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New Access to Social Entrepreneurship
following Academic Curricula and Research

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Abstract

The complexity of the integration process of Albania in the European Union, like other Western Balkan countries, includes problems with specific regard to the third sector. The fragility of the financial market and the failure to adapt the financing structure to the models of developed countries, condition the access of new graduates in social sciences to social entrepreneurship. Considering the concepts and scientific literature that refer to social enterprises in countries in development as responses to the absence of social interventions by non-governmental organizations, the private sector and the government, this paper aims to analyze the typological gaps of secondary level degree curricula in social sciences, with a particular focus on studies in social entrepreneurship and administration of social services. The selected quantitative research methods were combined with qualitative methods, in accordance with the exploratory and empirical type of the inquiring process. The question the research raises is: "What are the scientific domains of concepts in which university knowledge and practice base criteria that define social enterprises as distinct from associations, foundations, organizations, and other components of the third sector?" The conclusions help to understand the need for new influence after scientific research and academic discourse that will assist in reducing knowledge gaps by applying throughout the study practice in the field the significance of social enterprises as operational structures that create interventions against social issues.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, third sector structures, university secondary level curricula.

JEL Classification: L31.

1. Introduction

This study follows third-sector concerns related to structural disorganization, improvisation and the scarcity of interventions against social issues, where in particular civil society organizations are perceived to have less impact in decision

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making. Following the view of Amerhauser and Kemp (2021) who state that “The Western Balkans is a difficult environment for CSOs to work”, recently, public debates, as the efforts to influence the restoration of the third sector in Albania have been silent. Although the European integration perspective of the country is sensitive, statements from the European Commission reports with reference to government's lack of awareness to the role that third sector organizations and social enterprises need to play, lack of answers.

The main objective of the paper is to analyze this particular limitation of the size of the third sector components and its consequences for new graduates in social sciences, as well as the space and resources to access social entrepreneurship. The research on absences related to the secondary level curricula of university studies with profiles in social entrepreneurship and in the administration of social services continues with the request for a new academic influence towards a new dimension for the development of the third sector in Albania.

2. Problem Statement

Social value is a guiding concept of social entrepreneurship, rooted in the distinct domains between civil society organizations (CSOs) and social enterprises (SEs). Austin, Gutierrez, Ogliastris and Reficco (2006) compare CSOs and business-based social enterprises contribution in generating social value, by stating that “Whereas most CSOs focus entirely on producing goods or services aimed at some form of social betterment, a business-based social enterprise functions within a company’s overall operations that are dedicated to social value creation” (Austin et al., 2006).

Following on from concepts of Shane and Venkataraman (2000), who see social entrepreneurship as “a process that includes: the identification of a specific social problem and a specific solution (or set of solutions) to address it” (Shane, Venkataraman, 2000), Jeffrey Robinson (2006) emphasises that “In developed nations, SE is on the rise because of the decline of the welfare state” (Robinson, 2006). The author continues and refers to “distrust of the NGO community, apathy within the private sector, and the impotence of the government to provide services to the people” (Robinson, 2006) as causes for the rise of social enterprises in nations in development.

The rise of new forms of social entrepreneurship in Albania as responses to the demand for innovation are blocked and cannot find ground within a still fragile economic market, where the third sector remains limited to a few civil society organizations and fewer social enterprises. According to Phillips, De Amicis and Lipparini (2016) there is “no legal definition for SEs in Albania” (Phillips et al., 2016). The authors state that there are “No official policy measures recognising social enterprise”, and that “Negotiations toward official adoption of a draft law by the Parliament remain in their early stages” (Phillips et al., 2016). The authors refer to Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) survey of 2013 “which identified 80 organisations that fit the criteria for ‘potential social enterprises’” (Phillips et al., 2016). The latest progress report published by the

European Commission (EC) in October 2021 once again expressed concern for the situation of the third sector in Albania, where in particular “Substantial efforts are needed to ensure meaningful and systematic consultations with civil society as part of an inclusive policy dialogue for reforms” (EC, 2021). Considering that the shortcomings in Albania's economic system and the absence of a clear governmental projection of assistance to social enterprises limit the access and involvement of new graduates in social entrepreneurship and the administration of social services in the sector, this paper calls for change, new access, and influence to third sector development in Albania on the basis of scientific empirical analyzes.

3. Research Questions / Aims of the Research

This paper presents the results of the research conducted in Albania in the period: April 2021-December 2021. The purpose of this research is to analyze the absences of the university secondary level degree curricula with profiles in social entrepreneurship and social services administration.

The questions the research raise are:

What are the scientific domains of concepts in which university knowledge and practice base criteria that define social enterprises as distinct from associations, foundations, organizations and other components of the third sector?

Which third sector structures are the most frequented by students studying for a master's degree with profile in social entrepreneurship and social services administration during university practice in the sector?

What is the knowledge provided through the secondary level curricula in financial resources, external environment social entrepreneurship at the sector level?

4. Research Methods

The research sample consisted of 418 master's degree students from three main Albanian public universities (n = 418). The age range of the respondents, randomly selected to participate in this research, is between 21 and 33 years old (Table 1). The aim of the research methodology used to design the study following social sciences researches (Creswell, 2012) was to collect data on the level of attendance of third sector structures by master's degree students with a profile of studies in social entrepreneurship and social services administration, during university practice in the sector.

Primary data were collected through questionnaires used for organizations, foundations, and social enterprises based in Albania and designed following the Kessler model (Kessler et al., 2002). Within four sections of the questionnaires open questions and two Likert scales (Croasmun, Ostrom, 2011) were designed to be instrumental in bringing to the analysis a sort of personal feeling and reflection on the commitment of master's degree students in upcoming interventions against social problems.

Table 1. Sample characteristics by gender and age group

Gender * Age							
			Age				Total
			21-23 years old	24-26 years old	27-30 years old	31-33 years old	
Gender	Male	Count	61	38	33	15	147
		% within Age	14.6%	9%	7.9%	3.5%	35%
	Female	Count	142	67	43	19	271
		% within Age	34%	16%	10.3%	4.5%	65%
Total		Count	203	105	76	34	418
		% within Age	49%	25%	18%	8%	100.0%

Source: A-Institute, 2021.

Secondary data were collected through contextual analysis (McTavish, Pirro, 1990) and semi-structured interviews (Matthews, Ross, 2010).

Contextual analysis focused on:

- Desk research/document review of existing second degree university courses with profiles in social entrepreneurship and administration of social services;
- Evaluation of the statements and reports of the European Commission;
- Observation/participation in the events organized by the Faculties of social sciences and the Department of social work and social policies next three main public universities based in Albania.

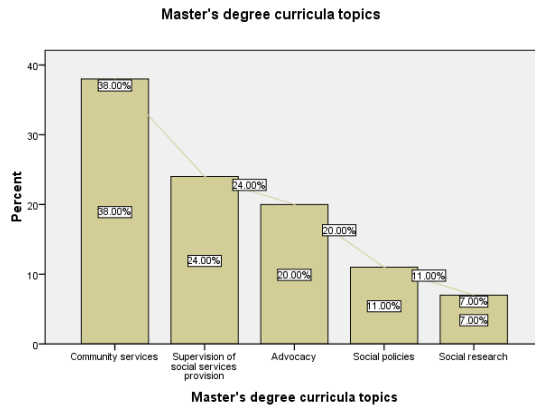
The interviewing process focused on:

- Semi-structured interviews with 168 local experts selected from researchers, academics, and representatives of social enterprises and civil society organizations based in Albania. The interviews were structured around two key themes: Sizing the level of collaboration of public universities with the third sector, and Assessing the access of master's degree students to third sector structures.

5. Findings

Data analysis showed that the level of participation through practice sessions in social enterprises and civil society organizations is limited. In the context of the curricula topics, assessment data showed that for 38% of the respondents “Community services” is the main topic on which curricula of master’s degree studies with profile in the social services administration are based. Other topics are: “Supervision of social services provision” (24%) and “Advocacy” (20%). The least cited curricular topics are “Social Policy” (11%) and “Social Research” (7%) (Figure 1).

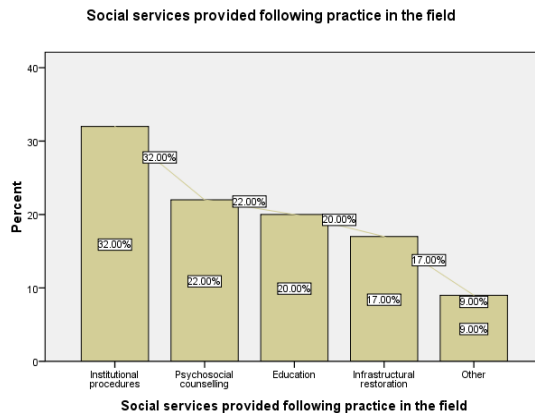
Figure 1. Master’s degree curricula topics



Source: A-Institute, 2021.

Access to knowledge and preparation for work is characterized by profound absences in specific curricula dedicated to social entrepreneurship and the administration of social services. For 32% of the respondents, the main social service in which they were mostly involved during practice sessions in the field is the “Institutional procedures”. Other social services were provided following “Psychosocial counselling”, “Education” and “Infrastructure restoration” (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Social services provided following practice in the field

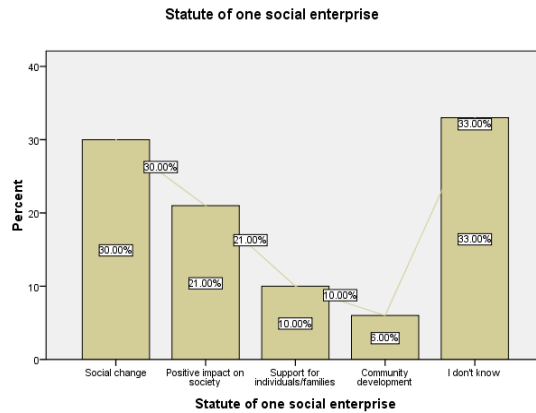


Source: A-Institute, 2021.

Continuing with the assessment of the knowledge of the components of the third sector, it emerges that 30% of the respondents consider “Social change” to be the main criterion that defines the statute of a social enterprise. 21% of the respondents consider “Positive impact on society” as the main criterion, while 10% of the respondents believe that “Support for individuals/families” is the criterion that defines the statute of a social enterprise (6% of the respondents indicated

“Community development” as their main criterion) (Figure 3). Due to lack of knowledge, 33% of the respondents did not answer this question.

Figure 3. Criterion for the status of a social enterprise



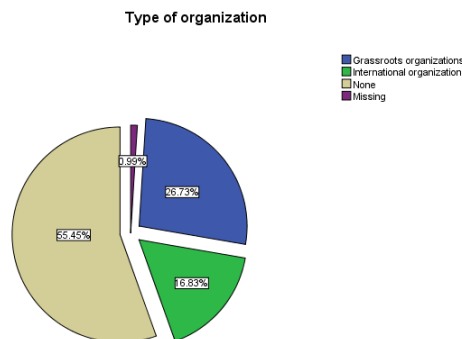
Source: A-Institute, 2021.

The analysis of the data shows that a major part of the respondents (58%) consider “Non-profit distribution” the main criterion that defines the statute of non-profit organizations (for 23% of the respondents the main criterion is “Private state” and for 19% of the interviewees the main criterion is “Private / non-governmental state”).

The “Grassroots organizations” (26.7%) and “International organizations” (16.8%) were the most frequented third sector structures during practice sessions in the field (Figure 4).

Data showed that the majority of the respondents (55.4%) indicated the absence of practice sessions as a cause of the COVID-19 pandemic.

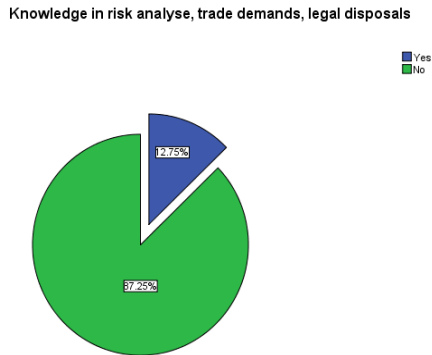
Figure 4. Type of organization mostly frequented during practice in the field



Source: A-Institute, 2021.

Risk analysis, trade demands, legal disposals were indicated as issues that most of the the interviewees (87.2%) are unaware of (Figure 5).

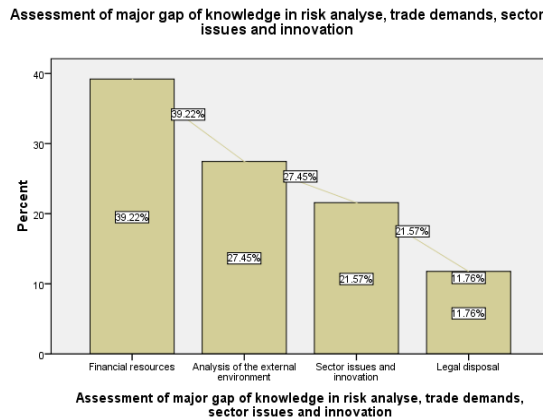
Figure 5. Knowledge in risk analyse, trade demands, legal disposals



Source: A-Institute, 2021.

The data showed that respondents' lack knowledge in particularly in: "Financial resources" (39.2%), "Analysis of the external environment" (27.4%), "Sector issues and innovation" (21.5%) and "Legal disposals" (11.7%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Major gap of knowledge in risk analyze, trade demands, sector innovation

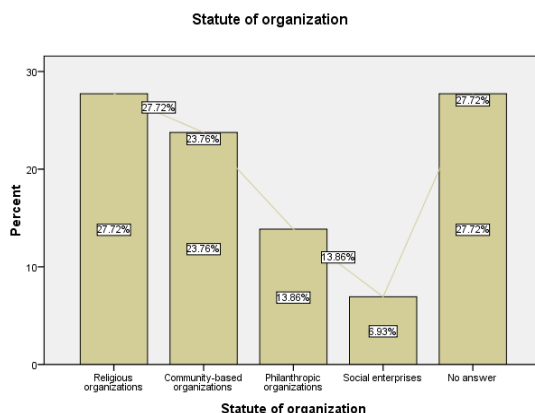


Source: A-Institute, 2021.

Comparative analysis with qualitative data collected from interviews with representatives of civil society organizations and social enterprises based in Albania suggests that from the group of respondents, who applied their university knowledge during practice sessions in the field, 27.7% had this experience following "Religious organizations".

Others have implemented the practice in "Community-based organizations" (23.7%), "Philanthropic organizations" (13.8%) and "Social enterprises" (6.9%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Statute of organization frequented



Source: A-Institute, 2021.

Comparing with the typology of organizations, the data showed that the “Grassroots organizations” were the primary resource of knowledge on risk analysis issues, trade demands and legal disposals (Table 2).

Table 2. Assessment of knowledge in risk analyse from practice in the field

Type of organization * Risk analyse, trade demands, legal disposals					
			Risk analyse, trade demands, legal disposals		Total
			Yes	No	
Type of organization	Grassroots organizations	Count	36	1	37
		% within Risk analyse, trade demands, legal disposals	57.1%	.3%	8.9%
	International organizations	Count	12	2	14
		% within Risk analyse, trade demands, legal disposals	19.0%	.6%	3.3%
	None	Count	15	352	367
		% within Risk analyse, trade demands, legal disposals	23.8%	99.2%	87.8%
Total	Count	63	355	418	
	% within Risk analyse, trade demands, legal disposals	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Source: A-Institute, 2021.

6. Conclusions

The data analyses show that there is a contemporary scientific basis where the curricula of master's studies with profile in social entrepreneurship and social services administration are placed, but the scientific concepts are conveyed in a fragmentary way to students and there are not transferred as knowledge. One of the strongest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was on practice sessions in the field that did not follow an implementation methodology. Operational interventions in non-profit civil society organizations and social enterprises, where students of master's degree students have been engaged, either the comparative analysis or the contextual analysis show, lack of strategic planning on the analysis of risks, market demands, legal disposals and sector innovation. The collaboration that universities have with third sector structures is conditioned by the instability of the sector in terms of logistical changes, but also by the lack of a regulatory framework in terms of partnership.

The generalization of the data may be taken with concern due to the moderate reaching of those respondents, already graduates in social entrepreneurship and administration of social services in the secondary level of university education. In conclusion, the condition of a deeply damaged third sector in Albania is a constraint for the necessary social interventions against the impact of social problems through social enterprises. Following the results of the research, this paper calls for a new awareness at the academic level, where researchers and academics must contribute to the enrichment of university curricula with scientific concepts on social entrepreneurship, as well as in restoration of third sector perspectives.

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