

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

There are differences between definitions of innovation adopted e.g. by economists, sociologists and management scientists and the understanding of the term “innovation” causes many problems [Dargan, Shucksmith 2008:274;Rodin 2014:2]. 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. 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. They are defined as “**the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations**”[Guide to Social Innovation 2013:6]. Regions’ but also larger or smaller territories’ innovation capacities are determined by the entities which form **the system working for innovations, i.e. those that work in this field and are related to other institutions and organizations operating for the same purpose** [Cooke 1992; Terstriep et al. 2015:180]. These entities in rural communes are first of all **territorial self-government, non-governmental organizations (including local action groups) and social economy entities** [see Terstriep et al. 2015:35-49; Zajda 2015]. In literature of the subject, the town (especially metropolitan areas) is presented as the “natural” environment for innovations [Nowakowska 2009:22]. However, although the resources of rural areas limit their possibilities of creating and implementing technological innovations, they still provide the opportunities for creating and carrying out social innovation. English language literature describes many examples of social innovations. In the project “Ageing and New Models for Elderly Care”, the "Homeshare Model" was applied, involving help for young people in finding lodgings with 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 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]. In Polish literature of the subject, the issue of local systems of social innovations **has not been discussed so far**; therefore the **scientific aims of this pioneer research project are: 1.**To analyze the conditions of forming local systems of social innovations in rural areas, **2.** To reconstruct the models of their functioning, and **3.** To identify the results of their activity in terms of solving social problems of rural commune residents. **The research project shall involve field work, including: 1) quantitative research** such as: **a)** survey using the electronic survey and structured interview technique, **b) desktop research, 2) qualitative research** – using the free-form interview technique with a standardized list of items to be found. The research will be carried out in **at least 310 randomly selected rural communes** – there are 1,571 rural communes in Poland, so the size of the representative sample, with estimated fraction of 0.5, was estimated to be no less than 310. The quantitative research will be conducted among representative, randomly selected samples of persons who are employees or members of organizations/institutions potentially belonging to local systems of social innovations and to the greatest extent participate in preparing and implementing projects (including innovative ones) devoted to solving local social problems, namely: **1. workers of rural communal offices** (representatives of at least 310 communes – electronic survey), **2. representatives of NGOs (including LAGs) and members of social cooperatives** – electronic survey or structured interviews with members of at least 930 organizations (310 communes*3 organizations). The proper research will be preceded by a **pilot study** carried out on the sample of approximately 15% of the total number of respondents. **The quantitative desktop research** will cover sources such as: websites of LAGs, the database of the National Network of Rural Areas, Local Data Bank, Polish Inventory of Social Cooperatives, and the resources of the Geographical Information System. The results of this part of the research will be compiled in a quantitative way using **statistical inference**. **The qualitative research** will be carried out with the free-form interview technique using a standardized list of items to be found among a purposively selected sample of **at least 100** workers of communal offices, members of NGOs, including LAG, and members of social cooperatives. who: **1) completed the electronic survey/gave a structured interview, 2) work for (or belong to) an institution/organization forming the local system of innovations which carries out the highest number of innovative projects**. The results will be compiled from the qualitative and quantitative point of view. In the research the concept of social capital by R. Putnam will be used [1995, 2008], as well as the theory of human capital [see Becker 1964; Cahuc, Zylberberg 2004], the theory of attitudes as evaluative dimensions [Bassili 1996; Cacioppo et al. 1997; Costa, McCrae 1992] and the concept of regional innovation system [Dossi et al. 1988; Lundvall 1992; Cooke 1992; Edquist et al. 1997]. Research will have **an interdisciplinary character**. **Sociological perspective will be complemented with a psychological perspective and analysis of socio-economic geography.**