



## International Conference “Unlocking the Potential of the Social Economy for EU Growth”

### WORKING GROUP REPORT

On the first day of the Conference, November 17th, 2014, a total of 10 working groups (WG) were held to discuss relevant topics that had been previously identified via a public consultation. Rapporteurs and moderators produced individual reports for each WG and they are published as they were received, without undergoing any editing process. The reports are divided into five sections (Main recommendations; Starting point; Main issues discussed; Recurrent issues; and Concrete proposals) although not all of them were completed in all WG.

In addition to individual WG reports, a document highlighting the main recommendations from all of the WG is available at [www.socialeconomyrome.it](http://www.socialeconomyrome.it).

*Please note that this is a working document, not edited for form or content.*

### WORKING GROUP 7: THE CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND STATISTICS

**Moderator:** Gianpaolo Barbetta, (Catholic University Milan), Italy

**Rapporteur:** Michael Roy, (Glasgow Caledonian University), UK

**Speakers:**

1. Manlio Calzaroni (ISTAT), Italy
2. Rafael Chavez (University of Valencia - CIRIEC), Spain
3. Federica Bandini or Antonio Maticena (University of Bologna), Italy
4. Domenico Mauriello (Unioncamere), Italy

5. Massimiliano Mascherini (Eurofound), Belgium
6. Rocío Nogales (EMES), Belgium
7. Dina Rakin (European Movement in Serbia), Serbia
8. Marieke Huysentruyt (iPropeller and Stockholm School of Economics), Belgium

<b>Main recommendations</b>
<p>The main recommendation is in relation to an observation about the importance of research and theory building. There is a normative assumption that a “larger” or ever expanding social economy is beneficial to society. In actual fact, a growing social economy may be a symptom of greater malaise in society caused by (for example) austerity and the state retreating from many areas of welfare provision with society acting to protect itself the best it can from ever increasing inequality and poverty. But the social economy can only do so much. Intuitively (and theoretically) a society which has a healthy balance between market, state and civil society would be beneficial for human well-being and would help to protect European society against the misery of growing inequality, social exclusion and isolation. So how can we attain such a position? How can we make the most of what we have in order to maximize well-being and ensure that everyone benefits from increased growth, and not just a few? These are questions that academics, if resourced effectively, can help answer.</p>
<b>Starting point</b>
<p>The central theme of the session related to the contribution that research, education and quality statistics can make to informing evidence based policy making, which is critical to the social economy. The working group was chaired by Gianpaolo Barbetta, (Università Cattolica, Milan). Speakers were a diverse mix of academics, educationalists and statisticians. Presentations were made by Manilo Calzaroni (ISTAT, Italy); Rafael Chaves (University of Valencia/CIRIEC, Spain); Federica Bandini (University of Bologna); Domenico Mauriello (Unioncamere, Italy); Rocío Nogales (EMES International Research Network); Dina Rakin (European Movement in Serbia); and Marieke Huysentruyt (iPropeller, Brussels).</p>
<b>Main issues discussed</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Systematic data collection seems to be a common problem, and co-ordination between various statistical offices is required.</li> <li>- Education systems, at all levels, are required to appreciate the plurality of the economy. Not everyone wants to work in mainstream business and young people, in particular, seem keen to become social entrepreneurs, when they are made aware that this is an option.</li> <li>- Better bridges need to be made between practitioners and academics.</li> <li>- The importance of the social enterprise ‘ecosystem’ i.e. the cultural, legal, political frameworks requires to be better appreciated. While many best practice examples will be country specific, best practice across countries requires to be shared to help the social economy flourish.</li> </ul>
<b>Recurrent issues that came up during the discussion</b>
<p>Recurrent issues relate to the quality of statistics, and the absence of quality data in many cases. This seemed to be related to the lack of a clear definition in order to define the population within much larger datasets. The social economy has a large range of (often contested) meanings, and so this raises quantitative challenges.</p>

### Concrete proposals discussed

1. In an ideal world, all policy would be evidence-based, rather than upon ideology. The quality of evidence is thus an imperative. Systematic data collection seems to be a problem with the social economy in particular due to the contested nature of the phenomenon. Better co-ordination and learning from best practice is required among the various bodies charged with gathering statistics in order to establish a working definition and thus potential population sizes.
2. We need to take stock and recognise that there is a wealth of research being produced which is not being utilised to its maximum effect. Better use needs to be made of research, including knowledge of the state of the art, and the contours of the landscape; how the sector looks and feels across Europe.
3. European programmes should prioritise issues relating to the social economy. Particular emphasis should be placed upon transversal, multi-disciplinary working. Greater flexibility within programmes is required in order to reflect the inductive or abductive nature of knowledge generation in the social sciences. In other words, greater recognition requires to be given that, in many cases, not everything can be hypothesised or even thought about at the beginning of a research project in the social sciences, and programmes should be flexible enough to cope with changes in tack or direction.

Should you have any questions regarding this report, please contact [info@emes.net](mailto:info@emes.net) and [socialeconomyrome@lavoro.gov.it](mailto:socialeconomyrome@lavoro.gov.it)