

## 'Innovations among People' in Selected Social Economy Enterprises in Poland

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**Abstract :** In Poland, the system of social and professional reintegration of people at risk of social exclusion is, in fact, based on the activity of social economy enterprises. Playing this significant role these entities have to cope with various problems, related to the necessity of being successful on the open market, location on the peripheral (especially rural) areas or the "socialist heritage" in social and economic relations, which is certainly not favorable for implementing the idea of activation policy. One of the main objectives of the project entitled "Innovation among people. The analysis of the innovations creation and implementation in companies and social economy enterprises operating in Poland", was to investigate the innovativeness of Polish social economy entities as a possible way for them to be prosperous (the project was funded by the Polish National Science Centre grant on the decision DEC-2013/11/B/HS4/00691). The ethnographic research in this matter was conducted in 2015 in two parts: six three-day studies using participant observation and individual in-depth interview (IDI) techniques (in three social cooperatives and three social integration centres) and two one-month shadowings (in one social cooperative and one social integration centre). Enterprises were selected from various provinces in Poland on the basis of data from previous computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) research, where they declared that innovation management is a central element of their strategy. The ethnographic study revealed that they, indeed, create innovations and the main types of them are social and organisational innovations - but not always and not all the employees are aware of that. Moreover, it turned out that wherever the research was conducted, researchers found some similar opportunities of innovations creating process, like a "charismatic leader", true passion and commitment not depended on the earned money or building local institutional networks, and similar threats, e.g. under-staffed offices or the great bureaucracy of some institutions. The primary conclusion for the studied entities is that being innovative is not only their challenge and opportunity for well-being at the same time, but even a necessity, something deeply rooted in their specific organisational structures. Explanations and illustrations for the statements above will be presented in the proposed paper.

**Keywords :** ethnographic research, innovation, Polish social economy, professional reintegration, social economy enterprises, social reintegration

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