

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY – CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**CLAUDIA PETRESCU
MIHAELA LAMBRU**

The contribution of social economy organizations to the economic, social and environmental development is increasingly recognized at international level. A wealth of research is emerging constantly in this field. This special issue of *Quality of Life Journal* is dedicated to social and solidarity economy and its challenges and perspectives for sustainable development. The goal of this special issue is to approach and discuss the situation of social and solidarity economy at international level, in terms of opportunities and constraints for development.

A preliminary version of the selected articles included in this special issue have been presented and discussed during the workshops of the 7th CIRIEC *International Research Conference on Social Economy “Social and Solidarity Economy – moving towards a new economic system”*, June 2019. The CIRIEC conference was an opportunity for academics, practitioners and decision makers from 42 countries to discuss the latest research challenges and topics in the field of social and solidarity economy at international level.

This special issue on *social and solidarity economy* gathers four research papers focusing on topics such as social economy contribution to the implementation of sustainable development goals, social economy role in local development, social economy eco-system, the role of social economy entities in welfare system. The selected papers bring together an international perspective on social and solidarity economy development trends, by analyzing different approaches and case studies from Europe and Latin America.

The social economy eco-system from Croatia is presented in the article *Current challenges and potential of social economy in Croatia*. The authors analyse the trends and challenges of the social economy development in Croatia as the newest EU state. The paper provides an assessment of the current state of affair in the cooperative sector and social entrepreneurship, and an overview of the institutional context of the development of cooperatives and social enterprises. Based on the assessment of the social economy in Croatia and of EU best practices, the authors propose some solutions for the development of the social economy sector.

The contribution of social enterprises to the welfare system reform is analyzed in the article *Exploring social enterprises role within the Romanian welfare system*. The presentation of a historical overview of the social economy organizations' evolution in Romania shows that contemporary social enterprises are deeply rooted in social economy traditions and their present challenges and perspectives are strongly dependent on policy decisions and historical events that shaped their present condition. The development of the Romanian social enterprises is in tight connection with the evolution of the welfare state and the article explores the challenges of social enterprises specific roles within a post-transitional welfare system.

Two articles are analyzing the social and solidarity eco-system, and the relation to local development and sustainable development from two Latin America countries, Ecuador and Brazil. *The sustainability of entrepreneurship within the social and solidarity economy: an analysis of social factors* presents the Ecuadorian social and solidarity economy and analyses the social factors that influence sustainability of social enterprises. Taken into consideration that in Ecuador there is a significant waste of public and private resources on enterprises that fulfill no apparent social or economic purpose, the authors analyze the internal and external factors that influence the sustainability of social and solidarity economy.

The relation between social and solidarity economy and sustainable development goals is addressed in the article *Contributions of the Social and Solidarity Economy to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the construction of evaluation indicators: the case of a settlement in Araraquara, Brazil*. The article provides an analysis of a municipal social economy policy application in order to explain some of the necessary contributions to reach certain SDGs, and proposes a new set of indicators that can emphasize better the relation between SSE and SDGs.