SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS SOCIAL INNOVATION IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract. Scientific literature emphasizes that in organization the entrepreneur is often introduced as a change agent (Andersen, 2008). Individual entrepreneurship is very important as a source facilitating the development of some sort of social innovation idea. As Andersen emphasizes, "it is not surprising that the entrepreneur appears as a hero in the innovation discourse and the modernization rhetoric, and to promote this conception, the proverb "None other but the imagination puts limits on what is possible" is repeated over and over again" (Andersen, 2008, p.55).

In Lithuanian context even the basic idea of social entrepreneurship could be considered as innovation. Thus in this paper the analysis of social entrepreneurship is presented in the theoretical framework of diffusion of innovations and the concepts of social innovation and sustainable development.

The more grassroots, spontaneous, creative initiatives, those which seek to change established practices from below, are also the most innovative (Moulaert, Martinelli, Swyngedouw and Gonzalez, 2005) and creative risk-taking. Thus the object of empirical research is grassroots initiatives to create social enterprises that usually are community-owned and have social targets prior to financial ones.

The paper is based upon research conducted for the scientific project "Social innovations and social partnership in rural communities". The project is aimed at the analysis of social innovations and social partnership between market and non-governmental sectors in rural regions. The paper discusses the findings, based on interviews, conducted in 2007 – 2008 and focus group discussions, made in 2009.

The most important social and economic problems in rural areas are: (1) The lack of knowledge; (2) Unemployment; (3) Environmental problems; (4) Low quality of living in rural areas, poverty. It is important to mention that rural residents in Lithuania have big expectations towards infrastructure development, and even bigger than towards social innovations.

According to scientific literature, there are three main ways that are used to stimulate development of social innovation: (1) external actors facilitate development of social innovation (top – down approach); (2) local actors develop the social innovation (bottom – up approach); (3) external actors facilitate a local institutional capacity to be able to mobilize internal resources and develop social innovations (top - down initiatives to facilitate bottom – up activity). As empirical data show, the "bottom – up" perspective and "top - down initiatives to facilitate bottom – up activity" are the most successful strategies for the emergence and development of social innovations in rural communities.

According to the data from expert interviews, several trends (directions) of social innovations that could serve as a tool for restructuring process in rural areas in Lithuania can be identified: (1) New services in rural settlements (like rural tourism, ect.); (2) New education courses for rural people; (3) Ecological farming; (4) Formation of local action groups; (5) Electronic social innovations.


Key words: Social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, social partnership, social innovation, sustainable development, Lithuania, case studies.
Literature:

1. Andersen, O. J. (2008). A Bottom-Up Perspective on Innovations: Mobilizing Knowledge and Social Capital Through Innovative Processes of Bricolage // Administration & Society, Volume 40 Number 1, p.54-78. Online: http://aas.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/40/1/54


