extracted from the specialised literature on the implementation of legislation and public policies in the social field in Romania.

5. Policy analysis

5.1. Brief presentation of the analysis framework

Through the explanatory model of the public policy paradigm, Hall (1993) addressed the role of ideas in the process of public policy elaboration. Hall (1993: 279) considers that, in addition to specific objectives and instruments, public policies must be based on a framework of ideas and standards for solving social problems. Daigneault (2014a: 458), who developed the explanatory model proposed by Hall (1993), clarified that a public policy paradigm addresses a field of public policy sectors and contains a series of values, philosophical principles and a worldview and a public policy theory targets a single sector of activity and explains the process by which a policy achieves its objectives. Public policy paradigms influence the content of public policies and public policy ideas are constitutive parts of paradigms (Daigneault, 2014b).

In order to operationalize the explanatory model proposed by Hall (1993), Daigneault (2014a: 461) structured public policy paradigms in four dimensions: "i) values, assumptions and principles about the nature of reality, social justice and the appropriate role of the State; ii) a conception of the problem that requires public intervention; iii) ideas about which policy ends and objectives should be pursued; and iv) ideas about appropriate policy 'means' to achieve those ends (i.e. implementation principles, type of instruments and their settings)". The analysis of public policy paradigms, through the four dimensions, has been carried out in multiple studies, such as the one on social work paradigms (Daigneault 2014c), the one regarding the changes generated by crises on the public policy paradigm at European Union level (Falkner 2016) or the one about the transition of Romania and Bulgaria to renewable energy in the period 2007-2017 (Davidescu *et al.* 2018).

Regarding the influence of the public policy paradigm on the development of social entrepreneurship, Nicholls and Teasdale (2017: 324) consider that the political vision (macro level paradigm) regarding social welfare (intermediate level paradigm) is transposed into specific public policies such as social entrepreneurship (micro level paradigm).

5.2. Analysis of the national public policy framework

The purpose of the public policy framework analysis, carried out according to the explanatory model of public policy paradigms (Hall 1993; Daigneault 2014a; Nicholls and Teasdale 2017), was to present the evolution of the political vision in Romania regarding social welfare, including the way of transposing the values and principles about the state's involvement in solving social problems into public policy instruments such as social innovation and social entrepreneurship. By correlating the results of government documents analysis from the period 1990-2020 with statistical situations in the social field and the results of other specialised analyses/reports, I explained how the evolution of social policies influences the degree of institutionalisation of social innovation and social entrepreneurship concepts at the national level. In the government programs was analysed the political vision regarding the involvement of the state in solving social problems. In addition, normative acts, including public policy documents, from fields of activity such as social work, social economy, entrepreneurship, research, innovation and the non-governmental sector were analysed.

The political vision regarding the welfare state in Romania

Although after 1990 Romania's governance was mostly ensured by the centre-left political parties (Fitzek 2020: 103) and, therefore, the social democratic ideology should have encouraged the maintenance or development of the social functions of the state, the political discourse promoted a distancing from communist practices that also determined a reduced involvement in the provision of social welfare, although Romanians strongly felt the problems generated by the transition to the market economy (Zamfir 2020: 41). In the context of the emergence of private and non-governmental organisations and the promotion of the privatisation policy of state properties, the state managed specific problems such as supporting the unemployed by offering compensatory social wages (Voicu and Stănescu 2020: 88). Gradually, non-governmental organisations, mainly with the support of external funding (between 1994-2008, the European Commission financed programs worth over 40 million euros), began to take over some of the social functions held by the state, which is why the public authorities saw the outsourcing of public services dedicated to vulnerable people a way of solving social problems through reduced budget allocations although, at

least at the beginning of the period, these organisations did not always have specialised staff (FDSC 2010: 121; Zamfir 2020: 45).

The reform of the public social work system, implicitly of social services, was also delayed due to the rethinking of the economy according to the neoliberal model that promoted the achievement of individual well-being, without the involvement of the state, through market mechanisms that were supposed to generate economic and social development (Zamfir 2020: 45, 49). In practice, in an unstable political, economic and social context, the neoliberal model caused, by reducing social spending, an exacerbation of the degree of marginalisation and impoverishment of vulnerable people (Zamfir 2020: 49). Throughout the time period under analysis, the social welfare state in Romania was characterised by low public spending on social protection. In 2002, the national level expenditure on social protection, as a proportion of GDP, represented 13.6%, maintaining similar annual values until Romania's accession to the European Union, only in the context of the economic crisis increasing from 14.3% of GDP in 2008 to 17.6% of GDP in 2010 (Dima and Barna 2013: 29). After 2010, social protection expenditure began to decrease gradually in the context of the reduction of social benefits and the promotion of work integration measures for vulnerable people. For example, these represented 14.8% of GDP in 2017 (compared to the EU average of 28.1%) and 15% of GDP in 2018 (compared to the EU average of 27.9%) (National Institute of Statistics 2018: 51).

In Romania the political vision was to develop the sector of non-governmental organisations and civil society, including the cooperative sector, and to support organisations with social objectives so that the state gradually withdraws from areas such as social, cultural or educational. Against the background of maintaining social protection expenditure, including those regarding social work, at a low level in Romania, and, at the same time, in the context of the administrative reform that focused on the principles of decentralisation, subsidiarity, privatisation and deinstitutionalization, the non-governmental sector, respectively its role in the provision of social services to vulnerable groups was continuously expanding (FDSC, 2010, p. 8).

The approval and implementation of the social work legal framework simultaneously with that regarding the sector of non-governmental organisations, including the regulation of possibilities that non-governmental organisations carry out economic activities for the fulfilment of their social mission or provide social services through a partnership with central and local public authorities, led to an increase in the number of non-governmental organisations at the national level. In 2009, associations and foundations represented the main active organisations in the social economy sector in terms of number (23,000 out of a

total of 25,744 active organisations), revenues (71% of total revenues), volume of fixed assets (70% of total assets) and employees (64% of total employees) (FDSC 2012: 10-11).

However, non-governmental organisations accredited as providers of social services relied mainly on private, public or international funding and less on income from commercial activities. In 2000, only 18% of non-governmental organisations accredited as social services providers had economic activity, and in 2005 the situation was similar (17.4%) (Dima and Barna 2013: 43). In 2015 the main source of funding for most associations and foundations accredited as social services providers were the budgets of local public authorities (FDSC 2017: 128).

Among the non-governmental organisations specialised in social projects, in 2010 only 16.6% had accreditation for the provision of social services (Dima and Barna 2013: 40-42). However, in 2011 associations and foundations represented the main private providers of social services, holding a 47% share of the total number of accredited providers (Dima 2013: 53). In 2016, associations and foundations represented 40% of accredited social services providers, meaning 13% of all non-governmental organisations active in the social charitable field (FDSC 2017: 123). The accreditation rate of non-governmental organisations in the field of social services was predominantly low, by reference to the number of non-governmental organisations in the social-charitable field, the causes being both related to the bureaucratic process of accreditation but also to the imposition of high quality standards in contrast to low funding from the state/local budget (FDSC 2017: 125).

More recently, the policy of encouraging non-governmental organisations for the provision of social services and for the integration of people from vulnerable categories into the labour market, including through their involvement in social economy activities, has been maintained. The adoption of the legislation on social economy in 2015 determined the need to obtain a social enterprise certificate by organisations in the field of the social economy, including associations and foundations, which wanted to receive certain facilities from the public authorities or funding from the state/ local budget. Since 2017, the social economy sector has been promoted by government authorities as a partner for the provision of quality and low-cost social services. In the period 2016-2020, the total number of social enterprises increased from 48 to 519, of which 41% represented associations and 7% foundations (Alături de Voi Foundation 2021: 21, 24). However, if we refer to the data for 2009, the associations and foundations active in the field of social economy are much more numerous than the data on accredited social enterprises indicate, which means that most of them

operate in this field without the financial support of public authorities or reserved facilities for social enterprises.

Although the political vision, visible at the level of government programs, was to encourage the development of the non-governmental sector and that of the social economy as tools to reduce poverty and combat social exclusion, in practice the restrictive legal framework and insufficient fiscal and non-fiscal facilities determined many non-governmental organisations to be involved in social or community projects and to carry out commercial activities without accrediting themselves as social services providers or social enterprises.

Public policy issues

Since 2002, the Romanian governmental authorities have constantly developed public policy documents on the topic of social inclusion, focusing in particular on establishing anti-poverty measures (Arpinte 2020: 170). The main problem that needed to be managed was the existing pressure on the social protection budget caused by the falling birth rate, the increase in external migration of the active population and the demographic ageing process. In addition, a significant part of the active population worked in the informal sector or was unemployed due to layoffs following the privatisation of state-owned factories. Imbalances in the labour market affected the sustainability of the social protection system at the national level and accentuated the differences in development between regions. The global economic crisis that has had effects since 2008, has affected especially young people and people from vulnerable categories at the national level.

Public policy objectives

The public policies elaborated in the social field until 2020 mainly aimed at creating jobs and combating unemployment by increasing formal businesses, especially those owned by SMEs, and encouraging social entrepreneurship with the aim of integrating people from vulnerable categories into the labour market. As far as the field of social work is concerned, the granting of social benefits was envisaged only in the case of people who could not be integrated into the labour market. Specific objectives were promoted such as increasing employment among young people, extending the active life of the elderly, facilitating employment among women and people with disabilities.

For example, through the National Strategy for Employment 2014-2020, the Government of Romania proposed to reach by 2020 an employment rate of 70% for people aged between 20 and 64. The Ministry of Labour and Social Justice (2019: 144) states that the employment rate was continuously increasing in the period 2007-2018, for the 20-64 age group being

almost 70% in 2018. However, throughout the period the differences in the employment rate according to gender are maintained, in 2018 women having an employment rate of 56% compared to 73% for men (Ministry of Labor and Social Justice 2019: 144-145). Regarding NEET young people, meaning young people in the 15-24 age group who do not study or work, the year 2018 indicates a decrease in their number compared to the period 2014-2016, respectively from 17.5% to approximately 15%, being still below the European Union average of approximately 11% (Ministry of Labor and Social Justice 2019: 152).

In the 2002-2020 period, public authorities developed ambitious strategies and plans to promote social inclusion by establishing measures to reduce poverty and increase the employment rate among the active population. Although the employment rate in the case of the 20-64 age group had positive developments in the period 2014-2020 and the number of employees increased considerably from 4.3 million in 2011 (Zamfir, C. 2013: 6) to approximately 6.5 million in 2020 (National Institute of Statistics 2021: 1-2), however, part of Romania's population continues to be at risk of social marginalisation and poverty, the most vulnerable groups still being children, young people between 15 and 24 years old, people with a low level of education, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Public policy instruments

The public policy instruments used at the national level to implement strategies and plans on the topic of poverty eradication and social inclusion also aimed at strengthening the capacity of private organisations, especially non-governmental organisations, to implement social work projects and programs at the community level. Financial support from the central and local public authorities was manifested mainly through subsidies, public procurement/concession contracts and European funds. For the implementation of the labour market insertion policy of people from vulnerable categories, the social economy, in general, and social entrepreneurship, in particular, were institutionalised by regulating the sector at national level and adopting organisational forms such as authorised protected units and social enterprises/social insertion enterprises.

According to the data provided by FDSC (2010: 143), public funding for associations and foundations that provided social services was quite limited in the period 1998-2010, but the number of subsidised social work units was increasing in the period of reporting, from 60 subsidised units in 1998 to 322 in 2010, as well as the number of beneficiaries increasing from 2,087 in 1998 to 15,687 in 2010. In 2013, only 30% of the revenues of non-governmental organisations in Romania, suppliers of social services, represented public funding in contrast to private providers from other Member States of the European Union

that received public funding that varied between 50 and 80% (Dima 2013: 110). The total allocation of subsidies registered an increase in the period 2010-2013 but starting from 2014 the number of beneficiaries was continuously decreasing (9,587 beneficiaries in 2016), which also determined the reduction of the total amounts approved for the non-governmental organisations that administered social work units (255 subsidised social work units in 2016) (FDSC 2017: 86).

Non-governmental organisations' low access to public policy instruments such as public procurement/concession contracts or subsidies has led them to strengthen their capacity to engage in social entrepreneurship activities. The social economy sector at the national level is mainly composed of non-governmental organisations with economic activity, mutual organisations, cooperatives, sheltered workshops that are involved in entrepreneurial activities whose aim is not to obtain profit for personal purposes but to obtain income for the achievement of the organisation's social objectives (Lambru and Petrescu 2012: 166). Social entrepreneurship has been visible in Romania since the 1990s at the level of associations and foundations that, through the income obtained from commercial activities, tried to implement their social programs (Lambru and Petrescu 2017: 117). Attempts to institutionalise the social economy and social entrepreneurship began timidly in 2005, concrete steps to develop the legal framework were undertaken after 2010 in the context of the implementation of the European social inclusion agenda, manifested including through the operational programs at the national level dedicated to European funds, and through the involvement of non-governmental organisations (Lambru and Petrescu 2017: 117).

In 2006, the organisational form of protected units or sheltered workshops for people with disabilities, as they are known in the specialised literature, was regulated. The integration of people with disabilities into the labour market was a horizontal objective that was also reflected in the legislation on public procurement. In the same year, the public authorities received the right to reserve participation in the awarding procedures of public procurement contracts only to sheltered workshops or programs that consider ways of protected employment for people with disabilities. The number of authorised protected units generally registered an upward trend in the period 2008-2017, respectively from 207 in 2008 to 708 in 2017 (Lambru and Petrescu 2021: 165). The amendment of the legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities in 2017, which removed the option for public or private organisations with more than 50 employees to purchase products and services from authorised protected units in the amount of the disability tax, had a negative impact on commercial activity and, implicitly, on the human resource, which caused a decrease in the number of authorised

protected units to 376 in 2023⁵ even in the context of a partial return in 2021 to the initial approach.

In the period 2007-2013, financing schemes from European funds targeted more the issue of employment for people from vulnerable groups and ensuring their access to professional training programs and less the development of social services (Dima 2013: 110; Arpinte 2020: 182). The Human Resources Development Sectoral Operational Program (POSDRU) 2007-2013 initially had an allocation for the development of the social economy of 429 million euros, which was later reduced in 2012 to approximately 319 million euros, which financed 244 projects (MIPE 2021: 130-131). The development of the social economy sector through this field of intervention was visible in the short term through the results of the projects that totaled 1,696 new social economy structures, 11,369 new jobs and 10,741 people trained on the topic of social inclusion (72% of them obtaining a certificate) (MIPE 2021: 118). The institutionalisation efforts of the social economy and social entrepreneurship were also strengthened through POSDRU funding, respectively through the implementation of a project aimed at the elaboration of national legislation on the social economy, later adopted by Law no. 219/2015 (MIPE 2021: 152). In addition, during this period the social economy sector became much more visible, the knowledge of specialists in the field was consolidated and professional training materials, vocational training programs or master's degrees in the field of social economy were developed (MIPE 2021: 158).

Certain provisions were included in the public procurement legislation in order to support the implementation of the social economy legislation. From 2016 the public authorities can reserve the right to participate in the procedures for awarding public procurement contracts only to authorised protected units and social insertion enterprises. In addition, economic operators, non-governmental organisations, social enterprises and protected units accredited as social services providers can benefit from the reservation of the right to participate in the procedures for awarding public procurement contracts that have as their object certain health, social and cultural services. However, in the 2018-2020 period, the number of public procurement contracts/framework agreements reserved for social insertion enterprises and authorised protected units was reduced, respectively a total number of 40 contracts in three years⁶.

In the period 2014-2020, through programs with European funding such as the Human Capital Operational Program (POCU) or with national funding, projects were implemented for

⁵ According to the situation published on 10.07.2023 by the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Register of protected units.

⁶ According to the National Agency for Public Procurement (data published in the National Strategy in the field of public procurement 2023-2027).

the consolidation of social enterprises and for the establishment of social enterprises in rural areas. If the POCU impact assessment is not yet available, the POSDRU assessment carried out during 2020 provides us with information on the sustainability of the social economy structures established through this program. If the institutionalisation efforts regarding social economy, visible at the level of legislation through the regulation of activities, institutional working mechanisms, organisational forms and at the level of Romanian specialists organised in network-type structures, represent results of POSDRU 2007-2013 that show continuity, most of the structures of social economy established through this financing instrument did not survive in the absence of public policy measures that could have helped them in the stage of sustainability. In 2020, there were still only 742 social economy structures out of the 1,696 initially established, which did not subsequently choose to obtain a social enterprise certificate (in March 2020, only 133 were certified as social enterprises) or to keep their social mission (only approx. 40% of the 742 social economy structures evolved with the aim of fulfilling their social mission) (MIPE 2021: 143, 145). The 742 social economy structures still active in 2020 had difficulties, respectively 77% recorded a decrease in turnover and 93% recorded loss of personnel, only 17% of them recorded a positive evolution of turnover (MIPE 2021: 144).

The difficulties of the social economy structures established through POSDRU 2007-2013 were visible during the sustainability stage, with the adoption of Law no. 219/2015 and the conditioning of financing and facilities from public authorities on obtaining the certificate of social enterprise. The requirements to draw up frequent reports and to maintain a constant number of staff from vulnerable categories in contrast to insignificant fiscal and non-fiscal facilities (by reference to the needs of these organisations to assist, train and provide the necessary infrastructure for vulnerable employed persons, including those with disabilities) determined the social economy structures established through POSDRU not to obtain social enterprise accreditation, choosing to carry out social economy activities without the support of the public sector (MIPE 2021: 161). In addition, the central or local public authorities did not offer support measures such as subsidising jobs or social services, financing programs for social economy structures/social enterprises from national funds, contracts for the provision of services/products to public authorities or other support measures such as the county socio-professional insertion plan or those regarding the activity of authorised protected units (MIPE 2021: 146). Likewise, the local public authorities did not support the social insertion enterprises by granting facilities such as the allocation of spaces and/or land for carrying out activities, the promotion of their provided products/services or their performed works in the community or tax exemptions. (MIPE 2021: 146).

Therefore, despite the absorption of European funds by social economy structures, the national legislation did not positively influence their sustainability, the number of social enterprises/ social insertion enterprises being a reduced one in the period 2016-2019. However, the allocation of additional funding for the establishment of social enterprises through POCU seems to have determined a significant increase in the number of certified social enterprises (from 48 in 2016 to 519 in 2020), visible especially among commercial companies and associations that at the beginning of 2020 represented 42%, respectively 41% of the total number of certified social enterprises (Alături de Voi Foundation 2021: 21-24).

The lack of interest in developing/improving the existing public policy instruments in order to support the activity of these organisations in the long term, the lack of continuity of projects and programs, determined by the frequent changes of political vision, generate the perpetuation of public policy problems on the subject of poverty and social inclusion despite spending considerable amounts of money that are reflected beyond the financing of the projects of some organisations (including in the salaries of civil servants who evaluate or verify such projects and in the infrastructure necessary to carry out these activities). Therefore, the lack of a unified and coherent political vision regarding the social welfare state determines that the efforts, mainly visible at the level of human and financial resources from the public, private and non-governmental sectors, do not always have the desired effects, namely the population's quality of life, especially that of vulnerable people, not to register significant progress.

6. Analysis of primary and secondary data

The data collected through quantitative and qualitative research mainly contributed to the mapping of innovations in the field of social services and the understanding of the dynamics of the social innovation process. Considering the chosen theme, in this paper I have included only the results of the data analysis that are directly related to the social entrepreneurship activity carried out at the national level through authorised protected units, social enterprises and social insertion enterprises. Detailed information about the innovation process in the field of social services, including the types of innovations identified, the types of organisations that innovate and the organisational characteristics that favour the development of social innovations, has already been presented in a specialised article (Prodan 2023).

6.1. Quantitative data analysis

The majority of social services providers who answered the questions in the questionnaire are not formally active in the field of social entrepreneurship, only 16.44% declaring that they have a social enterprise certificate, 1.68% a social mark for social insertion enterprise and 3.69% an authorization for a protected unit.

Only 27% of the respondents believed that they developed or contributed to the development of an innovation in the field of social services, most of them not knowing how to properly describe the innovation or adequately explain the novelty elements. Moreover, 13.42% specified that the innovation targeted an existing group of beneficiaries through an existing social service (6.38%) or its modification (8.05%). Only 6.71% stated that the innovation targeted a new group of beneficiaries and 9.73% that the innovation aimed at the development of a new social service.

Among the social services providers who consider themselves to have innovated, 12 stated that the organisation they represent has social enterprise certification, 5 authorization for protected units and 1 social mark for social insertion enterprise. The results of the quantitative data analysis showed that approximately 25% of social services providers involved in innovation processes are active in the area of social entrepreneurship.

6.2. Qualitative data analysis

The interviews were attended by several social services providers who selected in the questionnaire the answer option related to holding a social enterprise certificate or a protected unit authorization. However, following discussions with them, it emerged that they had a misunderstanding regarding the organisational forms specific to social entrepreneurship, confusing the social purpose of the organisation with the social entrepreneurship activity. Of the 21 people interviewed, only one maintained his initial statement, namely the fact that the organisation he represents has accreditation for social enterprise. Therefore, the qualitative data invalidated the quantitative ones, from which it emerged that 25% of the respondents involved in an innovation process are formally active in the area of social entrepreneurship.

However, some of the social services providers participating in the research had a formal social economy structure in the past. For example, one respondent, which provides social services to people with disabilities, was authorised in the past as a protected unit but could not comply in the long term with the requirements related to maintaining a constant number of employees with disabilities and a time frame in which they had to work as they had their

own work rhythm and were not always able to be productive. In this context, the social services provider gave up the authorization for the protected unit and turned to occupational therapy workshops where people with disabilities work at their own pace and the products obtained are sold through an online store.

Qualitative research showed that in Romania associations and foundations are the main providers of social services that innovate, the most common innovations being evolutionary ones through which new services are developed or existing services are approached in an innovative way for existing beneficiaries. Social services providers generally innovate from the need to diversify social services or to introduce services for a certain category of beneficiaries and in particular to reduce the pressure on the social work system through new services aimed at deinstitutionalizing beneficiaries and integrating them into the community. The dynamics of the social innovation process is visible in the case of evolutionary and radical innovations that have turned into disruptive innovations. It is about innovative practices that have been taken over in national legislation and subsequently promoted and implemented at the level of the social work system. Partnerships between public and private organisations are one of the most important factors that determine the development of innovations in the field of social services.

Innovating social services providers collaborate with a wide spectrum of actors, such as public authorities and institutions, associations and foundations, economic operators, organisations from abroad, social economy structures (social enterprises and protected units), universities, beneficiaries and volunteers. In general, collaboration with other organisations aims at granting funding, promoting activities, training staff, developing technology and infrastructure. In particular, the collaboration with social enterprises and protected units aims at the integration of the beneficiaries into the labour market, an aspect noted in most of the identified innovations.

6.3. Secondary data analysis

From the analysis of the list of accredited social services providers, published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity on 10.01.2022, it emerged that at the end of 2021 approximately 66% of accredited social services providers came from the private sector. A little over 50% of the social services providers were associations and foundations, the rest of the private providers being economic operators, cults recognized by law and individuals. However, the list of social services providers does not contain information about the involvement of these organisations in social entrepreneurship activities. Similarly, the register of social enterprises or the register of protected units are not linked to the list of

accredited social services providers or the list of licensed social services. Although the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity is the regulatory authority in Romania both for the field of social services and for that of the social economy, at its level no indicators are calculated that cover both fields (for example, the number of accredited social services providers that hold licences of operation for social services and who have certified as a social enterprise).

The single record register of social enterprises, administered by the National Agency for Employment, contained 2782 social enterprises at the level of November 2022 (total social enterprises with the status of active, withdrawn, expired, suspended certificate). Out of the total number of social enterprises included in the register, only 232 had social services as their field of activity. However, it is not clear whether or which of these social enterprises are authorised and licensed to provide social services and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity has not provided an answer in this regard. Therefore, if we refer to the total number of social enterprises included in the register, we can say that approximately 8% of social enterprises have social services as their field of activity.

Regarding the provision of social services by protected units, the National Authority for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities communicated in writing, during 2022, the existence at national level of 12 accredited social services providers who hold operating licences for social services and have authorization for protected units. If in December 2022 there were 345 such social economy structures in the register of protected units, we can conclude that only about 3% of authorised protected units provide social services.

7. Discussions

Romanian social policies are situated at the intersection of the two welfare regimes proposed by Esping-Andersen (1990: 27), respectively the conservative-corporatist regime (characterised by the principle of subsidiarity in the sense that the state intervenes only where the family does not have this capacity) and the social-democratic regime (characterised by the principle of universality of the social insurance system) (Dima and Barna 2013: 17; Lambriu and Petrescu 2017: 121). According to OECD (2016: 26), the structure of the social innovation system is influenced by the social and welfare model that has developed at the level of a state. Romania fits into the Eastern European model proposed by the OECD (2016: 27) in which family networks continue to play an important role in providing well-being for its members. This model is characterised by weak institutionalisation and funding of social innovation at the government level, with most efforts

being undertaken by associations and foundations with financial support from international organisations.

The political vision after 1990, respectively the privatisation of public services according to the neoliberal model of economic development in order to achieve the transition to a democratic political regime, determined a "path dependence" (Skocpol and Pierson 2002) that continues to influence the current political choices regarding the institutional development of the welfare state. Romania's accession to the European Union did not significantly impact the welfare model at the national level, but only certain social policies, such as the implementation of the public policy option regarding the work integration of people from vulnerable categories to the detriment of the one regarding the development of the social services field. Social services providers in Romania operate in a mixed system characterised by public-private partnership (Lambru and Petrescu 2012: 173; 2017: 116), influenced by the particularities of the minimalist family welfare regime (Voicu and Stănescu 2019: 74) in which the family plays an important role in the provision of social work, with the state allocating a small budget for social spending.

Regarding the institutionalisation (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 70-85; Tolbert and Zucker 1996: 181-184) of the concepts under analysis, both social innovation and social entrepreneurship have a low degree of institutionalisation at the national level. Social innovation is still in the pre-institutionalization stage as the concept has recently been introduced in national legislation and public policies, but I have not identified guides or instructions on this topic to be developed by public authorities, organisational structures dedicated to this activity or a promotion of social innovations in the form of a collection of good practices at government level. Regarding social services providers, their degree of knowledge and understanding of the concept of social innovation is low, most of them not knowing how to describe an innovation properly or identify the elements of novelty.

Social entrepreneurship is in the stage of semi-institutionalization, the first efforts of institutionalisation at the national level being visible after 2010 and being made concrete by the adoption of Law no. 219/2015 regarding the social economy, the establishment of social enterprises, the training of specialists in the field and their organisation in network-type structures. Although the social economy sector has been massively financed through European funds (POSDRU 2007-2013; POCU 2014-2020), the public authorities do not sufficiently promote public policy instruments that can support the continuation of the activities of newly established social enterprises, such as the mechanism for granting subsidies or participation in public procurement contract award procedures. In the case of

social services providers, there is limited knowledge of the particularities of social economy structures at the national level and the characteristics of social entrepreneurship. This situation was generated by the influence of the employment policy of the European Union on social public policies at the national level, embodied in specific legislation and funding instruments that mainly aimed at the insertion of vulnerable people into the labour market through social enterprises. In the context of insufficient fiscal and non-fiscal facilities, social services providers did not have the necessary motivation or interest to engage in formal social entrepreneurship activities.

8. Conclusions

Social policies in Romania have influenced and continue to influence the process of institutionalisation of social innovation and social entrepreneurship. The two concepts were taken from the policy promoted at the level of the European Union and were gradually introduced into national legislation and public policies. If in the case of social innovations we identify timid attempts at institutionalisation, social entrepreneurship has been promoted, at least in the last 10 years, as a tool for integrating vulnerable people into the labour market, with considerable amounts of money being allocated for job creation and the establishment of social enterprises. The promotion of social enterprises as social enterprises for work integration is an observable trend in states that had a communist political regime and more recently joined the European Union (Lambru and Petrescu 2016: 2).

The insufficient involvement of public authorities in terms of maintaining and developing these social economy structures and implicitly the jobs for vulnerable people, has determined that social entrepreneurship is not fully institutionalised at the national level. Social enterprises are established and operate, as a rule, in the short term through projects with European funding and establish their scope of activity and organisational objectives according to the requirements of the funding guidelines. In the absence of support from public authorities in the sustainability stage, most social enterprises are dissolved or reduce their activity and implicitly the number of employees. This situation prevents the complete institutionalisation of social entrepreneurship which frequently goes through stages of institutionalisation and deinstitutionalization due to the deficient legal and financial framework.

Guidelines for obtaining financing from European funds, dedicated to the development of the social economy sector, mainly concerned activities related to the integration or reintegration of socially excluded persons or those who were at risk of social exclusion into the labour market. Under these conditions, the field of social services was not a priority for social

enterprises in Romania, in 2022 only approximately 8% of social enterprises and approximately 3% of authorised protected units had social services as their field of activity.

Semi-institutionalization of social entrepreneurship at the national level determines a lack of involvement of social enterprises in the development of innovations in the field of social services as an initiator or partner. However, social enterprises are involved in innovation processes, mainly initiated by associations and foundations, as collaborators for the integration of beneficiaries of social services into the labour market. The results of the research carried out in 2022 at the level of social services providers in Romania confirm the results of the SI-DRIVE project (Howaldt 2019: 40), through which social innovations were mapped at a global level, respectively the fact that social enterprises had a marginal role within the social innovation processes initiated by other actors such as private companies, public organisations and non-governmental organisations.

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