

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Social Economy post-graduate studies at Spanish universities. A pending task?

Fostering Social Economy development requires its previous appropriate knowledge, as well as the recognition of the essential role it plays in current societies. In this sense, participative and Social Economy ventures are an undiscovered reality due to a lack of information in society which, sometimes, turns into misunderstanding. Such lack of information is causing that many entrepreneurs do not choose social entrepreneurship as their first option. Despite that fact, social ventures have shown their reliability in times of economic crises. This feature is easily observable by their ability to generate and distribute income and also by their capacity to keep stable and high quality jobs. Therefore, education plays a key role in performing this task; being Social Economy training programs scarcely developed in the Spanish context.

The present study aims to analyze the current offer of under-graduate and Master Degrees studies in Co-operatives and Social Economy at Spanish Universities. The study is structured by autonomous communities and performs a comparative analysis of the different contents included in the current Master Degree offer, as well as their main features. Hence, method has consisted of a comparative analysis of the different Master Degree programs related to Social Economy. To do so, authors deeply reviewed the subjects taught, the main features of every subject, whether the subjects were compulsory or optative and also their loading in terms of credits (ECTs). The source of information employed have been Spanish Universities' corporate websites, specifically the curriculum information gathered from these websites. Such comparative analysis shows general trends in terms of the basic contents that are included in all the existing offers.

Study shows that the training offer in terms of Master Degrees (according to the European Higher Education Area) whose main contents are related to for-profit Social Economy organizations at Spanish universities is still incipient and little developed. Out of 511 Degrees in Economics (239 Under-graduate Degrees and 272 Master Degrees), only 7 of them (1.3%) specifically include the term "Social Economy" in the Degree name (individually, associated to the study of not-for-profit organizations or to local development). There are at least 28 Master Degrees (5.5%), of which 2 are related specifically to co-operatives, 2 focus on not-for-profit organizations and the 24 remaining include subjects related to Social Economy addressed transversally. Altogether, only 6.8% of the Spanish offer of Under-graduate and Master Degrees develops training subjects related to Social Economy.

Although, the training offer in Master Degrees focused on Social Economy is beginning to become a reality at Spanish universities. Despite this fact, they are still being few and most of them are in their first stages of development. But there are already some specific Master Degrees, some of them recognized by ANECA. Concretely, there are 7 Master Degrees that specify in their name the term “Social Economy”, of which 3 are officially recognized by ANECA and 2 are specifically related to co-operative corporations. Regarding their loading in terms of ECTS credits, in the vast majority of them this loading reaches 60 credits ECTS (one academic year); there are only two exceptions that account for 30 and 50 ECTS credits. The new reform of Spanish curricula are likely to establish Under-graduate Degrees of three years and Master Degrees of two years, turning into Master Degrees with 120 credits ECTS loadings.

In other European countries there is a much more developed and consolidated offer. Hence, in France there are 72 Under-graduate or Post-graduate Degrees that include directly or transversely topics related to Social Economy. In this sense, the European Parliament has urged member states to promote initiatives aimed at the creation and development of Social Economy enterprises, to set up a legal framework to drive its development, as well as to support Social Economy enterprises through public policies. At the same time member states, accordingly to their means, must pay special attention to the development of training programs in Social Economy in the high educational level. Member states must also promote training programs aimed at encouraging democratic values in the ventures and transmitting Social Economy knowledge.

With respect to the subjects and contents included, Masters Degrees in Social Economy usually include legal and business administration training. The demand of trained professionals adapted to Social Economy firms requires knowledge related to law, accountancy, taxes, strategic management, human resources management and marketing; such knowledge differs from the one required to manage traditional investors owned firms. Current trends also involve the inclusion of contents related to social entrepreneurship, public policies, social innovation, sustainability and social corporate responsibility. Most of Spanish universities curricula do not include such contents, which supposes an important weakness to be faced. Another of Post-graduate Degrees main feature is that most of them are taught under attendance or semi-attendance learning. Many times these Post-graduate Degrees are promoted by Social Economy enterprises and organizations themselves.

Regarding teaching methods, several authors point to the implementation of participative learning, including blackboard collaborate and blending learning, in semi-attendance Master Degrees including further development of virtual classroom platforms. They also point to fostering ties between social Economy organizations and universities to promote and develop these Master Degrees. In fact, collaboration is essential to improve the quality of training and also to boost students' internships programs in Social Economy organizations (mandatory in some Master Degrees, volunteer in some others). Such collaboration with Social Economy organizations and professionals can also drive better quality in the

final Master Degree dissertations, as it may facilitate rapprochement between academia and the current challenges of the sector.

In the end, according to the analysis performed, it seems that in the future years training programs focused on Social Economy will be further developed and increased. But it requires governments' support and implication in terms of a proper weighting within high educational level training programs according to its importance as a transversely topic in curricula (which is expected to be complicated if Under-graduate Degrees duration is reduced to 3 years). On the other hand, at teaching and researching staff level, it seems that a greater personal commitment is required to develop core subjects allowing the transversal inclusion of Social Economy related topics, it is also remarkable the need of enhancing Post-graduate Degrees in Social Economy as they have clearly been revealed as insufficient. To attain these goals teamwork setting through mutual reinforcement networks is necessary.

KEYWORDS: Social Economy, European Higher Education Area, Post-graduate Degrees.