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Social Responsibility of Organizations. Directions of Changes

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SOCIAL ECONOMICS – FROM THE PROFIT ORIENTED MARKET TO THE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Summary: The theme of the article is social economics, which is treated as a conceptualization of business practice referred to as social entrepreneurship. Its specificity – equal treatment of economic and social goals – makes that this form of entrepreneurship does not find a satisfactory explanation in mainstream economics theories. According to the Author, the case of social economics tends to make an adjustment of the way of understanding economic rationality in the dominant neoclassical frame. Considering this issue, the Author presents arguments in favor of the thesis that the rationality of social entrepreneurship manifests itself in relations to the broad context of social welfare. It also indicates the positive role of social economics entities in the process of transition from the profit oriented entrepreneurship to its socialized form.

Keywords: social economics, social responsibility, rationality, market society.

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1. Introduction

Social economics is the object of the following considerations: a particular form of theoretical considerations referring to those forms of economic practice which due to its specifics do not find satisfactory explanations in economics without adjectives. The object of interests of social economics is economic actions which do not fulfill assumptions accepted in relation to theoretical models constructed in the mainstream economics, especially convictions on (exclusive) profit character of taken economic actions. The most simple and, at the same time, the most general explanation of the entities of social economics recalls its most important feature, which is the connection of the engagement in social values with an effective action based on market mechanisms. A social enterprise – constituting the object of social economics research – is such a form of economic activity in which non-economic social values are as important as economic effects.

Let us focus on the fact that the concept of social economics refers to numerous various forms of management which constitute a specific complementation of actions taken by the institutions representing all three sections of social life: the state, civil society and the market. The entities of social economics act in the area of social policy and at the same time they support organs of local authorities in realizing the social functions of the state. Furthermore, they offer effective help to the beneficiaries of charity organizations and, therefore, they constitute an element of philanthropic activity. In addition, by leading a market activity they abide the rules of social responsibility and care for the common good. At the same time, they expand the range of social engaged business [see Yunus 2013].

This ability to take such forms of action, which are characteristic for here indicated areas, makes the entities of social economics constitute a kind of a keystone – an element linking the area of political power, economic power and civil activity. At the same time, they contribute to at least partial abolition of the tension/conflict between them. What is more important, they create a possibility of achieving goals socially useful by the engagement and contribution of organizations representing the sectors of the state, the market and the civil society.

The aim of the presented considerations is to demonstrate that the reflection on social economics force in some measure is a discussion on the presence of non-economic valuation in individual economic choices as well as in the strategy of the activities of companies and economy as a whole. The exposure of complex motivation underlying the projects identified as a social enterprise in which social causes are important as well as economic effects raises a question whether the profit oriented business (more widely the economy) is the only possible rational form of management. Therefore, two issues should be considered. The first concerns the assumptions respected in the mainstream economics in the concept of economic rationality. The problem here considered is the issue of its "mismatch" to the modern market where there are many different forms of enterprises, which clearly "do not fit" in the quite narrowly circled model of rationality. The statement of the existence of numerous examples of building a strategy of action referring to differently understood precedent aim raises the question whether this conception should be redefined.

These considerations lead to the recall of another issue – concerning a clearly outlining tendency of the change of the social idea of the precedent goal of management. More and more often opinions are articulated that achieving the value of the prosperity growth is a positive value if it serves the improvement of material conditions of all members in a given community and if it contributes to the strengthening of democracy. The increase of the interest in social economics referring to theoretical aspects as well as to practical allows a discussion on the change of the perspective view of the world and, more significantly, it contributes

¹ Such an argument is raised by Borzaga, Depedri, Tortia [2013].

to the strengthening of the voice of such researchers that recognize serious threats connected to maintaining the neo-liberal economic views which often take the form of market fundamentalism [see Harvey 2008]. In the present article I am going to show that taking into consideration the research interest of social economics and the intensified activity of social entrepreneurs, we no longer cannot treat social enterprises as a relatively small, marginal sector of the market economy. To the contrary, social economics can be understood as a way of realizing the assumptions of democratic capitalism and the support for socially responsible business. Moreover, it determines a significant factor integrating the actions of different entities (the state, nonprofit organizations, market enterprises), whose aim is to create better conditions for common participation in jointly worked out welfare.

2. The question of economic rationality in terms of profit

The interest of researchers and practitioners in social economics is certainly problematic for the representatives of the orthodox economics as in practice one can find many examples of actions of social economics entities which - despite the fact that they do not fit in the definitional framework of neoclassical concept of the rationality unit -are rated as efficiently using market-based instruments and as sufficiently effective. In other words, what refers to the theoretical assumptions does not provide any chance of success, but in practice it turns out to be a quite successful venture. Obviously, the context of reference must be taken into consideration: the positive evaluation of social businesses is reasonable due to the allowance of not only economic, but also non-economic, social effects. Therefore, a question returns whether rational action is such an action in which we endeavor to the achievement of maximizing the economic benefit or (also) the one due to which we want to obtain positive social consequences. The inclusion of both mentioned types of custom from the point of view of the assumptions of neoclassical behaviors to the areas of phenomena described and explained in the theory of economics requires de facto a change in the range of understanding of both the effectiveness and the economic rationality.

The issue of economic rationality in the mainstream economics is related to both individual actions and an entire and complex system of the market economy. The economic system functions depending on the activity of individual participants of managing practice, whose both consumer and investment decisions contribute to the final economic result. The current condition of the economy and the perspectives of its future growth depend on the accuracy of choices made by individuals. The

² According to Dees [1998] in the area of social entrepreneurship the concept of benefit is differently understood – not in the material sense – but as a complex value: the value of improvement of the social situation is understood as a sum of material and social benefits from which the social and ecological losses are "deducted."

rationality of the system is based on the assumption that consumers as well as producers take decisions appropriate from the point of view of the public interest. On the other hand, it is assumed that man is endowed with (a stable, constant) nature, which leads him or her to take care of his or her own good, wherein this good is understood as obtaining the greatest material benefits. In the case of the market economy based on the private capital, there is no conflict between the economic business of an individual and the general condition of the economy. For there exists a connection between the rationally acting entities participating in the economic practice and the positive economic results achieved on the macroeconomic level.

Macrorationality of the market economy is warranted by the actions of market mechanisms, objectively comprehended laws affecting participants in the market game in such a way which, on the one hand, enables the achievement of individual goals (specified material benefits) and, on the other hand – in the macroeconomic scale – leads to a situation, in which all available resources are used in an optimum way in the process of the production of goods and services, which means that a given economy is fully efficient. It is considered, therefore, that the rational actions of individuals and the functioning of the whole economy are mutually affecting on each other. An individual striving to achieve the greatest possible benefits undertakes such actions, during to which his or her knowledge will be able to make him or her achieve the most desirable results and at the same time they are beneficial for the whole economy. The market rewards with a high rate of profit those who undertake the right decisions, which leads them to thoughtful actions in the future. As a result, a feedback ensues between the rational actions of economic entities and the macrorationality of the whole system.³

The acceptance of such conclusions entails the necessity of recognizing their consequences. Firstly, the acceptance of the belief that rational actions are those whose aim is to achieve as high benefits as possible. Secondly, that the economy is a system relatively independent and functions most efficiently when this independence – particularly when it comes to the extemporary political actions – is respected. None of these beliefs can be related to the social entrepreneurship. As already indicated, the motivation of the entities of social economics is complex and has a dual economic dimension (financial) and social (practical, symbolic): the primary goal is to achieve a positive state of affairs in the form of e.g. the possibility of achieving employment opportunities for the unemployed and disabled, creating jobs which meet the flexible requirements for mothers of young children, organizing shelters for homeless animals, etc. The way to achieve such a goal is the market activity which would meet the requirement of competitiveness. Even though the requirement of competitiveness is understood differently than in the neoclassical approach – it is not connected with the assumption of undertaking efforts to maximize the profit. The rationality of the entities of social economics is thereby referred to two

³ I undertook this problem in the following texts: [Zboroń 2010a; 2010b].

matters: gaining an income on the satisfactory level and enabling the continuation of the venture and achieving nonmaterial benefits.

Such conditions are fulfilled by innovative companies realizing the idea of fair trade: companies that offer organic products, the producers of healthy food, cafeterias which offer catering services and at the same time are a cultural center, support clubs for women – mothers of young children returning to the labor market, etc. A common feature of such ventures is the replenishment of the market offer with products/services that are socially valuable and which contribute to the improvement of the quality of life and democratize the market by addressing the needs of minority consumers

3. The asocial nature of the management in neoclassical economics

Difficulties encountered in connection with an attempt to answer the question on the basis of the recognition of the activities of the entities of social economics as rational are indeed the sequence of abandoning the liberal views on the economy and social order which were formed during the Enlightenment. Many critics of the modern economics emphasize that neoclassical economics and the neoliberal project of social order has little to do with classical economics cultivated in the spirit of liberalism. The gradual "desocialization" and "dehistoricization" of economics⁴ led to the formation of an economy model abstracted from the social content and a representative individual, which has been deprived of both feelings and cultural competence: worldview, ethical, moral, political beliefs. Economics since 1871 has been concentrating on the issue of general balance (macrorationality) and individual rationality,5 which enables to achieve a possible high efficiency understood as a relation of expenditures to obtained effects (traditional recognition) or as the most efficient allocation of available resources (resource recognition). As a consequence, in the mainstream economics the technical-economic issues concerning the triad: rationality, effectiveness, balance become the most relevant. In parallel, the changes in the dominant worldview are forming: gradual abandoning of the idea of liberal democratic order based on the values of equality, freedom, freedom of belief, identical (practically: close in their scope) possibilities. In exchange, a neoliberal vision of market-oriented society, in which interpersonal relations are treated as exchange acts and those as market transactions, is introduced. In the neoliberal conception of the social order, the market sector clearly dominates in the social space, the role of the

⁴ Terms by Fine and Milonakis [2011], after Wojtyna [2011].

⁵ Simon [1986] analyzing the neoclassical assumption on the rationality of an individual draws attention to three issues – differences in relations to how in other social disciplines human rationality is understood. However, the economic approach lacks reference to individual aims and values present in other social disciplines. Moreover, an integrity of behaviors is assumed and the existence of a "one world," in which behaviors are objectively rational because of their present and future condtions, is accepted.

state is limited to its basic functions, and the third sector of civil engagement does not have any chance of growth due to the progressive atomization and alienation of individuals, which constitutes destructive in relation to the values of social responsibility and the community effect of the influence of the neoliberal ideology.⁶

It is obvious that such an encircled perspective of viewing the social-economic reality does not include custom from the point of view of the adopted assumptions of actions, in which the status of rational behaviors is taken away or they are evicted beyond the area of economic reflection due to non-economic motivations attributed to them. A reflection, particularly scientific, requires language articulation. The lack of the right concepts – category of thoughts means the inability to undertake considerations on a given topic or the necessity to "match" the reality to the lexical resources. In this situation, the mainstream economics is currently dominated by the neoclassical approach: on the one hand, attempts are taken to describe and explain economic phenomena, which clearly do not match in the too narrowly circled meaning ranges, which brings the necessity to use higher and higher levels of abstraction. Which – at the same time – provokes the forming of an accusation that economics by undertaking unrealistic assumptions forms theories referring to the "imagined worlds." On the other hand, more and more distinctly the importance of such phenomena, which cannot be described and explained though the reference to the traditional assumptions, is revealed. In particular, this concerns the dynamically developing social entrepreneurship and reflecting it social economics, for which we do not find a satisfactory explanations in terms of the neoclassical theory.

4. Social economics and the market society

The criticism of "desocialized" economics and the market oriented society is more and more clearly articulated not only within economics but also in the wider context of social sciences. This in turn makes that the area of benignant interest of social economics, which constitutes an interesting project of solving social problems based on the known or rather differently used methods of action. Secondly, it argues in favor of a holistic recognition of economic reality, which is seen in a widely circled cultural context and in the general social practice. In particular, this contextual approach of social economics constitutes its important factor referring to the economics without adjectives, especially in relation to its main trend.

A lot has been said lately on the need of the holistic approach in economics [Acemoglu 2009; Akerlof 2007; Colander et al. 2009; Krugman 2009; Lawson 2009].

⁶ The message of the neoliberal ideology was most clearly presented by Margaret Thatcher, who in one of her interviews said: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations."

The source of this position was undoubtedly discussions, which had taken place in the period after the crisis of 2008, when the view that the economic crisis revealed the crisis of economics became relatively popular. However, such opinions appeared much earlier and they were associated with undertaken by many researchers' reflection whose subject was theoretical and methodological condition of economics. It is not my intention to take the discussion on this otherwise very interesting topic, but I would like to pay attention the point that in the widely understood social discourse going beyond the environmental debates of economists one can see a growing criticism of not only orthodox economics build on a neoclassical foundation, but also a neoliberal social order. In particular, this is about the opposition to the transfer of rules of market behaviors to the area of social relations, which leads to a gradual market orientation of society. Allowing the transfer of market mechanisms to the non-economic sphere means not only the spread of thinking about freedom and making choices (non-economic) in a transaction way, but also the recognition that the market is the best criterion for determining what is fair, what is the best measure of value of things and public goods [Sandel 2014].

One of the exponents of the social concerns connected to the threat, which may cause the direction of change in the Western culture, is Sandel, who writes: "The market economy is a tool of organizing the productive activity and, as such it has brought prosperity to many countries around the world, also in Poland. But the market society is something totally different. It is a world in which everything is for sale. It is a way of life, which every aspect is dominated by the market value and market thinking – starting from private life, through healthcare, education, to journalism and law. The fundamental problem in modern democratic societies relies on the necessity to determine, where the market serves the public good, and where its mechanisms should not apply" [Sandel 2014].

Sandel [2012] expresses concern in connection with the causes, which are evoked by a particular mechanism of thinking derived from economic sciences and transferred to political actions. Well, this not raising major doubts fact of the market efficiency in the field of ensuring the material welfare of the measured value of GDP provides specific justification for making attempts to exploit this efficiency in other important areas of social life. The problem, however, is what also Reich [2009] speaks about, that using market mechanism in relation to the non-economic area while simultaneously introducing it to a specific way of thinking on what is and what is not rational and connected with this valuation using the measure of material benefits. The expansion of the market leads to a situation, in which bigger and bigger area of social life comes under the rules imposed by capitalism, the public space where the principles of democracy operate is becoming smaller.⁸ The capitalism

⁷ I discussed this problem in the following texts: Zboroń [2009; 2011; 2012; 2013a; 2013b].

⁸ As a decisive moment of these changes Reich indicates the end of 1970s, when there was a fundamental change in democratic capitalism in America, which consisted on the fact that the US and much

promoting the business of an individual is strengthened, democracy engaged in caring for the common good is weakened. What is more, due to the expansion of the market sector, the space in which rules of democratic social coexistence apply is becoming smaller. An imbalance between capitalism and democracy is growing, which has its consequences in the form of widening of social disparities in terms of a sense of economic security and therefore the quality of life.

5. Social economics – towards the social entrepreneurship

In the view of outlined above major concerns relating to the direction of the development of modern Western societies, the program of social economics seems to be promising for the reason that it can provide important support for the civil society – the areas of democratic values. What is more – this support has a practical and rational dimension (with the broader sense of the term). Whereas, taking into consideration the diverse nature of the entities of social economics, the range and specificity of undertaken by them economic initiatives, we can speak about a positive effect in the form of complementation the action taken under various social sectors.

Supporting tasks of the state concerns initiatives whose aim is to broaden the offers in the field of preventing exclusion and marginalization of people who are permanently unemployed, homeless, disabled. In this respect, social economics offers diverse forms of offering support, which at the same time enables achieving more permanent and more rational effects in the form of social problems reduction. Such activity takes institutional forms like: social cooperatives, social integration centers and occupational activation institutions.

The support for the civil society is done by applying – in a greater way than previously – a range of market instruments to charity organizations, whose aim is to fulfill the needs of citizens. Social economics provides the nongovernmental organizations with practical patterns of solving social problems with the use of market instruments. With respect to both of these sectors, social economics performs a similar function: it works on behalf of clients of the welfare system financed by public funds and by beneficiaries of nongovernmental organizations. The solutions of social economics should, however, be considered more effective – it is not about the emergency assistance in solving current material problems, but permanent solving of issues through job opportunities.

Entrepreneurial activities of entities of social economics also produce positive effects in the market sector. Most of all, they provide support for the idea of corporate social responsibility – balancing social and economic values they expand the area of social management. Furthermore, thanks to the engagement in propagation of fair

of the world economy turned to much more competitive markets. The power was directed towards consumers and investors and the democratic ownership of capitalism was limited [Reich 2009, p. 50].

trade products and services, they contribute to the change of social awareness and dissemination of ethical consumption.

6. Conclusion

Sometimes social economics is called a project of social-economic system/order, which is understood as an alternative concept for the neoliberal social project which, however, can be a bit confusing. If this belief is related to the economic order according to which it is accepted that the basis of the economy is market transactions made by investors controlling the private capital, then it should be acknowledged that finding its reflection in the social economics idea of solving at least some of the social problems through economic actions using market instruments is at least partly consistent with the assumptions of the neo-liberal economy. Therefore, if we would like to demonstrate that social economics provides an alternative solution, then it should be clarified that this does not concern the methods of action, but differently framed goals and expected effects. In comparison with strictly market entities, this is about the possibility of simultaneous achievement of goals in the form of economic benefits and social values. In practice of social economics this means: expansion of market activities for obtaining social effects, less state and limiting the involvement of public finances, strengthening the civil society sector and the support of the social capital, pro-social activities done by the release of individuals from dependence on all the forms of social assistance, expanding the area of socially responsible economy, strengthening the idea of CSR, introduction of mixed practices (market and public). Thus, it can be concluded that social economics promotes the most rational actions. whose sense and final effect can be evaluated in a macrosocial context. The value of these activities makes the sum of economic and social achievements. The value of social economics relies also on the fact that on its example we realize that the rationality of management should be referred to a much wider, nonmarket context of social good.

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EKONOMIA SPOŁECZNA – OD PROFITOWO ZORIENTOWANEGO RYNKU DO SPOŁECZNEGO GOSPODAROWANIA

Streszczenie: Tematem artykułu jest ekonomia społeczna, która jest traktowana jako konceptualizacja praktyki gospodarczej określanej jako przedsiębiorczość społeczna. Jej specyfika – równorzędne traktowanie celów ekonomicznych i społecznych – powoduje, że taka postać gospodarowania nie znajduje zadowalającego objaśnienia w teoriach ekonomii głównego nurtu. Zdaniem Autorki przypadek ekonomii społecznej skłania do dokonania korekty sposobu rozumienia racjonalności ekonomicznej w dominujących ujęciu neoklasycznym. Rozważając ten problem, Autorka przedstawia argumenty na rzecz tezy, że racjonalność przedsiębiorczości społecznej ujawnia się w odniesieniu do szerokiego kontekstu dobra społecznego. Wskazuje także pozytywną rolę podmiotów ekonomii społecznej w procesie przechodzenia od profitowej orientacji gospodarowania do jej uspołecznionej postaci.

Słowa kluczowe: ekonomia społeczna, społeczna odpowiedzialność, racjonalność, społeczeństwo rynkowe.