Young Researchers and the Problems of Polish Rural Areas

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DETERMINANTS OF SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN POLISH RURAL COMMUNITIES

Introduction

Understanding the term "innovation" causes many problems. On the one hand, they may lead to trivializing and banalizing the meaning of innovation, i.e. considering all that is new as innovative. On the other hand, they may result in the belief that innovations are only reserved for a narrow group of economic establishment, largest (wealthiest) institutions, organizations which have the potential to create solutions that will be applied on the market and bring their authors concrete financial profits. Social innovations are not commonly identified among other kinds of innovations as those that are neither directly associated with the market nor require considerable financial expenditure. Instead, they are a response to social problems which can and should be solved with the participation of various social communities.

Extensive literature concerning innovations has been dominated by economic perspectives and discourse concerning relations between innovations and economic growth. But innovations (not only social ones) are created for people and by people, and therefore their social determinants should be considered as equally important as (or even more important than) the economic ones. These include the community members' ability of social participation, participating in different social networks, or – more broadly – the potential of their social capital.

The aim of the article is to present the determinants of social innovations in the context of characteristics of Polish rural areas, with particular emphasis on the social capital of their inhabitants.

Social innovations – definitions and social determinants

Not every innovation can be called social innovation. In terms of the subject criterion, we can identify technological innovations (including product innovations and changes in the process of manufacture), organizational innovations (either connected with technological innovations or not), ecological innovations (defined as changes preventing negative influences on the natural environment) and social ones (Najder-Stefaniak 2010: 14–15).

In the Guide to Social Innovation, the European Commission defines social innovations as: "the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations". It emphasizes that social innovations are a response to challenges related with and resulting from the process of social interactions. Their goal is to improve the quality of life of individuals and communities (Guide to Social Innovation 2013: 6). Davies, Caulier-Grice and Norman propose a similar understanding of innovations, stressing that: "Social innovations as new solutions (products, services, models, markets, processes etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need (more effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and/or better use of assets and resources. Social innovations are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act"[1] (2012: 5). MacCallum and Mehmood, analyzing different definitions of social innovations, observe that they have one thing in common: they all emphasize the importance of the ultimate goal, which is solving (or reducing) social problems (apart from market institutions) on the basis of participation of many social actors, primarily the ones that are affected by the problems (2010: 4).

Social innovations include:

1) "Social demand innovations which respond to social demands that are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions and are directed towards vulnerable groups in society. They have developed new approaches to tackling problems affecting youth, migrants, the elderly, socially excluded etc." (Guide to Social Innovation 2013: 6).

2) "Innovations for society as a whole through the integration of the social, the economic and the environmental" (*ibidem*: 7).

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[1] This understanding of innovation differs from the definitions established in sociology by Merton, and in Polish sociology, by Makarczyk. According to Merton, innovation is one of the possibilities (apart from conformity, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion) of achieving normative social goals. Members of each community can choose from these possibilities and the determined ways of their implementation. Innovative individuals do not behave in accordance with the adopted definitions, yet they also strive to achieve the set goals (Merton 2002: 198). Makarczyk, in his work *Przyswajanie innowacji* (regarded to be the pioneering one), identifies innovations with all cultural values which are treated as new in particular spatial and temporal conditions (1971: 9).

3) "Innovations concentrated on organizational changes of relations between different institutions and their stakeholder groups" (*ibidem*: 6–7).

Literature of the subject describes many examples of social innovations. Most of them are the effect of implementation of projects financed with EU funds. Andersen, Delica and Frandsen describe the effects of a project "From Book Container to Community Centre", during which a local library located in the poorest district of Aarhus, Denmark (with a particularly high percentage of immigrants) was transformed into a resident support centre. The library referred to as "a book container" was given the function of an institution providing immigrant counselling and training services, as well as educational services for children from ethnic minorities. It became the key element of the local network of institutions involved in solving social problems of district residents, including e.g. non-governmental organizations, but also citizens and their informal groups (Andersen, Delica, Frandsen 2010: 76).

Another example of social innovations is described by Millard. In the project "Ageing and New Models for Elderly Care", the so-called Homeshare International Model was applied, involving help for young people, especially students, in finding lodgings with (mostly single) elderly people. The young ones gained relatively cheap accommodation, and the elderly, assistance and new relationships preventing them from social isolation. The project was a response to problems of the ageing society (such as exclusion, social isolation, health conditions making housework difficult) and the young generation (e.g. limiting labour-related migration due to high costs of flat rental) (Millard 2012: 29).

Literature of the subject analyzes among others the determinants of creation and diffusion of social innovations connected with human and social capital (see Pietrasiński 1971: 13). As for the determinants connected with human capital, the traits of individuals which promote the creation and implementation of innovations as well as their diffusion are mentioned most often. Sztompka enumerates individuals' creativity, activity, imagination, orientation at achievements, acquiring knowledge, high sense of autonomy, independence and integrity (2005: 50). According to Hagen, people who have a special potential for creating innovations are those characterised by: 1) curiosity, active attitude towards the world, looking for hidden mechanisms and regularities so as to be able to influence phenomena; 2) the sense of responsibility for the bad sides of the world, accompanied by looking for better solutions and trying to introduce changes; 3) open-minded and tolerant approach to subordinates, positive attitude to originality and innovativeness; 4) creativity, unsatisfied curiosity, positive valuation of what is original and new (Hagen quoted in Sztompka 2005: 225). Such people also have a pioneering attitude to innovations, which – as emphasized by Ratajczak – is manifested in autonomously looking for new solutions not used before, or at least a receptive attitude revealed in positive evaluation of innovations and readiness to follow them. People with low levels of human capital more often have a conservative attitude to innovations, involving an adverse, sceptical approach (1980: 194).

As for the determinants of creation, implementation and diffusion of social innovations connected with social capital, scholars emphasize the importance of various social networks being the basis for cooperation of individual and collective actors based on mutual trust and shared values and social norms for the whole process (Pietrzyk 2000: 51).

English-language devoted to the relations between social capital and innovations refers to the studies of a classic of the concept of social capital, Coleman, who (together with his co-workers) analyzed the diffusion of innovations among doctors. Investigating the prescriptions of new drugs, he found that the doctors who participated in complex social networks were better acquainted with innovations in that regard. They learnt of innovations from other network participants rather than from scientific literature (Coleman et al. 1966).

The analyses of Granovetter and Soong, showing that the predisposition to absorb innovations is a function of behaviours of other network members (1985: 165–179), are also pointed out, along with those by Gladwell, who emphasized the importance of so-called "connectors" within social networks – entities with the number of connections with other participants higher than average – for the innovation process (2000). The homogeneity of a network does not help create social innovations within it. According to Rogers (a supporter of the concept category of "social system"), diffusion of innovations is most effective when quite similar, but not identical, social actors are the participants. Homogeneity greatly limits the variety of resources held by the system, and thus it minimizes its opportunities to initiate social exchanges (2003).

Social innovations are not created without the involvement of citizens, their organizations, and various associations. They are the effect of a social interaction process, including four stages: 1) identification of new/unmet/inadequately met social needs; 2) development of new solutions in response to these social needs; 3) evaluation of the effectiveness of new solutions in meeting social needs; 4) scaling up of effective social innovations (Guide to Social Innovation 2013: 6). The chances for implementation of the social innovation process are related to social participation. Davis, Simon, Partick and Norman explain this relation by pointing out:

1) the goal of social innovations, which is to satisfy social needs, requiring their identification and defining by the stakeholders themselves, as they have the tacit knowledge about these needs, not always shared with others (2012: 5–6);

2) reduction of costs of creation and implementation of innovations, connected with the participation of citizens, target groups of stakeholders interested in eliminating or solving their social problems. According to von Hippel, the participation of innovation recipients in identifying needs, creating an innovation and applying it shortens the transfer chain by the unnecessary engagement of third parties responsible e.g. for the identification of social needs (Hippel 1994: 429–439). Westley is of the opinion that eliminating one of the groups from the

innovation process when it concerns that particular group causes a serious loss for the creation of that innovation (2008);

3) resources generated thanks to social participation connected with tacit knowledge provided by the stakeholders in the process of social creation of innovations. As highlighted by Bason, including a higher number of people in this process allows for creating a whole repertoire of various possibilities, only few of which can be finally chosen (Bason 2010: 8–9).

In another work, Davies and Simon add that the inclusion of citizens in the whole process of social innovations legitimizes it, and thus facilitates the change of their attitudes, opinions and behaviours (2012: 6).

Selected characteristics of social capital of rural communities and the mechanisms of stimulating social innovations in rural areas

In the past and in the presence alike, there were and are many problems providing the basis for creation, implementation and dissemination of social innovations. They give the hope, not only for eliminating or solving the problem, but also for stimulating the resources of social capital (Guide to Social Innovation 2013: 10–11). Moulaert and Nussbaumer underscore that social innovations are particularly important for rural and poorly urbanized areas, where many social problems occur although they are often trivialized or go unnoticed (e.g. famine is less acute in the country because people can always rely on the produce of their own gardens) (2007: 16). On the other hand, some characteristics of rural communities, such as the level and type of their social capital (bonding versus bridging), can "counteract" innovations (see Putnam 2008).

Rural residents display much less trust than town (especially city) residents (Cybulska 2012: 4–5). However, they have greater trust in institutions functioning in the public sphere (such as the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, Caritas, Polish Red Cross, the army, scouting organizations, the Roman Catholic Church, the police, local authorities, the European Union, NATO, courts, newspapers, the government, political parties, the sejm and the senate) (*ibidem*: 15–16). They also put greater trust in their direct environment (closer and farther relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbours, parish priests, and local people who engage in work for the community) (*ibidem*: 9–10). They are ready to work voluntarily for their own environment. They are less willing than city residents to support strangers (Kowalczuk 2012: 2, 6) and less often agree with the opinion that people such as them, co-operating with others, may help those in need or are able to solve some of the problems of their own environment, area, village or town (*ibidem*: 4).

People living in the village declare above-average level of social activity, admitting that in the previous year they worked for their own environment, church, area or village, or for people in need, on a voluntary basis and free of charge. In 2012, 26% of rural residents made such a declaration, in comparison to 22% of those living in towns with up to 20 thousand residents, 17% of those from towns with 20 up to 100 thousand residents, 17% of those from towns with 101 up to 500 thousand residents and only 9% of people from the biggest cities (Hipsz 2012: 13). Social activity of rural residents is mostly informal. As compared with residents of biggest cities, fewer of them belong to formalized organizations or heterogeneous structures.

Hence, the characteristics of social capital of rural residents lead to the conclusion that it is still rather bonding capital with the family-neighbourhood-parish nature. These features, however, are not coherent, so they can be interpreted in various ways. For example, in the opinion of Fedyszak-Radziejowska (analyzing the social capital of rural residents in the "Report on the condition of Polish rural areas of 2012", also drawing on a study carried out by CBOS in 2012), the capital is undergoing a qualitative change and is losing its traditional, family-neighbourhood character. The author even draws the (rather risky) conclusion that: "Social capital of Polish rural areas is a strong side of their residents, especially farmers. Even if new CBOS studies show that it still has a more family-neighbourhood-parish nature than the social capital of wealthy big city residents, working for the sake of friends and occupational environments, its level is relatively high and – what is important – present in citizens' activity in social associations and organizations. The strong side of social capital of rural areas is the high acceptance of norms of cooperation and collaboration connected with religiousness and manifested, among others, in the activity for the benefit of the parish" (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2012: 123).

If we assume the thesis that the social capital of rural residents is closer to bonding than bridging social capital, we must accept that it does not promote social innovations. Neither does perceiving rural residents in terms of traditionalists and people with negative attitudes to social changes. As we can see from CBOS analyses, such an image of people living in Polish villages is still common (Hipsz 2014: 4), and the social mirror into which they look may have a negative impact on their attitudes towards innovations. They have difficulties with defining an innovation (cf. Tuziak 2013) and often do not believe it can be created without the use of huge financial resources (see Zajda 2012). However, Krzysztofek and Szczepański emphasize that: "If the need – and thus acceptance – of change is not well established in the individual and collective awareness, the change will occur slowly, and often be deformed. That is why it is so important to help the main actors and subjects of change – both local and regional communities and individuals – realize the need for that change" (Krzysztofek, Szczepański 2002: 41).

The goal of methods of stimulating social innovations is not only to create concrete actions aimed at eliminating a certain problem but also to activate citizens

to participate in the process, to strengthen their social participation on the basis of social trust and shared norms and values which enhance communitarian attitudes.

An interesting typology of methods of engaging citizens in the process of social innovations (applying techniques used in sociology as study techniques) was proposed by Davies, Simon, Patrick and Norman, who used two criteria: 1) informing about present states vs. future solutions; 2) including few citizens in the process of social innovations vs. including many of them in the process.

Informing about present states refers to the ways in which citizens can be the source of information concerning their current problems, experiences and challenges. This information is necessary for innovations to be created and is fundamental for the execution of the first stage of the process. Social engagement is also important in further stages of implementing innovations: testing prototypes and first-time introduction of certain solutions so as to check their effectiveness.

The future solutions criterion refers to any forms of engagement that make it possible for citizens to shape ideas underlying innovations. The ideas may be new, but they may also be associated with changing the existing order, improvement, or adjusting to the challenges faced. Citizens can create ideas on their own, but they can also help others (so-called innovators) in this regard. Engagement allows to include citizens in the execution of innovations and avoid the problem of learned helplessness (cf. Leadbeater 2009: 2).

The other criterion accounts for the difference between the number of citizens engaged in the process of innovation. Methods which include many of them (the authors do not specify how many) allow to recognize hidden phenomena and potential underlying patterns of action, behaviours and trends. Methods which include few citizens allow to complement this statistical image with qualitative data or to illustrate the problems of small groups.

The two criteria can be used to analyze the methods of civic engagement in the process of innovation with two questions. First, what kind of input do citizens contribute into the innovation process? Does it involve providing information on the present problems, or rather information that allows to create future solutions (exceeding the present perspective)? Second, what is the scale of civic participation in the process of social innovations? Do many of them participate in the process, or are they rather individuals or small groups? (Davis, Simon, Partick, Norman 2012: 17–18).

The methods which include few citizens in the process of providing information necessary for social innovations and pertaining to their present situation are among others: user-led research and citizens mapping needs (*ibidem*: 21–22).

User-led research means research carried out for the purpose of social innovations, designed in cooperation with the actual participants. They are included in each stage of the research process, beginning with the concept, through the formation of the sample, the field stage, data collection, analysis and drawing conclusions (*ibidem*: 27).

Citizens mapping needs – the most popular in this group of methods is so-called RPA – Participatory Rural Appraisal – used in the development of social innovations in Africa and Asia (also called Participatory Learning and Action). Including citizens in the process of social innovations involves encouraging marginalized groups to design their own research on the subject, based on direct communication, visualization, and recording (the methods takes into account the high illiteracy level among the members of those communities). The participants may also serve as guides, showing professional researchers their local communities. Thanks to so-called transect walks, it is also possible to verify information coming from the application of other mapping methods. As part of the study process, maps are created which describe the key elements of the community's life, relations occurring within it, the way of functioning and the social problems (*ibidem*: 23).

The informing about present states methods activating many citizens to participate in the process of creating social innovations include:

Crowdsourcing data platforms – Internet platforms where citizens can express their concerns about social problems that bother them, e.g. FixMyStreet.

Rating platforms – platforms which allow citizens to share their opinions on different public institutions, e.g. health care centres (for example in Great Britain – I Want Great Care, in Poland – RateMyTearchers.com).

The Developing future solutions methods which include few citizens in the process of social innovations are: Co-design, Idea camps, or Positive deviance inquiries.

Co-design – it involves inclusion of citizens in the process of social innovations using a series of theme-based workshops aimed at the development of concrete solutions for clearly defined social problems (*ibidem*: 36).

Idea camps – a kind of away-from-home workshops devoted to social innovations, with participation of the actual groups that need support.

Positive deviance inquiries – a method aimed at pointing out to the stakeholders what social problems there are and developing ways to solve them by following good examples (*ibidem*: 38–39).

Participation in the process of working out Developing future solutions makes many citizens apply methods of participation such as: Idea banks, Competitions, or Large-scale ideation exercises.

Idea banks – banks of ideas, known since 1968. Currently used in Amsterdam, Berlin and Paris as part of the "Open Cities" project. They involve citizens suggesting proposals of solutions to particular social problems to the local authorities.

Competitions – they make it possible to obtain assets for financing one's own ideas for social innovations. For example in 2010, the Rockefeller Foundation, GlobalGiving and InnoCentive announced a competition for innovations concerning water treatment in developing countries. More than 2.200 people took part in it and the main prize was $ 40,000.

Large-scale ideation exercises – methods which involve meetings for large numbers of citizens, devoted to solving social problems. One example of these

is Future City Game, developed by British Council, Centre for Local Economic Strategies and Manchester's Centre of Urban Life. The participants of a meeting (city residents with various socio-demographic characteristics) work in groups to work out ideas underlying social innovations (*ibidem*: 30–34).

The presented methods of activating citizens to participate in the creation and implementation of social innovations were used both in urban and in rural communities. The weakness of some of them, however, is the short time when community members can cooperate: mostly it is participation in a single concrete innovation process, aimed at the development of a particular social problem that affects them.

Selected problems of Polish local action groups preventing activities aimed at social innovations

The method that is used in rural areas of Europe with a view to implementing social innovations and based on long-term interactions between representatives of the local community, including those who are not directly affected by the innovation is LEADER.

The method itself is also considered as innovative and very difficult to implement, because it assumes among others a change of relations between rural residents representing three sectors: public, social and economic (Zajda 2011; Psyk-Piotrowska et al. 2013).

In accordance with the assumptions of LEADER, representatives of those sectors are associated in organizations called local actions groups. In Polish literature of the subject it is emphasized that the relations between them may be difficult, especially in the case of representatives of local authorities (the public sector) and entrepreneurs (the economic sector). Researchers point out that in offices entrepreneurs are treated as intruders, unwanted (demanding) guests, exceptionally pragmatic – only interested in cooperation that can bring them profits, preferably within a short period of time (Kłodziński, Rosner 2000: 150). What is more, local authorities favour some of them, usually establishing contacts with the owners of the largest companies of key importance for local development, or with the entrepreneurs who have already proved useful in cooperation and can co-finance different investments or cultural events (Zajda 2013).

Polish researchers often view negatively the paternalistic system existing between local authorities and the social sector, in which local authorities have a privileged position, thus limiting the autonomy of non-governmental organizations. In addition, they point out that authorities give priority to voluntary fire brigades, sports clubs and farmers' wives' associations, perceiving other organizations as potential bases for new political leaders, namely their rivals (see Herbst 2008a; Herbst 2008b; Śpiewak 2008).

Interactions between entrepreneurs and non-governmental organizations are generally difficult in Polish rural communities. The former, mainly looking for opportunities to sell their products and services in the local community, usually cooperate with NGOs (e.g. by sponsoring their activity) when they can see the possibility to increase their competitiveness. The latter perceive small and medium-sized rural entrepreneurs from the perspective of tough market competition, not as philantropists willing to support local NGOs disinterestedly (Zajda 2013).

Thanks to the LEADER method, these sometimes very difficult relations between the three sectors may be changed, by inviting them to long-term cooperation in local action groups aimed at multifunctional and sustainable rural development. The change of those relations is supposed to strengthen the social capital of representatives of the three sectors involved in their activity, defined as cooperation potential based on social trust and shared norms and values. On the one hand, social interactions not limited to a single project but rather lasting many years can lead to the creation and implementation of the social innovation involving permanent three-sector partnership. On the other hand, they can result in the creation of other social innovations, which would be oriented at solving or eliminating social problems faced by the residents living within the partnership for which the local action group works.

The relationships between members of Polish local action groups were analyzed in the research project "Structure and determinants of social capital of the local action groups", carried out in the years 2011–2013[2].

The case study method was applied in the research. Putnam's perspective of social capital (assuming that it is a system of three mutually determining components: trust, a network of connections among community members based on that trust, and the norms and values determining behaviours in relationships among them) was adopted as the theoretical basis. The object of research was: the trust component of social capital of members (partners) of local action groups, i.e. vertical and horizontal trust they display[3], the component of norms and values shared by those people[4] and the network component (i.e. the cooperation network

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[3] In the case of the trust component, the following variables have been stressed: 1) trust of LAG members to familiar persons (family, neighbours, colleagues from outside LAGs and colleagues from LAGs); 2) social trust of LAG members (belief that the majority of people can be trusted and trust to strange persons encountered in various life situations); 3) trust of LAG members to local institutions and organisations (local authorities, non-governmental organisations, local entrepreneurs).

[4] In the case of the component of norms and values, the following aspects have been analysed: 1) local patriotism of LAG members – their bond with their commune of residence, participation in the last local self-government election, readiness to bear expenses for promotion of local

of members or partners of those organizations[5]). The study covered local action groups from voivodeships with the lowest and highest number of such organizations working in their areas[6].

1500 survey forms were distributed, 586 of them were returned, and 573 surveys from members of 34 out of 59 local action groups to which the request for participation was sent were qualified for further analysis (due to the content, especially numerous cases of lack of data).

The conducted analyses showed that in the investigated LAGs there were phenomena which made it difficult for authentic partnership to develop: relationships which might increase the effectiveness of cooperation of LAG members also for the sake of implementing social innovations.

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culture; 2) values and norms shared by LAG members – due to the character of LAGs, partnership is an important value, understood as an area which is coherent in the aspects of natural environment, economy and culture. Attempts have been made to determine the reasons for membership in an organisation, and whether LAG members (partners) operate for its good or they are more focused on the interest of one specific social group or their personal interests. Moreover, the researchers have analysed the respondents' attitude towards the norm of three-sectoral cooperation (to check if they are convinced that all members of this organisation should cooperate regardless of whether they represent the social, public or economic sector) and the level of their conviction that it is necessary for LAG members to know the LAG operational procedures; 3) socially-involved attitude of the surveyed – their readiness to provide support to other people, willingness to continue their membership in a LAG (work for the common good). The level of sense of subjectivity of the surveyed has also been analysed (understood as a conviction that they have control over their own lives).

[5] In the case of the network component, the following variables have been listed: 1) involvement of LAG members in networks of cooperation for their partnership or commune; 2) participation of the surveyed in LAG works – assessment of their activity in LAG works during implementation of scheme 2 of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme (including assessment of the forms of their activity in a group, frequency of participation in LAG general meetings, flow of information about group meeting among LAG members); 3) sense of LAG members having influence on functioning of the partnership and conviction of the surveyed about the influence of LAG operations on development of the partnership.

[6] The analysis covered the organisations from western voivodeships, i.e. Lubuskie, Opolskie and Zachodniopomorskie (included in the 1st set – voivodeships with the smallest network of LAGs), and from central and southern voivodeships – Wielkopolskie, Małopolskie and Podkarpackie (belonging to the 2nd set – voivodeships with the highest "saturation" of this kind of organisations). Thus, the research was conducted in 6 out of 16 voivodeships. So far, the publications resulted from the analyses conducted in three voivodeships at the most. Thus, it was interesting to determine whether problems of local action groups observed in these regions are shared by such organisations from other parts of the country.

All the groups operating in the selected voivodeships were requested to participate in the survey (59 LAGs). Representatives of slightly more than a half of them agreed (34 LAGs), including 9 out of 14 local action groups of set 1 and 25 out of 45 local action groups from set 2.

The research was conducted as an individual survey (addressed to members, partners of local action groups operating in the selected voivodeships).

These phenomena include municipalization, i.e. colonizing the LAGs by self-governmental authorities that attempted (mostly informally) to dominate their works. An example of this is the authorities influencing the composition of the governing or decision-making body of a local action group by recommending a person associated with local authorities as a representative of the social or economic sector.

Another negative phenomenon which makes the cooperation of three sectors of Polish local action groups difficult is the petrification of their management boards and councils (i.e. the managing and decision-making bodies). For many years work in these organs has been performed by the same persons, most often those who have belonged to the group since the time of implementation of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme (about 3/4 of board members have gained experience related to implementation of the LEADER approach in that very period, the same refers to nearly 3 in 5 council members) (see Zajda 2014: 87).

Local action groups lack organs (units) which would make it possible to include more members (partners) in works of these organisations. These structures are often too large to offer their members any opportunity to be pro-active (and shape in themselves the sense of actual influence on the change of the image of their villages). If there are 150–200 members in a local action group, the board consists of 5–7 members, and the number of councillors does not exceed 20, then the question arises about the space for (more or less) regular work of other members (partners) of such organisations.

Involvement in the works of local action groups is also hindered by their professionalization and economisation. They use the advisory services of so-called experts and companies which specialise in organisation of various projects much more willingly than turn to the village inhabitants, as they are afraid that audit results would otherwise show some irregularities. Such course of action is also encouraged by the fact that the procedures of LEADER approach implementation are described as very complicated (even by board and council members) (see *ibidem*: 88–89).

Problems of local action groups in the aspect of the trust component are mostly related to the trust of members (partners) of these organisations to the representatives of the economic sector and the level of their generalised trust. Those members (partners) of local action groups who belong to the economic sector were trusted only by slightly more that half of their colleagues. Mistrust characterised mainly representatives of the public sector (over 16% of these respondents answered that they do not trust them at all). The largest level of trust to them was declared by representatives of the economic sector (63% of these respondents answered in this way).

Local action groups cope with the problem of relatively low level of generalised trust of their members (partners). Only less than 20% of the surveyed declared a high level of trust to strangers encountered in various life situations, and as many as 34% of them respondent that they do not trust such people at all (see Table 1) (see *ibidem*: 89–92).

Table 1. Social trust – distribution of answers to index questions

Social trust	High		Moderate		No trust	
	number	percentage	number	percentage	number	percentage
Trust to strangers encountered in various life situations (N = 566)	112	19.8	264	46.6	190	33.6
	Yes				No	
Conviction that most people can be trusted (N = 546)	367	67.2	–	–	179	32.8

Source: compilation from the project "Structure and determinants of the social capital of local action groups".

Yet, this is this type of trust (to strangers encountered in various life situations) determines the inclination to enter more diversified social relations and facilitates access to diversified information and taking advantage of them, including economic advantage. The low level of generalised trust reflects not only the low inclination to enter new contacts and form new networks (only the closest colleagues, mostly from one's own sector are trusted), but it also shows how fragile the basis for current cooperation within local action groups is. Actual cooperation in local action groups often takes place within a relatively limited and closed circle of persons who have long-term high functions on decision-making organs of their groups (see *ibidem*: 90–92).

Conclusions

Many social issues cannot be solved with the use of top-down approach, traditional in social policies, among others because of the complexity of problems which do not have a single solution but rather require different solution scenarios depending on many social variables. An intervention is always a form of interaction with stakeholders, which would be impossible without their participation. Thus, for social innovations, whose goal is to eliminate social problems, the resources of social capital are necessary: trust, norms, and values which are supposed to facilitate cooperation.

Social innovations cannot be implemented in every local community. On the one hand, not all of them must develop in an innovative way, and on the other hand, not all have such a possibility due to at least three determinants: social perception of innovations as a process reserved for companies with considerable

financial capital, little human capital resources connected among others with edu-
cation or creativity, and a low level of social capital (limited or low cooperation
skills and will to participate in the innovation process, especially among the target
groups whose problems provide the basis for innovation processes).

The LEADER method is one of the methods of generating innovations
aimed at changing the relations between the three sectors of key importance
for rural development. The high level of social capital represented by the repre-
sentatives of local authorities, entrepreneurs and social organizations, resulting
from participation in local action groups (connected with their mutual trust,
shared norms and values facilitating cooperation and social activity) stimulates
actions taken for the sake of social innovations aimed at solving the problems
of local communities. Their successful implementation strengthens partnership
and social capital resources of persons and entities within those communities.
This change, being introduced into Polish rural areas with the use of the LEADER
method, is treated as an unfinished process whose effectiveness may only be
assessed after more than ten years. It seems that the obstacles to its introduction
are not only the deficits of human or social capital of rural residents, including
people engaged in the work of local action groups, but also bureaucratic pro-
cedures which have transformed these unique non-governmental organizations
(so-called hybrid structures) into new local development agencies whose ef-
fectiveness depends, not on real involvement of rural residents in the process
of social innovations, but rather on correct clearance of costs of operation and
achievement of the assumed results.

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The aim of this publication is to look at the problems of Polish rural areas from the perspective of the young generation of researchers, to show what problems they are interested in and what study methods and techniques they use to describe the phenomena occurring in Polish villages. The results of their studies were also presented to underscore the importance of these phenomena for the development of knowledge concerning the dynamic transformations in Polish rural areas. The Authors represent different fields of study (sociology, ethnography, economy and geography) from renowned academic centres such as University of Lodz, Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences (IRWiR PAN) in Warsaw, Life Science University of Poznan, Technical University in Warsaw, Institute of Urban Development in Krakow, and Maria Grzegorzewska University. What they have in common is interest in the problems of rural areas and their residents. They focus on the new model of rural development, very often identified with concepts such as multifunctional and sustainable development, on social innovation, the subject of transformations in rural residents' social roles, including rural women serving public roles, as well as on the strategies of coping with the reality used by residents of marginalized villages. The articles introduce the Readers to selected problems of development of Polish rural areas and help them to understand their complexity.