

Marie J. Bouchard and Damien Rousseliere (Eds.), *The Weight of the Social Economy: An International Perspective*

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The social economy, consisting generally of cooperatives, non-profit and mutual benefit organizations, foundations, and other social enterprises, is a sector which makes a significant contribution to employment creation, social cohesion, sustainable growth, social justice, social innovation, and socio-economic equality. It is also a sector which has weathered the recent economic upheavals better in comparison to other sectors and is increasingly gaining recognition and acceptance across the world. Much still needs to be done to increase our understanding of the sector. Despite the increasing application of this concept, and initiatives related to it, there are limited data that provide a comprehensive picture of the evolving state of the social economy internationally.

Although the social economy is in no way a new phenomenon, measuring and evaluating it has a shorter history. In particular, the production of statistics about the social economy has been fraught with methodological and other challenges. However, there is considerable international interest in quantifying this sector because of increasing developments in social investment, as well as the need to be more explicit in measuring the added value that it may contribute. *The Weight of the Social Economy*, edited by Marie Bouchard and Damien Rousseliere, is a recent effort to fully comprehend the scope and scale of the social economy through facts and figures. The primary focus of this book is to present regional, national, and international perspectives on the production of data about the social economy. The contributing authors illustrate the various methodologies used in the construction of statistics on the social economy, their limitations, and the implications for public policy.

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The first part of the book explores how the social economy is currently being quantified by looking at various methodologies and tools used to identify, qualify, and classify social economy entities. Various chapters in this section focus on indicators, qualification criteria for social economy entities, as well as classification and standardization methodologies. The authors address various methodological concerns associated with the production of statistics on the social economy, explain how the different indicators used to produce statistics lead to specific representations of the social economy, and discuss their advantages and disadvantages. This section provides readers with an excellent survey of current statistical methodologies and tools used in various jurisdictions to measure the participation and relative weight of the social economy.

The second part of the book offers international perspectives from Europe, Latin America, and Asia on the production of statistics on the social economy, using various methodologies (satellite accounts, impact assessment, national survey, etc.). The authors point out the contribution of the various approaches to the production of these statistics and show their implications for public policy. For example, chapters by Fecher & Lejeune and Uzea & Duguid clearly demonstrate that the conventional approach to measurement often proves to be poorly adapted for providing an accurate quantitative understanding of what the social economy produces. In particular, they point out that a number of conceptual and theoretical challenges make it particularly difficult to measure the monetary impact of the social economy.

This book also highlights a paradox found in measuring the production of the social economy. On one hand, as many chapters in this book illustrate (e.g., chapters by Fecher et al. and Uzea et al.), the production in the social economy includes non-market dimensions largely underestimated by national accounting, and stress the need to adopt a broad definition of this production. On the other hand, the various chapters also explore the measurement of the production of social economy entities using two approaches (e.g., chapters by Artis et al., Bouchard et al. and Archambault)—the satellite account approach and statistical observation. The authors suggest that neither of the approaches can lead to an exhaustive and reliable statistical measurement of the impacts generated by the social economy. As such, there does not seem to exist an appropriate method of calculation for adequately measuring the contribution of the social economy to the gross domestic product (GDP).

While there is recognition of the complexity of the production activity of the social economy, this book does not explore new alternative propositions to support the measurement of the social economy production. However, this book presents the strengths and weaknesses of the available models and their ability to inform effectively about the social economy. This information would be of great value for those who are interested in developing innovative ways to measure the production of the social economy. Undoubtedly, *The Weight of the Social Economy* adds to the knowledge base on the social economy by explaining why it is important to have reliable and comparable statistics, and suggesting areas for potential future research.