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## **Worlds Apart: Social Entrepreneurship Discourse in Croatian Media**

### **Abstract**

The concepts of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship have been ever more present in public discourse during the past 20–30 years, along with radically different views of the kind and level of socioeconomic or political change that these specific economic ventures (should) aim for. Although social enterprise discourse is often dominated by neoliberal perspectives, which present market-based activity as simply an efficient means of solving all kinds of more or less local and isolated social problems, more critically minded strands of research have been questioning this approach and calling for a broader and more critical perspective. This paper aims to see how these opposing discourses are represented in the Croatian news media, as a discursive sphere which is accessible to a broad public. The analysis focuses on online media in the period 2007–2019 and is based on a comparison between three media types: the online versions of a national daily newspaper and a regional daily newspaper, as well as an online-only progressive non-profit news site. A stark contrast is apparent between mainstream commercial media and alternative non-profit media, i.e. a dominance of neoliberal “enterprise discourse” in the former and more emphasis on a broader political and economic agenda calling for more fundamental, comprehensive and long-term change in the latter.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, Croatia, media, discourse analysis

## **Introduction**

The 2008 global financial crisis drew attention to the negative social and environmental consequences of a global economy focused on maximising private profit. This sparked numerous calls for the empowerment of alternative economic principles (e.g. Amin 2009; Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010; Kawano 2010; Dash 2014). Instead of projecting them into a future that has yet to be built, it is frequently emphasised that these other principles (co-operation rather than competition, sharing rather than private accumulation, reciprocity and community ties rather than individualism) are already being enacted in practice in many creative ways around the world. Particular organisational forms, which embody these principles, such as co-operatives and mutual societies, have existed for over a hundred years. Other examples are community-supported agriculture, urban and community gardens, microfinance, alternative currencies, fair trade networks, various platforms for sharing, giving and mutual assistance etc. The dismantling of the welfare state in many countries has also led to the proliferation of initiatives providing services insufficiently covered by the public sector, such as community-organised childcare or aid for various categories of disadvantaged persons.

In spite of the diversity of these practices and organisations (due, among other things, to their connections to local communities and cultures), they share common ground, since they are based on the abovementioned “alternative”, non-capitalist economic principles and they are independent from public sector structures. This justifies grouping them under one umbrella concept, which contextualises specific local practices as part of a larger, more comprehensive phenomenon. They thus become more visible to policymakers, the public and the practitioners themselves, encouraging more opportunities for growth (Kawano 2010). Attempts to conceptualise this broader perspective have resulted in an abundance of terminology, but we consider “social and solidarity economy” to be the most clear and inclusive term.

The social and solidarity economy is the conceptual ground in which we would like to anchor the concepts of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship (SE) that the paper centres on, in the sense that they refer to specific forms of social and solidarity economy practice. These concepts have been appearing with ever more frequency in public discourse during the past 20–30 years, as the economic practices that they refer to have been proliferating. They can be considered contested concepts, with “a range of actors promoting different languages and practices tied to different political beliefs” (Teasdale 2012, 3). However, Defourny and Nyssens (2017) point out that “[m]ost SE approaches in the literature, if not all, share the view that social enterprises combine an entrepreneurial dynamics to provide services or goods with the

primacy of a social mission". Some examples of social enterprise projects that are mentioned in the media analysed here are: a company employing blind and visually impaired people in the production of soap bars, a bar employing people with special needs, a co-operative beer brewery, a co-living project for single migrant mothers and a social co-operative employing people with disabilities in the production of clothes and household items from recycled textiles.

One approach to researching social enterprise (still not very common) is to engage in ethnographic fieldwork in order to gain insight into the lived experience of social enterprise practices from the perspectives of practitioners, users and others. Another is to analyse the various forms of written discursive production, which contribute to constructing representations of social enterprise in the public sphere. Discourse analysis can supplement the local, interpersonal and embodied perspective of ethnography with an insight into the discursive production of meaning, which is an integral part of everyday practices. A discourse analytical approach to social enterprise has been undertaken by a relatively small number of authors to date (e.g. Parkinson & Howorth 2008; Hudson 2018; Chandra 2017; Teasdale 2012; Mason 2012; Ruebottom 2013). These studies tend to focus on discourses produced by specific (categories of) actors, such as SE practitioners, organisers and promoters or policymakers, for example by analysing policy documents or different types of texts produced by social enterprises themselves. Our aim, however, is to assess representations which reach a broader public, i.e. people who are not involved in or do not yet have a particular interest in social enterprise, and this is why we have chosen to focus on news media. Interestingly, although media representations are generally a popular research subject, we have not yet come across a study which would focus specifically on the concepts of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship in media discourse.

The subject of this paper is thus the use of the Croatian terms "društveno poduzetništvo" and "socijalno poduzetništvo" ("social enterprise"/"social entrepreneurship")<sup>1</sup> in Croatian news media. The focus of the analysis is the difference between a consciously political critique of capitalist market economy and a pragmatic, goal-oriented focus on concrete local problem-solving without a broader critical perspective. This opens up the question of the co-opting of social entrepreneurship by the neoliberal "enterprise discourse" (Parkinson & Howorth 2008). We will look at whether social entrepreneurship is discursively located within the context of a broader field that includes other types of practices and organisations, which we see as a way of attributing to them a significance beyond their immediate local aims. We will also focus on how

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1 For more on these terms and their relations, see the chapter "Approach to the media texts".

social enterprise actors are represented (individually or collectively, for example) and how social enterprise projects are evaluated (praise and/or critique). Another aspect that we consider relevant are the actors who use these terms in the media, since this is closely linked to how they will be represented. We approach the analysis critically, which means that we focus particularly on examples of representation that we consider problematic and in this sense our approach is broadly theoretically and methodologically influenced by Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Fairclough 2003; Richardson 2007). More specifically, the analysis relies on some of the examples and suggestions provided by Fairclough (1995 [1991]) and Mautner (2008). We do not, however, attempt a detailed linguistic analysis, since our aim is to provide a first insight into some tendencies in the media use of the above-mentioned terms, rather than to delve more deeply into a particular aspect of media discourse.

Due to ease of access (considering the Covid-19 pandemic), but also to trends in media consumption in Croatia, we have decided to focus exclusively on online news media (see the section “Approach to the media texts” for more details). In order to compare different types of news source, we selected the web sites of one national daily newspaper and one regional daily newspaper and an online-only progressive non-profit news site. Since we are interested, among other things, in the earliest appearance of the selected terms in the media and also because we are aware that the total number of search results will be relatively low, we did not want to set a narrow temporal limitation for the analysis. We took the year 2007 as a starting point, in order to include the period before the 2008 financial crisis, and set the limit at 2020, which we did not include, since the exceptional circumstances of the global pandemic and the accompanying economic crisis would call for a more specific approach.

In the following section, we introduce the theoretical framework of our approach to social entrepreneurship, followed by a brief overview of the development of social enterprise and social enterprise discourses in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, in order to provide a context for our analysis. We then describe the process of selecting the individual media, conducting keyword searches and the analysis itself. After that we present the results of the analysis, first in what we consider the mainstream media and then in the “alternative” medium *H-Alter*. This is followed by a concluding section, where we sum up the results and consider some avenues for future research.

### **A theoretical foundation for social enterprise**

Critical researchers of the social and solidarity economy often turn to the fields of economic anthropology and economic sociology as sources for a critique of the capitalist concept of the economy. In these fields, the economy is

conceived as wholly intertwined with and inseparable from social and cultural structures and processes, i.e. it is itself considered a social construct (Mauss 1923, as cited in Laville 2010). This perspective is encapsulated in the concept of embeddedness, which was particularly elaborated by the economic historian Karl Polanyi (2001; 1957). He shows how an independent and self-regulating market cannot actually exist, since it necessarily depends on a specific institutional and social structure which supports it and makes it possible. This means that it is not the only “natural” form of economic organisation, but instead that it is contingent and malleable, like all other social and cultural forms. Thus, there seems to be a particular affinity between the social and solidarity economy as a field of research and the disciplines of cultural anthropology and ethnology, although this potential has yet to be realised to a more significant extent.

Social enterprise research and policy discourse is often dominated by neoliberal perspectives, which present market-based activity (i.e. selling goods and offering services for money) as the most efficient means of solving all kinds of social problems. This approach aims for “social impact”, i.e. positive social change, but usually only with regard to a very specific and localised issue, while ignoring the underlying, systemic issues caused by dominant neoliberal economics. It can thus actually contribute to the further dismantling of any vestiges of the welfare state and to the already advanced colonisation of all spheres of public and private life by market relations and market logic. More critically minded strands of research have been questioning this approach, emphasising the political dimension of social enterprise (Roy & Grant 2020) and articulating economic and social change as a more comprehensive, fundamental and long-term goal. The social and solidarity economy is one such framework, which allows for a better understanding of the specific characteristics of social enterprise, as opposed to approaches from mainstream business and entrepreneurship studies (Parkinson & Howorth 2008, 287).

The concepts of enterprise and entrepreneurship themselves come from the context of “capitalism and free market economics” (Jennings, Perren and Carter 2005, as cited in Parkinson & Howorth 2008, 286) and thus potentially bring with them what Parkinson and Howorth (*ibid.*) call “enterprise discourse”. This discourse, which the authors particularly associate with the field of social enterprise policy, foregrounds efficiency, impact and the “heroic” individual entrepreneur who is built up into a mythical figure, particularly by the media. This individualist approach obscures the social, collective processes that social entrepreneurship ventures consist of, while the managerial focus of enterprise discourse “neglect[s] the political and dialogical practices at the

centre of social entrepreneurship” (Cho 2006, as cited in Parkinson & Howorth 2008, 286). On the other hand, among social entrepreneurs themselves, Parkinson and Howorth locate a counter-discourse which instead focuses more on collective action, community and the political and moral aspects of their work. Another important difference between the two discourses is that the former positions social entrepreneurship as part of the mainstream capitalist economy, while in the latter it is constructed as a distinct phenomenon, with its own structures, values and modes of acting. However, dichotomies such as “policy vs. practitioners” should be approached cautiously, since, as Hudson (2018) shows, strong disagreements and conflicts can also arise, for example, among practitioners themselves.

### **Social enterprise in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe**

It is often pointed out that there are many similarities in the context and development of social enterprise in the countries of Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe, prompting comparative analyses (Defourny & Nyssens 2021; NESsT 2017; Zoehrer 2017). After the Second World War, socialist states took the provision of social services on themselves, while the economy was also to a significant extent controlled and managed by the state, limiting autonomy. Although Yugoslavia was generally more liberal than Eastern Bloc regimes, with its official doctrine of workers’ self-management and elements of what can be considered civil society (Stubbs 2001), the environment was not conducive to the development of a social economy.

The concept of social enterprise was thus only introduced in the region in the 2000’s, as a result of the transition to a market economy and the transformation of the welfare state in the 1990’s. The key actors forming the discourse of social enterprise in the region were international agencies, foundations and organisations, which provided funding and support to social entrepreneurs, as well as European Union policy documents and funding tenders. The role of social enterprise was articulated either as providing social services (particularly to disadvantaged social groups) or generating income in order to make civil society organisations less dependent on grant-based funding. These discourses of service provision and economic sustainability were accepted and reproduced both in national policies and institutions, as well as by many of the social entrepreneurs themselves.

Due to the unfavourable legal, institutional and financial environment, social enterprise in Croatia is still relatively underdeveloped (Vidović & Baturina 2021). Sociocultural factors are also often cited as reasons for this, such as negative attitudes toward civil society organisations and co-operatives, low levels of social capital and “paternalistic” expectations that the state should provide social and economic security (European Commission 2019, 15–16).

Orlić (2014), however, whose research is based on ethnographic fieldwork with members of community-supported agriculture (CSA) groups, emphasises instead a long-lasting political and social distrust in state institutions. Rather than relying on them, some people are turning to family and individuals, i.e. informal circles, in creating alternative economic and social responses to their problems (ibid., 85). Šimleša, Bušljeta Tonković and Puđak (2016, 272) also adopt a more positive tone, stating that, although unevenly developed throughout the country, social enterprise is a growing factor in economic development.

### **Approach to the media texts**

Before moving on to a description of the process of media selection and analysis, we will briefly consider the importance of analysing media discourses in the context of research on contemporary culture. As Foucault (1972) has influentially shown, discourses can produce and enforce particular structures of meaning, to the extent that they can shape what can be thought or said about a certain topic. This is always closely tied to power relations within a given environment, which discourse is necessarily involved in, both by producing and maintaining them and being a result of their workings. Within the realm of discourse, a central role in most contemporary societies is played by the (mass) media, not least by encouraging the rise of imagined communities (Anderson 2016): national, regional or communities based on political ideologies, for example. As such, every medium will have an affinity with the interests and views of a particular social group (however broad that group may be). One can thus observe, by focusing on media discourses, how different world-views and interests interact and compete in attempts to construct different social realities, to set different agendas of what is relevant and what needs to be acknowledged or debated. As a practically ubiquitous part of everyday life, central in the articulation of “truth” and the enforcement (or challenging) of power relations, the media play a key role in research on contemporary culture. This is why we considered it important for a broadly conceived, multi-disciplinary research project on the solidarity economy to include an analysis of media discourses.

Since we wanted to compare the representation of social entrepreneurship in different types of medium, we selected three online<sup>2</sup> news sources for

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2 The decision to include only online media in the analysis was not only due to the possibility of keyword searches and greater accessibility, considering the Covid-19 pandemic. The circulation of printed daily newspapers in Croatia has been steadily declining during the period covered by our research, while the readership of the major dailies' online versions has been increasing (Vozab 2014; circulation figures for printed

the analysis. *Jutarnji list* (“Morning Paper”) was chosen as an example of the online version of a popular nation-wide daily newspaper, whose readership is oriented generally toward the centre in political terms (Peruško & Vozab 2017). Since social enterprise ventures are often more prominent on a local or regional level, we included the regional daily newspaper *Glas Istre* (“Voice of Istria”) in the analysis. The region of Istria on the northeastern Adriatic coast was selected because it has a daily regional newspaper with print and online editions and due to its relative prosperity, which might suggest a more active social enterprise sector. Finally, we wanted to include a non-profit, left-leaning, progressive news source, which critically approaches social, economic, political and environmental issues, as an alternative to the mainstream media. *H-Alter* was selected as a good example of this type of medium (Peruško & Vozab 2017).

To locate texts for the analysis, we used the terms “društveno poduzetništvo” and “socijalno poduzetništvo” as keywords in the search<sup>3</sup> (in all their case forms, i.e. with different word endings), both of which can be translated into English as either “social entrepreneurship” or “social enterprise”<sup>4</sup>. Although the adjectives “društveno” and “socijalno” both mean “social”, the latter bears an additional connotation to social welfare. Davorka Vidović (European Commission 2019, 80) points out that this is why the Croatian government opted for the former as the preferred official term, which is used in the Strategy for Social Entrepreneurship Development 2015–2020, although both terms are still sometimes used interchangeably. Therefore, although we searched for and analysed texts using either of the Croatian terms, we will use “social entrepreneurship” to translate both of them.

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newspapers in 2019 as provided by publishers to the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, available on demand).

- 3 The research was originally conceived so as to include several broader terms (“solidarity economy”, “social economy”, “good economy”), which can encompass a wide range of practices apart from social entrepreneurship, but due to the very small number of texts where these terms are used (particularly in the mainstream media), the journal editors suggested that we focus only on social entrepreneurship.
- 4 The difference between these two Croatian terms and their relation to the English terms requires a brief explanation. The English language allows a distinction between the terms “social enterprise” (as a broad field encompassing actors, activities, relations etc.), “a social enterprise” (an individual organisation active within the field of social enterprise) and “social entrepreneurship” (activity bringing an innovative approach to solving social problems, not necessarily present within a social enterprise). Croatian, however, only allows for the distinction of a social enterprise (“društveno poduzeće”), while the difference between social enterprise and social entrepreneurship is lost, since both the terms “društveno poduzetništvo” and “socijalno poduzetništvo” can refer to the whole field, as well as to specific innovative activity.

Web site		<i>Jutarnji list</i>	<i>Glas Istre</i>	<i>H-Alter</i>	Total
Total number of texts		71	31	28	130
Term used	“društveno poduzetništvo”	29	18	21	68
	“socijalno poduzetništvo”	42	13	7	62
Year	2007–2012	1	0	2	3
	2013–2016	30	18	21	69
	2017–2019	40	14	5	59

Table 1. Google keyword search results (numbers of texts using the term “društveno poduzetništvo” and/or “socijalno poduzetništvo”).

We used Google’s search engine to search the entire web sites of the selected media (*jutarnji.hr*, *glasistre.hr* and *h-alter.org*). We are aware that it is problematic to assume that Google search is an objective tool which produces fully reliable results without any omissions. However, since our approach is not based on quantitative methodology, overall patterns of use of the terms will emerge even if the search results do not cover every single instance of use. Having this caveat in mind, the information that we provide in Table 1 should not be understood as definitive data on the use of the terms “društveno poduzetništvo” and “socijalno poduzetništvo” in the selected media sources.

After conducting the keyword searches, the next step was to read the texts that we had compiled, taking note of general tendencies in the representation of social entrepreneurship which could be observed without a more focused analysis. We then proceeded with a more detailed focus on a smaller number of instances (texts or text sections), which were interesting either due to their specificity or as examples of the observed general tendencies. The main question that guided the analysis was how the purpose or role of social entrepreneurship is articulated, i.e. why and how it is important for a particular organisation, social group or for the society or economy more broadly. Among other aspects of representation, this has to do with how social entrepreneurship is contextualised and which other concepts, themes or discourses it is explicitly or implicitly linked with. Another important question is which social actors are given space in different types of media to produce or propagate particular discourses. This allows them to construct a concept of social entrepreneurship in accordance with their specific interests and goals, their position in political, economic and social power relations and their different strategies and modes of functioning. In the following two sections we will present our findings, first with regard to what we consider the mainstream media and then *H-Alter* as an alternative medium.

### **The mainstream media - *Jutarnji list* and *Glas Istre***

Taking into account that the search results might not have been comprehensive, it is still apparent from the data in Table 1 that social entrepreneurship as a topic was practically completely absent from the analysed media prior to 2013, when Croatia became a member of the European Union. However, Vidović (2012, 165–175) states that the term entered public discourse in Croatia around 2005. It would therefore seem that the diffusion of the concept into media discourse (at least that of the media analysed here) was rather slow and not linked to the 2008 financial crisis. This is in accordance with the observation by Vidović and Baturina (2021, 40) of a “slight increase in public interest” in social enterprise and social entrepreneurship after joining the EU, which they ascribe to “several EU funding schemes [becoming] available for Croatian social entrepreneurs”.

Apart from this, the most apparent general finding is the great difference between what we shall consider mainstream media (*Jutarnji list* and *Glas Istre*) and the alternative medium *H-Alter*. The fact that *Glas Istre* has a regional focus has not proven relevant in terms of quantitative or qualitative aspects of social entrepreneurship representation. Texts on social entrepreneurship on all three web sites rely strongly on the discourses of other social actors, while journalists’ authorial voices, for example in investigative or opinion pieces, are hardly present at all. The differences in the roles ascribed to social entrepreneurship can thus be attributed primarily to the choice of actors whose discourse is represented and the amount of space they are given. The mainstream media tend to give more space to actors from the public sector, primarily political figures, while *H-Alter* functions to an extent as a media platform for the civil society sector.

As a result, mainstream media representations are dominated by institutional and political discourse, foregrounding top-down promotion of social entrepreneurship by state and regional institutions. Encouragement of social enterprise projects is contextualised within the larger political programme of European Social Fund grants, promoted through partnerships between the state, the civil sector and private initiatives. In Istria, this is also realised in the form of regional partnerships, such as a Croatian-Slovenian partnership which was reported on in *Glas Istre* (Bašić-Palković 2015). In the article, a functionary of a regional Istrian public agency refers to the government’s 2015–2020 social entrepreneurship strategy and points out “that social entrepreneurship can significantly contribute to the fulfilment of the strategic goals of Europe 2020 and affect the reduction of the problems of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion”. This is a typical example of the social-welfare, problem-alleviation approach to social entrepreneurship, which is characteristic of public sector actors and which seeks to affect change only within a limited, concrete, pragmatically

oriented framework. Social entrepreneurship is also occasionally represented by state institutions as a vehicle for the self-financing of the civil sector, making it more financially independent (Rojnić Sinković 2015). This can be seen as a way of partly relieving the state of the financial burden of funding civil society organisations, in line with the general tendency toward dismantling the welfare state.

Mason (2012, 126) points out how “dominant groups, i.e. political elites” assert “hegemonic control over the public discourse concerning social problems (e.g. social exclusion)” and this can certainly be observed in the mainstream media that we have analysed. Beyond simply leaving out any form of critique or calls for systematic and long-term change, this approach can actually be said to discourage such critique by construing both the “problem” and its “solution” as detached from a broader context. This context could be introduced by using broader terms such as “social economy” or “solidarity economy”, which encompass many other non-capitalist economic practices and can introduce a more general perspective on the relationship between economy and society. These broader terms, however, are very rarely used in the mainstream media analysed here and hardly ever in the same text as the term “social entrepreneurship”, which means that discursive links are not established between them.

A similar discursive divide can be observed in some of the academic literature (both internationally and in Croatia), which focuses on particular social enterprise projects, but fails to link the research with a theoretical framework built on broader concepts, such as those mentioned above. Perhaps this is partly because the research participants themselves do not necessarily identify with any of these overarching concepts or are familiar with them (Orlić 2014; Puđak, Majetić and Šimleša 2016). In fact, some authors argue that both the terminology and theoretical concepts are poorly present in public discourse (Kawano 2010, 20) and that a substantial research effort should be undertaken in order to create a framework that actors could relate to. This would help by strengthening social and solidarity economy practices and activities and firmly establishing them in the social and economic context (Šimleša et al. 2016, 291). With this in mind, the Green Network of Activist Groups (Croatian: *Zelena mreža aktivističkih grupa* or ZMAG) introduced the term “good economy” (“dobra ekonomija”), articulating it as part of the moral economy as well. Since the concept is primarily used in the realm of practice (educational and advocacy activities) rather than research, it has not been particularly theoretically elaborated, apart from playing the role of a more “localised” (i.e. Croatian) synonym of “solidarity economy”. These efforts, however, have not yet penetrated to a significant extent into the mainstream media, where the term “social entrepreneurship” is generally not used in a critical political context.

Echoing Roy and Grant’s (2020) finding in the field of scholarship, representations of social entrepreneurship in the mainstream media tend to po-

sition it within the mainstream capitalist economic model, rather than as an alternative to it. The most explicit example is a quote from the minister of labour and the pension system, who calls it “capitalism with a human face” (Hina 2019). Texts engaging more extensively with social entrepreneurship, usually based on an interview with a social entrepreneur, contribute in a more subtle way to this representation. Most commonly there is only one interviewee and the main topic of the text is a social enterprise project (or several) attributed to them. The interviewee might mention other people or organisations they collaborated with on the project, but the emphasis of the article is on the “featured” individual. There is usually a photograph of them on the top of the page and the text interweaves descriptions of their social enterprise projects with their personal views, experiences and advice to others with similar ambitions.

A common motif in these narratives is overcoming obstacles and pursuing a goal in spite of scepticism or discouragement on the part of others (a good example is the title “They told her it wouldn’t work and now she is among the 12 most promising female entrepreneurs in Britain”, Bratić 2017). The entrepreneur’s achievements are often attributed to their personal characteristics (creativity, self-confidence, decisiveness, perseverance...), rather than to co-operation and collective effort. Parkinson and Howorth (2008) identify this individualist focus on the “heroic” social entrepreneur as an aspect of “enterprise discourse”, adding that it is particularly common in the media. In some cases, these texts articulate a (not necessarily explicit) critique of the dominant view of entrepreneurship as oriented exclusively toward private profit. However, by focusing attention on individual rather than collective agency, these texts limit the meaning of the *social* in “social entrepreneurship”: it refers only to social impact or benefit, but not to the social nature of the entrepreneurial process itself (see Parkinson & Howorth 2008, 288–289, for references).

Such an apolitical and acritical concept of social entrepreneurship seems to be the object of an unspoken consensus in public discourse. It is invariably represented positively (albeit superficially), as something desirable, as if there was a taboo in force with regard to negative representations of social entrepreneurship. This is surely due to the fact that the term has become a part of political discourse, with political parties from different sides of the spectrum citing it regularly in their programmes. However, this apparent consensus might be concealing negative attitudes, perhaps particularly within the business community, which can only occasionally be indirectly detected through attempts at legitimisation by social entrepreneurs. Some of them, namely, feel the need to emphasise that what they do is “just like any other entrepreneurship”, except that the profits are used for social purposes. This was stated, for example, by the director of a company that produces soap bars and employs blind and visually impaired people (Krnić 2017).

This can perhaps be interpreted as a response to the business community not taking social entrepreneurship seriously, viewing it as more like charity work, where the social aims are central, to the detriment of competitiveness and success in the market. This might be due to the fact that social enterprises often receive funding and other forms of assistance from the public sector and that the people running them often do not have much experience with market-based ventures. But it also potentially indicates prejudice and a lack of understanding of social enterprise in the mainstream business community (Vidović & Baturina 2021), prompting attempts at legitimization of social entrepreneurship from the perspective of mainstream capitalist entrepreneurship. The director of the soap company thus invokes the “free market” (which they aim to participate in with their products), while the text also mentions that the company’s employees work eight hours per day from Monday to Friday (as if to show that it is, indeed, a real job). The general aim of the article (and of most other texts focusing more extensively on social entrepreneurship) seems to be to dispel this prejudice and familiarise the business community with this alternative business model. However, the result, among other things, is that the concept of social entrepreneurship is adapted to the dominant neoliberal “enterprise discourse” (Parkinson & Howorth 2008). Another example of this are affirmations of the financial viability of social enterprise, such as an article informing that social enterprises in Croatia generated a total revenue of 943,551,875 Croatian kuna (€124,630,391) in 2015 (Promo 2019).

We did, however, come across one particularly elaborate example of explicit critique, although, significantly, it does not use the term “social entrepreneurship” to label its object. But it can be said to show the other side of the coin of the “positive”, but depoliticised representation of social entrepreneurship - a strong critical attitude toward attempts at achieving more radical and long-term economic change. The text in question is an opinion article (Grgas 2018) on the attempts by the Co-operative for Ethical Financing (*Za druga za etično financiranje - ZEF*) to found an ethical bank. The article criticises ZEF’s ambition of “experimenting, introducing a new model, changing the economy” and their “different view of the role of money” rooted in a critique of “economy based exclusively on short-term profit”. The author clearly sides with the “financial community”, representing these aims as unrealistic, overly ambitious, a “pretty fantasy that will never come true”. Calling ZEF a “dishevelled co-operative of 1400 members”, the author denies the viability of collective and co-operative management and decision-making in a financial institution. An opposition is implicitly constructed between the idealistic and insufficiently competent ZEF and the professional and serious financial community. “The ‘good economy’ sounds good,” the author writes ironically.

**The alternative - *H-Alter***

There are several characteristics which distinguish *H-Alter* from the mainstream, commercial media: it is a non-profit medium, published by a civil society organisation, and the authors of its texts maintain close connections with other civil society actors and activists. It is not focused on daily news and this lack of pressure to constantly produce fresh news items means that authors have more time, as well as media space, to engage more substantially with their topics. This is also encouraged by the fact that *H-Alter* has a relatively limited thematic focus, centred on the domains of civil society, politics (democratic political culture, human rights), social science, sustainable development, environmentalism and cultural production (UNMK 2016). All of this results in significant differences in the representation of social entrepreneurship between *H-Alter* and the mainstream media.

However, elements of the problem-solving acritical discourse usually associated with public sector actors are not entirely absent from *H-Alter* either. As we have already mentioned, all three media rely to a great extent on the discourses of other social actors in their representation of social entrepreneurship. In *H-Alter*, these are mainly actors from the civil society sector, but occasionally also government bodies or policymakers, for example in the case of funding tenders for social enterprises, which *H-Alter* publishes regularly. For some of these texts the author is not given, making it potentially unclear whether the text originates from an external source and to what extent it has been modified, i.e. whose and how many authorial voices are present. For some texts, such as announcements of various events, readers might reasonably assume that they were authored by other sources (the organisers of the event). However, the fact that they have been published on *H-Alter* means that they have thus become a part of *H-Alter's* discourse, i.e. that *H-Alter* supports and promotes their discourse. This becomes particularly relevant in the case of government tenders, as they introduce into *H-Alter's* discursive space elements of the discourse of public policy, which is close to political discourse, without necessarily making it clear that this is the case. In these texts, representations of social entrepreneurship are inevitably focused on problem-solving and devoid of any broader critical reflection, in contrast, for example, to some of the texts explicitly attributed to *H-Alter's* journalists (we provide some examples below).

Sometimes hints at broader systemic critique are combined with elements of the dominant political problem-solving discourse. An example is an announcement of a TV programme on social entrepreneurship (Anonymous 2014). The entire text was almost certainly copied from the website of the organisation which produces the TV programme in question, although the author is not stated. The text starts by pointing out that numerous “com-

plex economic, welfare [socijalni], social [društveni], cultural, environmental problems” are causing “political and socioeconomic instability in the whole world”. Among the suggested means for change are “new values of the society”, implying that “old values” (not mentioned explicitly), are linked with the abovementioned problems and thus considered no longer beneficial and in need of replacement. Thus, both the issue and the solution are constructed on a systemic, global level. However, part of the solution is also “addressing the needs of marginalised, socially vulnerable groups and problems in local communities”. This is represented as the role of social entrepreneurship (and, more broadly, “socio-economic ventures”) and it reads like it might have been copied from a political speech or a policy document.

Although most of the texts using the term “social entrepreneurship” in *H-Alter* are of the types described above (announcements of events or tenders), there are also examples where a broader perspective comes into view. This is perhaps most explicitly stated in two texts and in both cases by the same actor - Dražen Šimleša of the ZMAG association (which introduced the term “good economy”). One of these texts (Opačić 2014) is about the already mentioned project of founding an ethical bank by the Co-operative for Ethical Financing (ZEF). This provides a good opportunity for comparison with the harsh critique levelled at this initiative in *Jutarnji list* (although there are also more balanced articles about the ethical bank in *Jutarnji list*; a critique like the one presented above could not appear in *H-Alter* however). The text is attributed to one of *H-Alter*'s journalists and it reports on a public round table discussion held directly before ZEF's founding assembly. The round table participants assert that social entrepreneurship is not recognised by commercial banks in Croatia, which limits options for financing projects in their early phase and makes it very hard for social enterprises to get off the ground and grow. In contrast, ethical banks are presented as very welcoming toward social enterprise projects. An opposition is thus implicitly constructed. On the one hand are mainstream entrepreneurship, commercial banks and the “existing [economic] system”, which is criticised by Šimleša (one of the round table participants). On the other hand are social entrepreneurship, ethical banks and an alternative system which he represents as desirable (“positive”, “progressive”, “more just”, “more sustainable”). Thus, social entrepreneurship is articulated as part of a broader call for change in the current economic system, via its association with the ethical bank project which advocates this goal.

The other text is an interview with Šimleša on the occasion of the first Good Economy Conference organised in Zagreb by ZMAG (Kelava 2014). Šimleša elaborates the good economy concept, emphasising the need for a broad systemic perspective and long-term change, rooted in a critique of the current

economic system which has caused the triple crisis of the economy, climate change and resource depletion. Social entrepreneurship is mentioned several times as a prime example of the good economy (it “expands the spaces of the good economy”), along with many other forms of economic practice, which, in spite of their heterogeneity, are represented as sharing a common territory. Šimleša also encourages networking and exchange among different local communities. This topos of establishing links between previously separate practices and actors aims at building the social and solidarity economy (or “good economy”) as a broad movement, both discursively and otherwise, and is common among its advocates. This is motivated not least by issues of visibility: as Šimleša points out, good economy actors are not very visible, “because we are blind, that is, this system blinds us”.

### **Conclusion**

The global turmoil ignited by the financial crisis in 2008 strengthened movements across the globe that pondered different economic and social relations aimed at downsizing profit maximisation and creating different economic principles. Although modestly and inconsistently, in the last fifteen years these movements and practices have started to take shape in Croatia, as well. The present paper aimed at analysing how social entrepreneurship is represented in Croatian online media discourse since 2007, in order to see how this might contribute to shaping the awareness and opinions of the general public.

Both *H-Alter* and the mainstream media contribute to social entrepreneurship discourse primarily by providing a platform for the discourses of various social actors: the mainstream media focus more on public sector actors and *H-Alter* on the civil society sector. Thus, in the former, social entrepreneurship is more commonly represented in the context of EU policy, as an alternative solution to current problems, particularly in providing employment for the so-called “hard-to-employ” population. This shows that the neoliberal managerial enterprise discourse, focused on efficiency and problem-solving, is dominant in the mainstream media, potentially indicating the shrinking of the role of the state in providing welfare. It is also completely in accordance with the way that dominant public discourse on social entrepreneurship was shaped in Central, Eastern and Southeastern European countries, under the influence of the EU and international funders.

Social entrepreneurship seems to have become something of a buzzword in Croatian public discourse, as a result of these influences and of a generally dominant discourse of entrepreneurship as a desirable form of economic practice to boost employment and the economy. This should be viewed in the context of the pervasive postsocialist “transition myth”, which encourages policies

and discourses geared toward the creation of a free market, while insufficiently appreciating the specific nature and value of social entrepreneurship (Borzaga, Galera and Nogales, 2008, as cited in in Defourny, Mihály, Nyssens and Adam, 2021, 1). Thus, although political and policy discourse seems to have embraced the concept of social entrepreneurship, a lack of “conceptual clarity and a broadly accepted understanding of the concept” can still be observed (Vidović & Baturina 2021, 40). This is also the case in other Southeastern European countries, where “potential stakeholders from both the private and public sectors are not aware of and do not understand social enterprise models and success stories” and there is a “lack of general public awareness” of social enterprise (NESsT 2017, 15).

Apart from the discourse of political and institutional actors themselves, this is also a result of the particular contribution of the mainstream media to the public discursive landscape: they generally show a lack of knowledge and interest in a deeper engagement with issues related to alternative economic practices. While there seems to be a general consensus of representing social entrepreneurship positively, these representations tend to be rather superficial. Also, the presumed consensus might be concealing negative prejudiced attitudes rooted in neoliberal views, which rarely surface explicitly in the media, but can result in the adoption of elements of the enterprise discourse by social entrepreneurs. In this regard, the regional medium *Glas Istre* did not show any significant differences from the national daily *Jutarnji list*. The potential reasons for this should be explored by analysing other regional, as well as local, media.

In *H-Alter* on the other hand, texts are more likely to provide contextualisation and critical analysis of the current neoliberal paradigm, social and economic inequalities and the potentials of alternative economic practices to confront these issues. Dražen Šimleša and ZMAG are a prominent source in this regard, in terms of locating social entrepreneurship within the context of the “good economy” concept, articulating it as part of a broader “movement” calling for more fundamental economic, social and cultural change. There are, however, occasional hints of problem-solving “enterprise discourse” in *H-Alter*, as well, although not frequently. Among other things, this is due to the fact that many social entrepreneurs themselves do not view what they do in a broader, more critical context. As Vidović and Baturina (2021, 42) point out, “[t]he concept of ‘social economy’ was rarely used until recently, and so far, the term has not become really ‘embedded’ in the Croatian context, despite its long historical usage and role in continental European tradition”. This is even more so with regard to the concept of “solidarity economy”, which is associated with more critical, anticapitalist discourses. The introduction and promotion by ZMAG of the “good economy” concept is changing this situation to an extent, as some actors adopt the concept and use it to refer to their activities.

The data we have collected and analysed do not include the newly established “normality” of the Covid pandemic, followed by an economic crisis, as well as three strong earthquakes in Croatia in 2020, all of which has prompted calls for solidarity and reshaping of social relations and hierarchies. Another relevant development is the rise to power in the 2021 local elections of political parties and independent candidates from different parts of the spectrum who are not part of the traditional political establishment. Future research would benefit from taking this recent period as a starting point of analysis, enabling a more elaborated comparison of social entrepreneurship representations across Croatia.

Also, as Mauksch, Dey, Rowe and Teasdale (2017) point out: “Our understanding of language’s constitutive power takes on an entirely different coloration if we include ethnographic research scrutinising how prevailing discourses of social enterprise are dealt with at the level of practice.” They thus indicate how productive links can be established between discourse analysis and the fields of ethnology and cultural anthropology, where the former opens up the field of discursive production of meaning, while the latter connect it with the world of everyday practices. Combining ethnographic fieldwork with discourse analysis might also be a good way to explore the interesting and complex subjects for future research suggested by one of our reviewers: emotionality of texts, processes of circulation of particular discourses and the attachments that they offer within the perpetual crisis of capitalism.

Although ethnographic research of social enterprise is still not common, Mauksch et al. (ibid.) emphasise its important role in providing a perspective which foregrounds day-to-day processes, mundane experiences, interactions and sociality, as well as negotiation of tensions and opposing views. This allows for a view of social enterprises not as decontextualized entities or business models, but as “a social phenomenon that shapes, and is being shaped, through everyday practice”, “as performative enactment, i.e. as a kind of doing rather than a form of being”. The self-reflexiveness of ethnographic fieldwork also presumes an engagement with the shifting role of the researcher with regard to the process, participants, subject and aims of the research. This is especially relevant since it is quite common for social enterprise researchers to base their research on personal involvement with the organisations and individuals who are their research participants. In Croatia, ethnographic research of a social enterprise has been conducted and advocated by Stubbs and Vidović (2017), emphasising the importance of taking into account the specific context that each social enterprise venture operates in. Generally, however, this is still a vastly unexplored and promising territory which will surely open up many new perspectives not accessible to other methodological approaches.

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