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SOCIAL ENTERPRISES AND SOCIAL ECONOMY. Introduction

Social enterprises have sprung from a number of different initiatives throughout the world, as a response to the real welfare needs of people and communities. In Europe, the social cooperatives that arose in Italy in the 1980s are a social enterprise model that fits into the tradition of the social economy and occurred almost simultaneously in other European countries as well.

The academic world has tried to explain the phenomenon and to provide tools to analyse, support and develop this sector and a series of official initiatives have been taken at all levels: local, regional, national and European. The European Commission's Social Business Initiative (COM (2011) 682 final), in particular, defines a social enterprise as an operator in the social economy whose main objective is to have a social impact rather than make a profit for its owners or shareholders.

The intention behind this monographic issue of *CIRIEC-España, Revista de Economía Pública, Social y Cooperativa* is to review the state of play in research on social businesses and the new challenges they face. We therefore enlisted contributions from experts with a Europe-wide reputation who have provided the overall framework and description of social enterprises as an integral part of the broad picture of the social economy. We then widened the net to include papers assessing European policies and a selection of articles that allow us to include such relevant issues, we believe, as entrepreneurship, measuring social impact, funding models and strategic management, and empirical analyses of cases such as special employment centres and work integration social enterprises, as well as new models and trends in ethical banking and fair trade certification.

The European commission's Social Business Initiative identified key issues for their development, including studying and implementing measures in the areas of funding instruments for social businesses, which include specific European funds allotted to social entrepreneurship; labelling and certification of social businesses; forms of social enterprise; and identifying the best practices and methods to measure their social impact. This monographic issue offers a number of contributions and reflections that will advance our understanding and proposals in this field.

The articles have been divided into three groups. The first, more theoretical and general, comprises Jacques Defourny and Marthe Nyssens' paper on defining social enterprises from a comparative point of view, Carlo Borzaga and Sara Depedri's in-depth look at Italian social enterprises, reflecting on the institutionalisation process and new challenges, Marta Enciso, Aitziber Mugarra and Laura Gómez's examination of the European Commission's proposals in support of social enterprises and the elements of the social economy that define them, and Pilar Alguacil's reflections on how European regulations affect the social services of public interest that social enterprises provide.

The second group covers contributions on aspects of the creation, operation and management of social enterprises. Mercedes Valcárcel's paper, for instance, shows how European social entrepreneurship funds are applied in Spain while those by Francisco Salinas and Lourdes Osorio and by Alfonso Carlos Morales, Antonio Ariza and Noel Rodríguez focus on entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurs, the article by Millán Díaz, Carmen Marcuello and Chaime Marcuello examines different methods for measuring social impact, and Esther Villajos, Joan Ramon Sanchis and Domingo Ribeiro provide a frame of analysis based on strategic management.

The third group is very valuable, as each of the articles discusses a specific instance of the different forms taken by social enterprises: Beatriz Calderón and María José Calderón look at special employment centres, Antoni Socias and Patricia Horrach delve into the social responsibility of work integration social enterprises, Pedro M. Sasia introduces ethical banking as an essential pillar for a different development model and Juan Francisco Núñez and Sylvie Berthelot examine fair trade certification models.

Lastly, we hope that this monographic issue will spur new research into a model of enterprise that is characterised by Defourny (2001) and Defourny and Nyssens (2008) as being not-for-profit; engaging in an economic activity in order to provide goods and services related to its explicit aim to benefit the community; coming about through an initiative launched by a group of citizens; following a governance model that involves its stakeholders; being an autonomous organisation and bearing the risks related to its economic activity. These enterprises are found in sectors such as renewable energy, culture, social inclusion and disability, among others.

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