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## **Social Entrepreneurship – a Perspective of the Young Romanians**

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**Abstract.** *More and more nonprofit organizations employ business strategies to be more effective and to achieve their social goals. Social entrepreneurship is an option for increasingly more people who want to change the society for the better. The study investigates how Romanians understand the role of nonprofit organizations in society, as well as which are the perceived differences between nonprofit organizations and social enterprises. Of special interest is the Millennials' view, an increasingly more important part of the society. The results lead not only to a better understanding of the way the social system is perceived but also to identifying how to involve Millennials in the social economy.*

**Keywords:** *social entrepreneurship, nonprofit organizations, role of NGOs, social economy.*

### **Introduction**

The role of the nonprofit sector in contemporary society is changing, while nonprofit organizations are increasingly more influential and have a significant impact on both public and private spheres. For instance, grass-root organizations could complement or even substitute the public administration to solve some social problems, to provide reliable infrastructure or to develop the cultural landscape, beneficial both for communities and for individuals involved. We mention only one facet, but the literature pinpoints numerous aspects, which are going to be analyzed in the present study.

Increasingly more, nonprofit organizations use business strategies to be more effective and to achieve their social goals. Social entrepreneurship is an option for increasingly more people who want to change the society for the better. The cooperation between social entrepreneurs, nonprofit and public organizations is essential for developing a strong social economy and for socio-economic revitalization (Hosu, 2012, p.108). Social entrepreneurship is also appealing for young generations, who change both the business and social entrepreneurship landscapes (Haber, 2016).

The present study investigates how Romanians understand the role of nonprofit organizations in society, as well as which are the perceived differences between nonprofit organizations and social enterprises. Of special interest is the millennials' view, an increasingly more important part of the society. The results lead not only to a better understanding of the way the social system is perceived but also to identifying how to involve millennials in the social economy.

### **The impact of nonprofit organizations on the economic and social system**

The impact of nonprofit organizations takes various forms, in various fields: social, cultural, political etc. In addition to general aspects observable in any society, local specificities could manifest. For instance, in the former communist countries in Europe, NGOs contributed to a faster integration in the European Union, by facilitating civic engagement, internal and external dialogue or addressing various obstacles (Jenei and Kuti, 2006). This is another aspect to be considered when evaluating, for instance, the complex inter-relationships between government and NGOs. Nonprofit organizations complement and help the public administration to assume its responsibilities (Salamon, 1995).

Generally, NGOs have a relevant input in the development of civil society, both in developing countries and in developed ones. The less developed, the less democratic and the more experiencing political turmoil, the more relevant NGOs could be in a country. Broadly speaking, NGOs assume two types of roles: to provide services for the society and to facilitate the expression of values and rights (Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.145). NGOs have a complex political role around the globe, both when considering local and international organizations (Mercer, 2002). In addition, there is a direct relationship between the nonprofit sector and the level of corruption (Themudo, 2014), suggesting direct links between the nonprofit sector and the way public administration operates. On the other hand public

administration directly influences nonprofit sector and the social economy (Antonovici, Săvulescu & Sandu, 2015).

Many NGOs support the rights of various minorities and marginalized groups; they work for solving various problems these communities have. The impact of such NGOs would be observable on several levels: cultural, social, political, as well as economic. NGOs active in a certain domain would have a peculiar impact on that field. The impact also depends on the specific realities in a country, being impossible to make a global evaluation.

Although social issues in a broad sense are in most cases the concern of the NGOs around the globe, they have a significant economic impact (Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.143). NGOs contribute to the wealth of the countries, especially in the case of developed ones, with strong nonprofit sectors. In addition, they are important employers. The economic influence is both direct and indirect – registering multiplying effects (Richmond, 1999).

Even if the economic impact of nonprofit sector might be significant in some countries, the main result of the NGOs' activities is the social capital (Richmond, 1999). This contributes to the development of social networks, social trust and leads to greater community empowerment (Islam, 2014).

Society, at large, trusts nonprofit organizations, and positively evaluates their activities. Since 2001, the Edelman Trust Barometer documents a rise of the influence of NGOs (Edelman, 2016, p.3). People worldwide increased their trust in NGOs, which is the most trusted actor both for informed public and for general population (Edelman, 2016, p.7). Nevertheless, the level of trust varies among countries and taking into account the level of economic prosperity. For instance, a country in Eastern Europe are among the distrusters (Edelman, 2016, pp.8-9).

Despite the positive evaluation of the nonprofit sector and of the NGOs, some evolutions are critically considered in the literature. Among them, their "marketization" is relevant to our research. It refers to the adoption of business values and approaches, including for obtaining funding and social entrepreneurial endeavors (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004).

### **Social enterprise or nonprofit organization?**

In some academic literature, social entrepreneurship is considered a business-like initiative, having as the main purpose the achievement of certain social welfare (Mair & Martí, 2004, p.4; Martin & Osberg, 2007;

Seelos & Mair, 2005). Nevertheless, social entrepreneurship is not limited to social businesses (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012, pp.36-37). Some of these initiatives could be started by nonprofits looking both for funding and for targeting to solve various problems (Boschee & McClurg). The actual impact of such initiatives could be rather low in financial/economic terms (Sud, VanSandt & Baugous, 2009), but their number increased around the world. The development of social entrepreneurship is tightly linked with a changing role of business in society (Miller, 2005), both in terms of actual behavior as the perception of its role in the eyes of the wider public. The perception of the compatibility between business and social welfare also changed a lot (Edelman, 2016, p.28).

The impact of social entrepreneurship is double sided (Cornelius and Wallace, 2013). On one hand, it contributes to solving various social problems. On the other hand, it has an economic impact: proposes new business models, leads to new niche markets, redirect resources towards the social environment etc. (Santos, 2012, p.335).

Social enterprises are a relevant part of the social economy, which is growing and has an increasingly more important impact in the society. One of the relevant contributions is the inclusion of vulnerable groups (Cace et al., 2013, pp.11-12).

The literature also includes a second category of definitions of social entrepreneurship, which does not limit them to economic sector and the ventures associated with nonprofits. It refers in general to activities that have a main social purpose and lead to social welfare, no matter if businesses or nonprofit organizations are the initiators (Dacin & Dacin, 2011; Dees, 2001; Zahra et al., 2009) or considering the sources of funding, the way they operate, the legal form, etc. (Belachew, 2015). Social entrepreneurship is considered to provide in an innovative way solutions to social problems, allowing citizens to get involved in the social system for the general welfare (Alvord, Brown & Letts, 2002; Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.139). The innovation is linked with social aspects, thus social innovation is a key element of social entrepreneurship (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012; Praszkiar & Nowak, 2012, pp.17-18).

The social outcomes are more important than financial benefits (Haughton, 2008). 'Social entrepreneurs are driven primarily by a motivation to create value for society, not to capture value' (Santos, 2012, p.341). In this context, the social enterprise is a nonprofit organization that operates like a business but legally is organized as an NGO. Social enterprises might look for innovative solutions to solve social problems and their activity might involve market processes and productive activities. They base their activity

on developing mechanisms to sustainably address social problems (Santos, 2012, p.348). The entrepreneur is a key factor in social entrepreneurship endeavors.

Social entrepreneurship could be considered a cluster concept (Choi & Majumdar, 2010, pp.372-374). The dimensions relevant are the social entrepreneur, an operating organization – social enterprise, social innovation, market orientation, as well as social value creation.

Several dimensions characterize social entrepreneurship: social vision, sustainability, social networks, innovation and financial returns (Nga and Shamuganathan, 2010, p.261). The main personality traits influencing social entrepreneurial endeavors are openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, extroversion and neuroticism, the first three of them having a significant impact (Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010, pp.266-275). Other characteristics associated with social entrepreneurship are sociality (social value creation), (social) innovation and market orientation (Choi & Majumdar, 2014, p. 367; Nicholls & Cho, 2006; Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012). Successful social entrepreneurial endeavors establish mechanisms that permit building local capacity, disseminating an operational package and/or building a movement for social change (Alvord, Brown & Letts, 2002, p.21).

### **The role of social initiatives. A Romanian perspective**

The present study aims to understand the perception of the nongovernmental sector among young Romanians (millennials). Two main directions are considered: the role of NGOs and the perception of social entrepreneurship.

#### ***Methodology***

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 48 people, mostly aged up to 30 years old. Each interview lasted for up to 30 minutes. The interview guide was very brief, in order to have the possibility to deepen the discussion in the short period of time available.

The study focused on millennials. For the Romanian society, the relevant age limit for this segment of the population is 30. In order to understand better the specific opinions of the millennials, a few persons aged 30+ were also invited to respond.

Participants have different backgrounds in terms of their previous experience with NGOs, as well as academic or practical experience. Eight of

the respondents were not employed at moment of their interview. The sample is presented in Table 1, structuring participants according to their age.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the sample**

	No. of participants	Gender		Experience with NGOs	
		F	M	Yes	No
Millennials	39	25	14	23	16
30+	9	6	3	5	4

Most of them have a high level of education. Amongst the millennials, two of them are high school graduates, 19 graduated or are undergraduate students, while 18 are postgraduate students or graduated MA/Ph.D. studies. In the 30+ sample, most of the participants are MA and Ph.D. graduates, only two of them being bachelor-degree graduates. Three-quarters of the respondents live in Bucharest.

The analysis of data considered a deductive approach. Several items have been considered: the role of NGOs, specificities of the Romanian nonprofit sector, NGOs as social and economic actors, and social entrepreneurship perception.

## Results

### ***Opinions on the nonprofit sector***

The opinions on the nonprofit sector, as well as on those active in NGOs are positive in unanimity. The participants have, nevertheless, a wide array of points of reference:

*‘I believe that the nongovernmental sector is essential for any society; the larger the number of organizations involved, the more developed is that society’* (M2, 25 years old, no previous experience with NGOs, trade)

*‘... NGOs access European funds, being a positive factor for the development of underprivileged and marginalized communities and the integration of their members in the social environment.’* (M5, 22 years old, previous experience with NGOs, student)

*‘The role of NGOs is to have a visible impact in the communities in which they are active and which they serve.’* (M7, 24 years old, previous experience, marketing digital)

*‘... to get involved and to push things in the right direction, when the politicians and the parties have no interest to do it.’* (M9, 26 years old, no previous experience, marketing)

*'In Romania, NGOs do not have a stable place in the economic environment. (...) In the social one, I believe that the NGOs' initiatives are increasingly more visible and they influence the public opinion.'* (M30, 26 years old, previous experience, advertising)

Considering the role of NGOs, participants mention many aspects, but some ideas are recurrent, such as the positive impact on society, stressing especially the support of disadvantaged groups and job creation. The main aim of NGOs is, according to the participants, social involvement.

**Table 2. Participants on the role of NGOs**

	Millennials	30+
Civic engagement development	7	2
Social involvement	20	5
Education and value promotion	9	2
Environment	4	1
Cultural development	2	1
Helping the others	11	2
Development of the society	4	4
Economic development	1	

A more systemic / complex approach of the older respondents is observed. They tend to consider that NGOs contribute to the development of the society, while the millennials evaluate the activity of NGOs from a more personal perspective – helping the others. Older respondents seem to see the NGOs as part of the wider social system. For instance, one of the participants states: *'NGOs should, in my opinion, get involved in domains of public interest and intervene where the state is slow or it does not get involved. Where the state is weak, unorganized or corrupt, NGOs should have an important role (...), such as in the social field, health, arts, and culture. (...) I think that foundations should be a channel of redistribution of money from the economic/financial environment towards culture, health, and other social fields.'* (NM9, 60 years old, previous experience, accounting).

Many respondents are concerned with the relationships between NGOs and the state, considering them a very important aspect influencing the nonprofit sector, as well as society. Some participants commented on the relationships between the nonprofit sector and the government/public administration, stressing that NGOs assume some of the responsibilities of the state. The opinions are mixed, suggesting the complexity of the issue.

*'I believe that the role of some NGOs would be to get involved in activities and domains which are underdeveloped, which do not have a definite frame and which are insufficiently approached by the government or by the local public administration (...)* Organizations complement the activity of the public



*administration, through which the community takes self-responsibility to solve its own problems (...) They would not try to "cover the gaps" of the public system, which actually happens in the mentioned examples. They should not aim to fulfill the mission of some public institutions, which fail / have failed to achieve it` (NM8, 48 years old, no previous experience, public administration).*

Many participants also consider that the state does not support enough the nonprofit sector. *`Considering my experience in the nongovernmental field, I observed that only a few NGOs are supported by the state. From this perspective, a big difference exists between Romania and other European countries. Another aspect I observed is that NGOs are perceived by governmental institutions, as adversaries more than partners` (M12, 22 years old, previous experience, culture). `The role of the nongovernmental sector should be that of a partner for the state in the process of modernization of the Romanian society. In the context of this reform, the nongovernmental sector should justified and legitimately get actively involved in domains where his role is paramount (democracy and good governance, education, social services, economy with social impact), in public policies` debates, as well as in the offer for services publicly funded and privately implemented, by NGOs` (M24, 21 years old, no previous experience, student)*

The increased effectiveness of the NGO sector compared with the public system is another point stressed by participants. Especially the older respondents elaborate more on this aspect. This interest might be related to their system view, already observed. *`The nongovernmental sector is very important in contemporary society because it can substitute the state. Especially in Romania, the state cannot cope with all the responsibilities it has, while the NGO sector can contribute in a professional way to solve social problems (...) being more flexible than the state and responding faster to challenges` (NM5, 45 years old, no previous experience, banking).*

Few of the participants also mentioned that not all NGOs are oriented towards society and that some could aim private economic interests or various personal benefits. Some of such opinions are as follows: *`I observe that many NGOs say they do some activities. When you get to work with them, you see that actually, the projects are not really there, people do not know about them. Some NGOs only pretend to be active...` (M11, 23 years old, previous experience, digital marketing). `From my point of view, the NGOs in Romania also have some side aims, as for instance to obtain influence or even material benefits associated with their activity. I do not deny that, in the same time, there exist NGOs which registered results worthy of appreciation, but which do not have a major impact in Romania` (M18, 22 years old, no previous experience, student). `Some NGOs are for obtaining financial*

*advantages in various contexts: corporations have to spend their CSR budgets, the state subsidies for animal protection... and NGOs become profiteers covered by some good causes.` (M20, 26 years old, marketing`... `in Romania, some NGOs are established only to exist, not achieving something useful, or – even worst – they are established as facades for money laundering` (M29, 20 years old, no previous experience, student).*

Participants evaluate not only the role and the impact but also the way NGOs operate. Some stress the cohesion of NGOs, the need for more support - from the state, companies, and society. Nevertheless gaining support is not an easy task, many observe. *`I would say that NGOs should support more the idea of volunteering, in order to facilitate socio-cultural activities, to involve more types of persons in the projects of community development. It is clear the people are inertial and they need powerful stimuli to act` (M1, 25 years old, no previous experience in NGOs, IT). `My opinion is that in Romania the level of citizen involvement is lower than in other countries. This is mainly due to the legislation – there are no facilities for individual donors and people are not encouraged to get involved in the activities developed by NGOs` (M15, 23 years old, previous experience, accounting). `I believe it is important that NGOs become partners of various organizations and public institutions with competencies in various domains of activity. The state and the role of civil society are in tight interdependency with the relationships established and developed between NGOs on one hand, and public organizations – local and national, we all as regional and international organizations, on the other hand.` (M35, 22 years old, no previous engagement, student). `In my opinion, in Romania is difficult because sponsorships are lower compared to other countries Therefore an NGO has smaller capital and smaller power than a foreign NGO. In addition, there are communication problems with the state`s representatives, who do not protect the interests of the country, but their own interests` (M39, 25 years old, no experience, marketing).*

The impact of NGOs is connected with the reasons NGOs exist. Participants observe that NGOs are very different to one another. Participants mention a wide array of reasons to get involved and develop an NGO, from altruistic ones to very personal and even egotistic. Table 3 presents the reasons most stressed by all the participants.

**Table 3. Main motives to initiate an NGO**

	Millennials	30+
Passion & dedication	6	3
Desire to make a change in society	19	3
Desire to help	5	2

Investigating the transcripts, one observes that the explanations differ between millennial and older participants, even if the main reasons seem to be similar. For instance, millennial explain the passion to get involved in certain causes and project in correlation with a wider societal good, while older participant related the same dedication to the desire of personal / professional satisfactions.

The millennials tend to agree that the main drive to develop an NGO is the desire to influence positively the society for the wider good. *'An individual / a group develops an NGO according to their social visions and activities, considering that it can help / change society for the better. (...) In order for that to happen, the initiators of an NGO have to know what they want, to believe in their vision and its impact on society'* (M8, 22 years old, previous experience, business).

The older participants seem to be more nuanced in the evaluation. They attribute a wider array of reasons, mixing personal ones with external ones. *'I think that people today establish NGOs considering all sorts of motives. Possibly, they consider it is simpler to implement an idea as an NGO, compared to a firm. Or, because they believe it is easier to gain a salary having a grant, compared to a firm. Or, maybe they feel they can change something in society; but they have to cooperate with other to have power, visibility and to be representative... Other (set up an NGO) because the legislation is dubious and it does not permit to collect funds outside a legal association'* (NM4, 37 years old, previous experience, sociology). *'There are two types of persons who establish an NGO. On one hand, there are the idealists, those passionate about something, who want to change the world for the better, who want to help those in need. On the other hand, there are the pragmatic persons, the entrepreneurs, those who want to secure access to European funding using an NGO'* (NM5, 45 years old, no previous experience, banking). *'Some NGOs have been created for fiscal evasion by business owners. For a while, a law stated that the cars imported by NGOs were tax exempted for instance. On the other hand, there are also personalities that imposed themselves in cultural or social fields, in Romania or abroad, who accumulated important funds, and now they try to help, to promote causes, to save lives.'* (NM9, 60 years old, previous experience, accounting).

Comparing the impact of NGOs in Romania with other European countries, respondents seem to agree that they are a more important actor in more developed countries. The causes of such gap are multiple, but two issues are recurrently mentioned: differences in mentalities, as well as more support for NGOs in other countries. Participants make reference both to support from companies, and from the state. *'I believe that, unfortunately, NGOs in Romania do not have a voice to be heard in the social and economic system.*

*They are not supported and taken into consideration. Excepting the large NGOs, with a history behind them, I believe that very few NGOs thrive and are integrated, taken into consideration. (...) In other countries a culture of volunteering exists, therefore NGOs have an active role in the community development. In Romania, generation Y seems to be increasingly more focused on volunteering, on society. I hope that shortly, the projects of small but visionary NGOs will be considered...` (M11, 23 years old, previous experience, digital marketing). `The place of NGOs is unimportant in the economic and social system. These organizations are of interest only in extreme cases (as the fire in Colectiv Club), not in every-day circumstances. In other countries, to work in an NGO is an honored and not a business or a burden, as I have observed.` (M25, 24 years old, previous experience, services). `Unfortunately, NGOs do not have an actual significant impact on the Romanian society as it happens in more developed countries` (NM5, 45 years old, no previous experience, banking).*

Several participants also stress on the historic evolutions and the relatively young age of the nonprofit sector in Romania. For instance, one of the millennials states: *`I believe that in Romanian the majority of NGOs operate as well as in the West. This is due to the foreign input, to the contributions from which many NGOs benefited` (M12, 22 years old, previous experience, culture). Not all agree with a gap of the development of the NGO sector in Romania compared to other countries.*

The actual impact of NGOs in Romanian is seen from many perspectives. NGOs are recognized by most as part of the economic and social system, by providing jobs, contributing to social cohesion, but with no real power. *`I do not know the statistics about NGOs, but I believe they have an important role in the socio-economic system, both when considering the financial resources they attract, and the human resources involved` (M2, 25 years old, no previous experience with NGOs, trade).*

Some consider that the weak connections with society and sponsors, as well as low visibility of the Romanian NGOs might explain their relatively lower impact. *`NGOs should be more involved. (...) They face a certain mentality and reticence both from citizens and the state. In Romania is no clear culture in this sense. I think there is also a legislative problem. There should be set a framework to allow the state and the private environment to cooperate more effective with NGOs. (...) The NGOs have a reduced intervention role` (M21, 28 years old, previous experience, education).*

### **Opinions on social entrepreneurship**

The participants were less confident in their opinions when discussing social entrepreneurship. They elaborated less their answers and admitted several times they do not grasp too well the phenomenon discussed. Some of the participants, especially the older ones, openly said they do not know and they would rather not make speculative affirmations. Respondents feel they are not familiar enough with the concept of social entrepreneurship: *'Intuitively, I believe that the social enterprise also has a financial objective, to obtain profit, even if the scope is to support the social economy. NGOs are non-profit organizations, therefore a major difference of approach might be related with this'* (M1, 25 years old, no previous experience with NGOs, IT). *'I think that the two concepts (e.g. social enterprise and NGO) are not synonyms, but I cannot trace exactly the demarcation line...'* (M2, 25 years old, no previous experience with NGOs, trade). *'I see an NGO as something close to actual needs, with a transparent mission, while a social enterprise is closer to a company'* (M17, 26 years old, previous experience in NGOs, culture), *'I do not know what a social enterprise is. Maybe it is concerned with social causes, therefore it can be some sort of nongovernmental organization that is active in the area of protection / help if the categories of persons at risk... However, I do not really know...'* (NM7, 32 years old, previous experience, education).

Most of the participants tried to observe the differences between social enterprises and NGOs. The stress was always set on the commercial aspects of the social enterprises. The source of financing the activity proved to be a relevant distinction. The young participants could also name a few social enterprises, proving that they are to some extent more attentive to the social economy compared with the older respondents. *'The two concepts are somewhat synonymous because their final scope is not to maximize profits, but to achieve a social mission'* (M6, 23 years old, no previous experience, finance). *'I do not think they are synonyms, but both have noble aims.'* (M9, 26 years old, no previous experience, marketing). *'A social enterprise is self-financed through the offer it produces, while NGOs operates through sponsorships and financed projects.'* (M20, 26 years old, no previous experience, marketing). *'The difference is observed in relation to the commercial activity of a social enterprise.'* (M7, 24 years old, previous experience, digital marketing). *'I believe that a social enterprise is a form of NGO because it does not aim to maximize its profit and the final aim is of social nature.'* (M23, 20 years old, previous experience with NGOs, student) *'The main difference is that NGOs do to obtain profit, therefore they cannot directly participate in economic processes, while social enterprises have profits and directly participate in the economic development of Romania.'* (M36, 23 years old, previous experience with NGOs, advertising).

The opinions are quite similar in most cases. Only one participant was strongly convinced that a nongovernmental organization is a social enterprise, the two concepts being synonyms. Another one elaborated on the idea that social enterprises can support NGOs in their activities, mainly from a financial perspective. A singular opinion associates social entrepreneurship with public administration's initiatives: *'A social enterprise is created by the state for the benefit of a specific public, while an NGO is created because of the desire of an individual to help the development of the society'* (M37, 27 years old, no previous experience, business).

A characteristic of social enterprises several persons mentioned is the type of workforce used. The employees are persons with disabilities or part of marginalized groups. Some participants believe it is a legal obligation to hire this type of persons. Several participants mentioned that social enterprises have only social missions related with disadvantaged persons and that they could not be operational in other fields, such as culture, for instance. *'I believe that social enterprises are characterized by the obtaining of profit for the benefit of a disadvantaged group, through a strong involvement of its members in the management of the enterprise. In this context, a trait of social enterprises is their desire to promote a sense of responsibility at local level'* (NM8, 48 years old, no previous experience, public administration)

Most consider that social enterprises target social objectives, not profit. A few said that these organizations aim to maximize their profits, in order to achieve better their social mission. With two exceptions, all participants consider that social enterprises are socially oriented. *'In contrast with an NGO, which does not aim to obtain profits but funding for its activity, a social enterprise aims for maximizing its profit, which is used in social projects.'* (M12, 22 years old, previous experience in NGOs, culture). A few participants consider that social enterprises, due to their specific, cannot be profitable, even if they adopt business principles in their activity: *'many social enterprises will never be self-supporting businesses because they do not perceive "productivity" in a market acceptance. Moreover, I do not know if they should see it this way'* (NM4, 37 years old, previous experience, sociology).

**Table 4. Relationship between social entrepreneurship, NGOs, and business**

	Social entrepreneurship is a form of business with social aims	Social enterprise is an organization belonging to an NGO	Social entrepreneurship is mainly a social endeavor, not necessary a form of business and could belong to an NGO	Do not know
Millennials	12	4	14	7
30+	2	2	2	3

Table 4 summarizes the opinions referring to the system formed by social enterprises, NGOs, and companies. Millennials tend to grasp better the social and economic relationships compared to older participants. The characteristics of social entrepreneurship highlighted by the participants are sustainability, with an important social mission, organized to obtain revenues in order to reinvest them in the social field. Few participants believe some legal obligations are making the activity of social enterprises more restrictive compared to businesses or NGOs. *‘Today, when we talk about a social enterprise we refer in general to “an entrepreneurial incubator”, a framework created to offer to the young entrepreneurs the necessary environment and resources to develop projects/businesses aiming to improve a system, a process, a niche’* (M14, 23 years old, previous experience with NGOs, advertising). *‘Social entrepreneurship is an innovative business model, which aims to solve social problems through an innovative process, identifying resources in any environment. It is an agent of change of the society, it revolutionizes aiming sustainable results’* (M39, 25 years old, no previous experience, marketing)

The participants also elaborated on the characteristics a social entrepreneur possesses. Their opinions are structured in Table 5, considering the differences between millennials and the other respondents.

**Table 5. Main characteristics of a social entrepreneur**

	Millennials	30+
Caring	8	4
Dedicated	8	
Ambitious	2	
With moral values, ethical	7	2
Altruist and willing to help	9	5
Willing to change society	10	6
With entrepreneurial spirit	12	5
With a vision	4	1
Innovative	10	

Able to assume risks	3	3
Able to assume responsibility	4	
Rich	1	
Charismatic	1	
Trustworthy	1	
Confident	3	
Leadership abilities	4	
Good strategist	6	
Results oriented	2	4

Everybody agrees that a social entrepreneur is a person willing to change the society, who cares about the others and has an entrepreneurial spirit. We observe that the millennials also have in mind the set of characteristics that is usually associated with an entrepreneur: vision and innovation/creativity (Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.175). *'While a business entrepreneur could create new economic sectors, a social entrepreneur develops innovative solutions for social problems, in order to implement them later on a larger scale'* (M27, 19 years old, previous experience, student).

## Discussions and conclusions

Participants, especially older ones, see the nongovernmental organizations and social enterprises as part of a complex social and economic system. Especially the social value of such endeavors is widely recognized. The economic impact observed is mainly associated with social enterprises; the main contribution of the nonprofit sector that was mentioned is related to employment, especially offering opportunities for disadvantaged groups. There is a broad recognition of the importance of the nonprofit sector for the general development of the society and especially for the social environment.

The relationships between nonprofit organizations and public administration are of concern for the interviewees. Some consider that the nonprofit sector assumes the responsibilities that the public administration cannot fulfill for various reasons. Several respondents consider this situation as a failure of the public system. Considering this context, opinions referring to the obligation of the state to support the nonprofit sector were also expressed.

The complexity of the issues investigated is related to the fact that the opinions stated are not very well crystallized, especially among millennials. This last aspect might also be related to a relative lack of interest for and /



or visibility of the nonprofit sector and especially of social entrepreneurial endeavors. Millennials tend to be more emotional and idealists in their evaluations, while older respondents seem to be more analytical and nuanced. The former tend to consider personal aspects and have a person-based perspective, while the latter group also considers the role and the impact of the nonprofit organizations in a systemic way.

Respondents connect social entrepreneurship with social problems and market orientation but only with rare exceptions with social innovation. Social value creation and sustainability are in a low degree associated with this concept. The respondents also tend to associate tightly social entrepreneurship with vulnerable groups. Therefore, the dimensions and full capacity of social entrepreneurship are not well understood. Social entrepreneurship is a concept with which many interviewees are not familiar, especially the 30+ segment.

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