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INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION – COMPETENCE IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL ECONOMY



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Inclusion and Integration - Competences in the Social Economy



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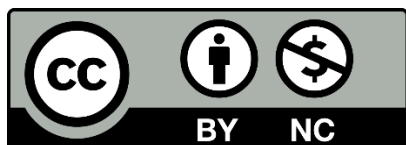
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1. Presentation of the project



Contemporary Europe faces numerous social, economic and demographic challenges that require innovative and comprehensive responses. In this context, the social economy (ES), which combines economic activity with a social mission, is playing an increasingly important role. Founded on the values of solidarity, democracy, participation and social inclusion, this sector is becoming an important element of sustainable development strategies, especially in the local and regional context. The subject of this intellectual work is the development of a comprehensive document containing guidelines for the functioning of the social economy in three partner countries — Poland, Lithuania and Italy. The final result of the activities will be this intellectual work, containing a set of recommendations, models and tools supporting the development of the ES sector in a transnational perspective. The guidelines will be prepared taking into account the existing support systems, legal and organisational specificities of each country, and their main focus will be on educational activities and social impact assessment. This approach will not only enable a better understanding of the mechanisms of the functioning of the ES, but will also contribute to the implementation of more effective and sustainable solutions in the future. The development of guidelines will be preceded by a detailed analysis of the needs and capabilities of individual countries. The starting point will be to identify competence gaps among adults working in the field of social economy, as well as to identify the most important social goals, such as: social inclusion, combating poverty, access to education, housing needs or autonomy of the elderly. These aspects will form the basis for the development of tools that can be effectively adapted to national conditions. An important component of the work will be a list of best practices and solutions used in Italy. This will ensure that the guidelines are not only theoretical, but will be based on real-world experience and proven models of social enterprise governance. During the course of the project, special emphasis will be placed on the educational and training aspect. The planned activities will include the transfer of know-how and the development of training paths

for mentors and social carers, which will contribute to the creation of new professional roles – the so-called "social entrepreneurship facilitators". These people will support the development of the ES sector in the future, especially in communities affected by exclusion or marginalization. An integral part of the intellectual work will also be the identification of potential partnerships between Italian, Lithuanian and Polish social enterprises. These partnerships are aimed at joint initiatives, exchange of experiences and strengthening the position of ES entities at the European level. As a result, it will be possible not only to increase the scale of operation of these organizations, but also to improve their effectiveness and social impact. As a result of the implementation of the activities, a list will be created containing specific tools and solutions that can be implemented in partner countries. The document will also take into account the results of consultations carried out with representatives of the ES sector and experts. The result will be the selection of those tools and practices that have the greatest development potential

and are best suited to local needs and implementation possibilities. The main goal of intellectual work is to democratize access to information and promote equal opportunities in education, knowledge and social participation. The inclusion of disadvantaged groups, increasing the professional competences of employees in the sector and strengthening the institutional capacity of ES organizations are long-term goals that the project aims to support. The activities undertaken as part of the intellectual work are not only to bring concrete results, but also to initiate change processes that will continue even after the end of the project. In conclusion, this intellectual work, which is the end result of the planned activities, will be an important step towards building stronger, better organized and more effective social economy ecosystems in partner countries. Through international cooperation, the exchange of good practices and the joint creation of management tools and models, it will be possible to create a solid foundation for the further development of this sector in Europe.

Project link: <https://filaryrozwoju.eu/projekty/projekt-pt-wlaczenie-i-integracja-kompetencje-w-obszarze-ekonomii-spoecznej/>

1.1. Genesis of the project

1.1.1. Description of the problem addressed by the project

Project on the socio-economic activation of people at risk and socially excluded people grows out of the analysis of contemporary social challenges and demographic developments, which are particularly evident in all countries of the European Union. A key element of this analysis is the awareness of the growing number of people experiencing social exclusion, which requires comprehensive and innovative solutions. The project "Inclusion and Integration – Competences in the Field of Social Economy" was created in response to the growing need for socio-economic activation of people at risk of exclusion at the local and regional level.

The social economy has played an important role in complementing public sector activities by offering services that support dependent and marginalised people. The project is based on the belief that the social economy (ES) plays a key role in the process of building civil society and solving local social problems. Social economy entities (PES) are seen as complementary to the activities of the private and public sectors, offering specific support and services aimed at dependent and at risk of exclusion. Their activities not only provide the necessary services, but also activate them by creating jobs, thus becoming an important element of the local and regional labor market.

The genesis of the project is also related to the evolution of the approach to PES support. The initial support, based mainly on subsidy instruments, was necessary to build this sector and create a group of ES entities, e.g. in the Podlaskie region. However, as ES developed, there was a need to change the emphasis from financing to strengthen the knowledge, competences and skills of people involved in PES.

This need stems from the desire to professionalize and improve the quality of the services provided.

The project aimed to increase the knowledge, competences and qualifications of adults in social economy entities, strengthen the development and innovation potential of these entities and build stable ecosystems supporting the development of PES. The project highlights the crucial importance of education as one of the main factors of social inclusion. Although vocational education is important for equal opportunities, non-vocational adult education is increasingly important in the context of eliminating social, mental, cultural and other, often unconscious barriers. The need for such education is clearly visible in the Podlaskie region, where PES report a growing demand for consulting and training services. In addition, the project recognizes the need to develop soft skills, such as working in a group or dealing with crisis situations, which are becoming increasingly important at the next stages of PES development.

An important aspect was to enable the exchange of experiences, good practices and joint development of solutions for the introduction of new services by PES. The project focused on the selection and subsequent implementation of organizational and technical solutions necessary for the provision of social services in the local community and the progressive digitization of customer service, which will allow for the improvement of management processes and the adaptation of PES offers to changing market conditions.

The genesis of the project is strongly linked to the inspiration coming from practical social economy activities, especially those carried out by the Italian partner. The project aims to use these experiences to encourage adults to actively participate in the socio-economic life of local communities, which is crucial for their social inclusion. The assumption of the project is to systematically acquire, collect and exchange knowledge and experience at the European level regarding the methods and ways of working PES with the external environment.

As part of the project, activities were carried out to identify models of functioning and management of the social economy in the partners and to analyze the functioning

PES support systems in different countries. An important element was to identify potential partnerships of social economy entities in the international arena, which will allow for establishing contacts and jointly developing strategies for the development of ES organizations and PES themselves in the future. Translating good practices of social economy into guidelines and transfer of know-how partners to implement proven solutions and increase operational efficiency. This information was aimed at preparing new professional functions that will in the future, they could act as "facilitators of social entrepreneurship", supporting local ecosystems and strengthening the structure of the social economy through sustainable cross-sectoral cooperation mechanisms and strengthening the position of PES in the local social services market.

An important element was the promotion of a culture of social economy, which contributed to increasing public awareness of its role and benefits. Thanks to cooperation with foreign partners, it has become possible to choose new solutions that do not exist in Poland and Lithuania and expand international cooperation. Further development of the social economy in the Podlaskie Voivodeship can be carried out by improving the quality of PES services, educational support and strengthening their position on the market. The project not only supported the exchange of information and the experience of people dealing with ES, but also created space for past activities that will have an impact on the socio-economic development of the region.

1.1.2. The purpose of the project and its significance

The aim of the project is to develop a comprehensive document containing guidelines supporting the development of the social economy sector in three partner countries: Poland, Lithuania and Italy. The end result will be a set of recommendations, models, tools and implementable solutions that:

- support the development of the social economy in local and transnational terms,

- contribute to improving the professional competences of people working in ES,
- will enable the assessment of the social impact of activities,
- support the creation of new professional roles, such as social entrepreneurship facilitators,
- enable the building of sustainable partnerships between ES entities in Europe.

The importance of the project goes beyond the purely educational aspect – it aims to create conditions for long-term social change, based on solidarity and inclusion. By democratising access to knowledge and tools, the project promotes equal opportunities and supports the construction of stronger, better-organised ES ecosystems.

Justification for the choice of topic and partnership

1.1.3. Justification for the choice of topic and partnership

The topic was chosen in response to the identified real needs of the ES sector in three countries. Poland and Lithuania, despite the dynamic development of this area, are still struggling with systemic problems, such as a low level of social inclusion of activities or limited access to training for employees in the sector. Italy, on the other hand, has advanced ES infrastructure and extensive experience, especially in the field of social cooperatives.

The partnership was built to take advantage of the complementarity of each country's competences. The Italian partner provides proven practices and models, Lithuania brings experience in the development of local ES structures, while Poland coordinates activities in the field of education and implementation of innovative solutions. Such a configuration allows for a more complete approach to the issue and the creation of possible tools to be implemented in different legal and social conditions.

The project "Inclusion and Integration - Competences in the Social Economy" was an initiative aimed at developing a document with guidelines to support the development of the social economy sector in three partner countries: Poland, Lithuania and Italy. Its

key objective was to create a set of practical recommendations, proven models, useful tools and innovative solutions that could be effectively implemented in practice.

The final result of the project contributed to supporting the development of the social economy both at the local and transnational level. Thanks to the information obtained as part of the project activities and the materials obtained from the partners, the professional competences of people active in the ES sector were improved. The project also made it possible to learn about the methods of assessing the social impact of the activities undertaken, which contributed to increased transparency and responsibility of the EC organisation. Importantly, this initiative has supported the creation of new, specialized professional roles, as exemplified by social entrepreneurship facilitators, who play a key role in animating local initiatives. In addition, the project actively promoted and enabled the building of sustainable partnerships between diverse social economy actors across Europe.

The importance of the project went beyond the informational and educational sphere. Its overarching goal was to create a solid foundation, in the form of tools and methods, for long-term social change, based on the values of solidarity and inclusion applied in the EC. By democratizing access to expertise and practical tools, the project actively promoted equal opportunities and supported the construction of stronger and better organised social economy ecosystems in partner countries.

The choice of the project topic was a direct response to the real, recurring identified needs of the ES sector in Poland, Lithuania and Italy. Despite the development of the social economy, Poland and Lithuania still faced significant systemic problems, such as an insufficient level of social integration of the activities undertaken and limited access to specialist training for the sector's staff. Italy, on the other hand, contributed to the project its extensive experience and advanced methodology, organizational experience in the area of ES, especially in the field of functioning of social cooperatives.

The partnership that was established as part of the project was based on the complementarity of the competences of each of the participating countries. The Italian partner shared best practices and effective models of operation, Lithuania brought

valuable experience in the development of local social economy structures, while Poland played the role of coordinator of activities in the field of education and implementation of innovative solutions. Such synergies have allowed for a more complete and comprehensive approach to the complex issues of the ES sector and has contributed to the creation of tools that were potentially feasible to be effectively implemented in a variety of legal and social contexts.

The guidelines, models and tools developed as part of the project will be a source of knowledge and inspiration for existing and potential social economy entities in the region. Access to proven solutions and good practices from Polish, Lithuania and Italy facilitates making informed strategic decisions and effective management of ES organizations. Improving the competences of the sector's staff, which is one of the key results of the project, directly translated into an increase in the professionalism and effectiveness of the activities of the Podlaskie ES organizations. The project contributed to raising awareness of the social economy in the voivodeship. Disseminating information about the opportunities and benefits of operating in this sector can inspire local communities and entrepreneurs to create new social initiatives. Support for the creation of new professional roles, such as social entrepreneurship facilitators, in turn, could strengthen the local ES ecosystem by animating and supporting the emergence of new actors.

The project, by promoting cooperation and building partnerships, will contribute to the integration of the social economy environment in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Establishing contacts with other ES entities created opportunities for the exchange of experiences, joint initiatives and access to new markets. In the long term, a strengthened and better connected ES sector in the region was more resilient to challenges and able to respond more effectively to local social and economic needs.

The project contributes to the development of the social economy in Podlasie by providing knowledge, raising competences, raising awareness and supporting the construction of a stronger, more integrated ecosystem, which in turn could contribute to the emergence of new and efficiently operating social economy entities in the region.

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1. Description of sources of information and research methods

The project was based on a comprehensive research methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative methods and using both secondary and primary data. The aim was to gain in-depth knowledge about the functioning of the social economy (ES) sector in Poland, Lithuania and Italy, to identify needs and develop recommendations tailored to the realities of individual countries.

The following methods were used in the research process:

1. Desk research (analysis of secondary data):

Review of existing reports, literature, market analyses and statistics on the ES sector in partner countries. National documents included and international, scientific publications, reports of government organizations and non-governmental organizations.

2. Statistical analysis:

Quantitative data from reliable sources such as the ISNET Observatory (Italy), the Polish Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship (PFFR) and local data were used with Šalčininkų MDC (Lithuania). These analyses made it possible to assess the scale of ES's activities, demographic trends and development needs.

3. Field research:

In-depth interviews, surveys and focus groups were conducted with representatives of EC actors, experts and stakeholders in each partner country. This allowed us to identify real needs, barriers and success factors.

4. Case studies:

Good practices and effective models of ESP functioning, especially in Italy, were

identified and described. The analysis of these examples allowed us to indicate solutions that can be adapted in Poland and Lithuania.

5. **Expert workshops and consultations:**

Meetings were organized with the participation of practitioners, trainers, decision-makers and industry experts. The aim was to jointly develop guidelines and verify the results of research in a practical and implementation context.

The methodology was based on the **principle of triangulation**, which means combining different data sources and perspectives to produce coherent, in-depth and practical conclusions. International cooperation allowed for a comparison of institutional and legal solutions, increasing the substantive value of the developed recommendations.

1.2. **Rezultaty projektu**

The main outcome of the project will be the development of **the final version of the guidelines for the development of the social economy** in three countries: Poland, Lithuania and Italy. This document will take into account existing support schemes ES, focusing in particular on:

- educational activities,
- assessment of the social impact of ES's activities,
- adaptation of recommendations to the legal, social and institutional context of each country.

The guidelines will be developed based on the real needs reported by stakeholders and on the conclusions of field research and expert consultations. They will be tailored to national circumstances and are practical – ready to be applied in different local contexts.

The results of the activities include:

- **increasing awareness** of the functioning of the power plant among direct and indirect recipients;

- **increasing knowledge** in the field of social economy and its institutional environment;
- **learning and analysing new solutions** in the field of social entrepreneurship and forms of support for ES entities;
- **exchange of experience** on the functioning of the sector in various legal systems;
- **preparation of a summary statement**, which:
 - fills the competence gaps of ES staff;
 - it allows you to understand the organization and image of the ES sector;
 - analyses the interest of stakeholders in the sector;
 - evaluates the effectiveness of existing and planned projects.

Planned intellectual property activities include:

- identification and transfer **of good practices**, methodologies, projects and techniques with high adaptive potential;
- **transfer of know-how** in Poland and Lithuania – enabling the preparation of adults for the role *of facilitators of social entrepreneurship*;
- Identify potential **partnerships between social enterprises** in the three countries;
- indicating the main **social goals**, such as: professional integration, urban regeneration, counteracting educational poverty, autonomy of seniors;
- implementation of tools for **the analysis of the social impact** of implemented projects and activities.

Main elements of the final study:

- analysis of the context and needs in Poland and Lithuania – identification of areas of activity and social goals,
- analysis of best practices from Italy – using data from the ISNET Observatory,

- identification of management models that can be transferred and adapted,
- preparation of training paths and training of trainers and mentors,
- planning implementation activities and international partnerships,
- democratization of access to knowledge about ES – including among groups at risk of social exclusion.

2. Presentation of partner organizations



2.1. Polish Pillars of Development Foundation (PFFR)

The mission of the Polish Pillars of Development Foundation is to initiate, support, implement processes and systems of change by engaging residents in order to build active and strong local communities open to dialogue and agreement. The Foundation was established as a result of the observations and experiences of the founders. It is a response to the reported needs of beneficiaries, participants in projects and activities carried out by founders in various organizations, institutions and companies. We gained experience as practitioners planning and implementing social and development activities. The Foundation is a non-profit organization, sensitive and open to the needs of residents. Our initiatives, projects, programs are addressed to non-governmental organizations, local governments and entrepreneurs, institutions of the business environment, education and training, and:

- creating conditions for the development of the competitiveness of regions;
- increasing efficiency, productivity of the economy, work efficiency;
- supporting the development of capital and human resources;
- activities supporting and supporting the development of social, economic, communities and communities;
- initiating, coordinating and supporting supra-regional, transnational cooperation of regions;
- promoting the long-term socio-economic development of the regions;
- supporting the development of social economy entities as key instruments of professional and social integration of people at risk of social marginalisation;
- promoting social entrepreneurship models that combine economic goals with a social mission;
- encouraging and informing about the possibilities of establishing and developing social enterprises;

- creating space for the development of participatory forms of management and decision-making in the spirit of the social economy;
- building an ecosystem supporting social economy projects providing social services of public interest at the local level

We know the problems of the environments in which we operate. The Foundation serves as a tool that helps to eliminate the problems of our recipients, beneficiaries and partners. PFFR is to create, initiate and support socio-economic development through personal and professional development of residents of rural and urban areas as well as inter-sectoral and intergenerational activities.

In our actions, we are guided by the principles of social economy, recognizing the primacy of social goals over profit maximization. We believe that effective solving of social problems requires the use of economic instruments, while maintaining organizational autonomy

and participatory decision-making processes. Our activities combine civic activity with an entrepreneurial approach, which allows us to create sustainable and effective social solutions.

The main addressees of the Foundation's activities are; adults, young people, local communities, local leaders, rural residents, groups at risk of marginalisation, as well as:

- existing and potential social economy entities: social cooperatives, social enterprises, non-governmental organizations operating in the field of social economy;
- reintegration units such as Occupational Activity Centres, Occupational Therapy Workshops, Social Integration Centres and Clubs;
- people interested in the development of a social enterprise;
- local governments interested in involving social economy entities in the implementation of social services of public utility.

The Foundation's involvement in the area of social economy allows us to effectively combine social activity with elements of entrepreneurship, creating projects with a clear orientation towards a useful social goal. Thanks to this, we are able to implement solutions that not only respond to current social problems, but also build lasting foundations for the sustainable development of local communities. The social

economy is an important element of building social capital in the local dimension, translating into an increase in public services that bind the local community together in relation to its territorial and cultural roots. That is why we actively support the development of social economy as an element of development policy, engaging in educational, advisory and supporting activities of social economy entities.

The Polish Pillars of Development Foundation implements projects aimed at social and economic development, with particular emphasis on the social economy, through:
Professional activation and improvement of qualifications:

- Vouchers for training in the Łomża subregion: The value of over PLN 22 million. Support for adult residents of the Łomża subregion, including low-skilled people, long-term care workers, inactive women, people 50+ and working Ukrainian citizens, through career counselling and training (including digital and green) to improve competences and qualifications.

- Student internships with employers: Implementation of internships and vocational courses for high school students in Łomża, enabling them to gain experience and qualifications in accordance with the needs of local entrepreneurs.

- Poland at home: Support for adult Ukrainian citizens who arrived in Poland after February 24, 2022, in basic skills, including digital and social skills, to facilitate integration and entry into the labour market.

- Digital Competences, Adult Learning of International Cooperation (Erasmus+): Development of digital competences and international cooperation in the NGO sector.

- Comprehensive system for developing competences and skills of adults: Projects worth over PLN 70 million, aimed at matching adult skills to the needs of the regional economy.

- Support for young people in the Łomża Subregion: A project worth over PLN 3.5 million, supporting the professional activation of young people.

- (We have)Skills and Inspirations for Working on the Web!: Support for women in the field of

e-business, remote work and the use of online tools for professional purposes.

Education and Social Development:

- Scientific Events - We Know More and Social and Economic Forum: Popularization of science and promotion of cooperation between science and economy in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.
- A new model of cooperation in the field of prevention of children's postural defects: A project worth almost PLN 60 thousand, concerning health prevention.
- Economics in practice for a teenager: A project developing the knowledge and financial competences of young people.
- Science is an adventure: A project worth PLN 690 thousand, disseminating science among wide social circles.
- Transnational NGO Cooperation (Erasmus+): Development of digital and personal competences of the Foundation's staff and local leaders.
- Creativity in Late Age - Seniotivity (Erasmus+): A project worth almost EUR 220 thousand, focused on the personal development of seniors, building intergenerational dialogue and counteracting stereotypes.
- Re+vita - Revitalisation through Culture (Erasmus+): A project worth almost EUR 300 thousand, supporting local social development, education and rural regeneration through culture and cooperation.
- "How to talk? Promoting information literacy...": Training for representatives of various organisations to develop communication skills and informed citizenship.
- Young. Active. Enterprising: Workshops with students to develop financial competence and entrepreneurship.
- Heroic Land of Łomża - Discovering History and Culture and My History. Poland: Projects cultivating historical memory and promoting local identity.
- Promoting health protection and promotion in the Stawiski Commune: First aid training for residents.

Through the implementation of projects, the Foundation actively supports the social economy, focusing on social integration, professional activation of disadvantaged groups, development of local communities and building human capital, which translates into an increase in prosperity and social cohesion in the region.

The Polish Pillars of Development Foundation wants to continue and expand activities supporting the development of social cooperatives, social enterprises and non-governmental organizations operating in the field of social economy, promoting business, legal, marketing consulting and assistance in obtaining financing. An important element will be to support the creation of new entities in areas where there is a lack of social services or there is a need for professional integration of people at risk of marginalization.

The Foundation wants to work with local governments to involve social economy entities in the delivery of public services, such as educational, cultural, reintegration and environmental services or social tourism, acting as an intermediary and advisor. It will support the emergence of social entrepreneurship models that respond to societal challenges and economic sectors, including the digitalisation of social services, the development of a green social economy and the creation of platforms for cooperation between different sectors.

Building and strengthening ecosystems supporting the social economy, creating a network of cooperation between entities, local governments, business and educational institutions will be aimed at creating an environment conducive to the development and functioning of social economy entities.

The Polish Pillars of Development Foundation helps to implement forms of management and decision-making based on participation, and to support their development in other organizations and local communities, strengthening the involvement of residents. It will conduct educational activities addressed to various social groups, including entrepreneurs, local governments and young people, raising knowledge about the social economy and its role. The continuation and development of international cooperation under programs such as Erasmus+, the European Social Fund Plus will allow for the exchange of experience and the implementation of solutions used in other countries. This may include joint projects with partners from other countries, exchanges of staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, as well as participation in international networks and platforms. Promoting Polish experiences in the social economy on the international arena, can actively promote Polish models and solutions on the international arena,

contributing to the development of the social economy in Europe. The expansion of transnational cooperation in the field of social economy will allow the Polish Pillars of Development Foundation to gain new knowledge, exchange experiences, access innovative solutions and build lasting partnerships, which will translate into even more effective and innovative activities for the development of local communities and the social economy in Poland.

Supporting the professional and social integration of people at risk of marginalization through social economy tools remains an important goal of the Foundation's activities.

Its further development will take into account local needs and building lasting partnerships between different sectors, and experience in the implementation of social economy projects gives the opportunity to effectively implement further initiatives.

2.2. ISNET Association - Italy

2.2.1. History and mission of the organization

Founded in 2007, ISNET was created to respond to the growing demand for support for social enterprises in Italy, a fast-growing sector that plays an increasingly important role in the socio-economic fabric of the country. Since its inception, ISNET has set itself the goal of promoting and facilitating the creation and development of social enterprises, believing that they are an effective response to many contemporary societal challenges.

ISNET's mission is based on the principles of innovation, inclusion and sustainability. The Association strongly believes in the importance of networking between third sector organisations, recognising that cooperation and the exchange of

good practices can have a greater positive impact than individual actions. That is why ISNET works tirelessly to foster relationships and synergies between more than 1300 actors and organizations, promoting a constant and fruitful dialogue.

In a context where social and environmental challenges are constantly evolving, ISNET is committed to fostering innovation in social enterprise business models. Through research, analysis and impact assessments, the association not only provides support to existing organisations, but also aims to identify and promote new opportunities for the sector. This proactive approach is at the heart of ISNET's mission: not only to preserve and strengthen existing organizations, but also to build a future where social enterprises can thrive and actively contribute to collective well-being.

ISNET's vision is an ecosystem where social enterprises are free to operate, innovate and respond effectively to the needs of communities, improving the quality of life for all.

2.2.2. Organisational and management structure

ISNET (Associazione Impresa Sociale) operates on the basis of a transparent organizational structure that ensures efficient management of statutory activities and the implementation of national and international projects. The governance model combines a strategic approach with flexible operational management, enabling effective cooperation with partners representing the public, private and non-governmental sectors.

The Management Board is responsible for setting the directions for the development of the organization and supervising its activities. His tasks include making strategic decisions, approving action plans and representing the organization in contacts with national and international institutions.

Current operations are carried out by a management team responsible for project

coordination, planning activities, resource management and cooperation with partners. The organization uses a project model of work, in which a team consisting of employees and experts with competencies corresponding to the scope of the activities is appointed for each project.

The organizational structure includes areas responsible for conducting research and analysis, preparing and implementing projects, evaluating and measuring social impact, consulting activities and developing cooperation with partners. Individual teams cooperate with each other at all stages of project implementation – from the preparation of the concept and obtaining financing, through the implementation of activities, to monitoring the results and disseminating the results.

An important element of ISNET's activities is a developed network of cooperation involving social enterprises, non-governmental organizations, universities, public administration units and business partners. Thanks to this, the organization can create interdisciplinary project teams and use the experience of different environments in the development of innovative social solutions.

Standard management procedures are used in the implementation of projects, including planning the schedule and budget, monitoring the progress of work, quality control of results and evaluation of the results achieved. A designated coordinator is responsible for each project, who supervises the implementation of activities and cooperation with partners and reporting to funding institutions.

Such an organizational model enables effective management of projects of various scales and ensures high quality of implemented activities, while maintaining flexibility and the ability to respond to the changing needs of partners and project recipients.

2.2.3. Main areas of activity and projects

ISNET operates in several strategic areas, aimed at supporting and developing the social economy through research, social innovation and impact assessment.

The main areas of intervention are:

1- Research: ISNET is involved in the creation of observatories that monitor and analyse opportunities for social enterprises. These include the Entrepreneurship Observatory on Social Impact in Italy, whose 17th edition is the only continuous survey in Italy on the social economy, and the Industry 4.0 Observatory, which examines the impact of innovative technologies on the third sector. Through this research, ISNET is able to provide up-to-date and relevant data, identifying trends and opportunities for social enterprises and contributing to the development of targeted strategies.

In addition to observatories, ISNET conducts ad hoc research on specific topics to support non-profit organizations in a targeted way. These include such analyses as:

- satisfaction surveys of stakeholders and beneficiaries;
- analysis of the organisational climate in order to understand the well-being of work in the third sector;
- Time management analysis to plan and control time to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of third sector organizations.

This research enables nonprofits to better understand their strengths and improve their internal management, increasing the effectiveness of their interventions.

2- Social innovation: ISNET is strongly committed to promoting social

innovation, developing projects that increase local resources and respond to emerging needs, often through the use of Structural and EU funds.

In particular, the association offers support both in the conception phase and in the implementation of innovative projects. She accompanies third sector organisations in project writing, advising on access to finance and operational management. The aim is to promote new models

a social intervention that can be scalable and replicable, offering concrete solutions to complex societal problems.

ISNET stands out for its ability to network, creating synergies between different actors from the public, private and non-profit sectors to ensure that social innovation projects have a lasting and meaningful impact.

3- Social Impact Assessment: Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is one of the central aspects of ISNET's activities. It measures in-depth and scientifically, both evaluative and predictive, using qualitative, quantitative and monetary research techniques (such as SROI | Social Return on Investment Index)¹ how third sector projects and activities can generate change and measurable effects in the communities in which they operate.

ISNET promotes the culture of Social Impact Assessment through animation meetings, seminars, webinars and trainings, both directly and indirectly (promoted by organisations representing the third sector, public and local authorities, public and private entities from other European countries).

ISNET has worked with major organizations such as Leroy Merlin, Loro Piana,

¹ Social return on investment (SROI) is a method of measuring non-financial value in relation to invested resources. It can be used by any entity to assess the impact on stakeholders, determine ways to improve performance, and improve investment performance.

Milan Foundation, and other major players to measure the social impact of their projects and activities in various fields.

Some of the main issues raised in the evaluations are:

- employing people in a particularly disadvantaged situation, promoting integration into the labour market;
- educating children to combat educational poverty and improve opportunities for young people;
- welcoming and integrating migrants to promote social and cultural inclusion;
- social housing to combat housing poverty.

ISNET's impact assessments enable third sector organisations to refine the design of their initiatives, ensuring that they have a positive and measurable impact on the communities they serve.

Finally, ISNET participated in the work on the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy's table for defining guidelines for social impact assessment.

2.2.4. Other experiences in the field of social economy

ISNET has a network of over 1400 third sector organizations, representing one of the largest social enterprise communities in the country. This extensive network allows the association to take a comprehensive and global view of the challenges and opportunities of the third sector, facilitating the exchange of experiences and expertise between the actors involved.

ISNET's role is carried out through active participation in strategic consultation tables with important public and private institutions, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Banca Etica, where the association contributes to defining policies and strategies to promote the social

and solidarity-based economy. With these tables, ISNET can contribute to the development of legislation and guidelines that are conducive to this sector.

ISNET regularly collaborates with prestigious universities, m.in. La Sapienza in Rome, the University of Bologna and the Politecnico in Milan, contributing to scientific research on social economy and participating in interdisciplinary research projects. Through this collaboration, the association fosters social innovation and provides key data and analysis to improve public policies and management practices in the third sector.

Another element that highlights ISNET's commitment to disseminating a culture of social economy is its active participation in the development of articles and research in specialist journals and newspapers such as Welfare Oggi, Impresa Sociale and Avvenire Economia Civile. These editorial contributions help raise public awareness and provide third sector stakeholders with the tools and knowledge to address the challenges of social sustainability and economic impact.

2.3. Special School in Šalčininkai - Lithuania

The Special School in Šalčininkai provides education and upbringing to children and young people with mild, moderate, severe or profound intellectual disabilities.

The facility accommodates students from the Šalčininkai region in the age range from 6 to 21 years of age. In addition to intellectual disability, they often also have a number of other limitations resulting from, e.g. cerebral palsy, genetic syndromes, lack or delay of speech development, ADHD, autism.

The main goal of educating our pupils is their comprehensive development and preparation for everyday life so that they are as resourceful and independent as possible, are able to control their own behaviour and can participate in social life.

Every day we work together for the success of our students and the satisfaction of parents, and the indicator of this is their satisfaction and the prestige of our school in the community.

The priority in our school is to provide the best possible conditions for the comprehensive development of each student to the extent of their abilities.

We are here to support the comprehensive development of a child with moderate, severe and profound mental disabilities, with couplings and autism at all stages of education, and to support their parents and guardians.

The needs of our students are: a sense of subjectivity in the therapy process, support and acceptance, safety, specialist help, an individual educational and therapeutic program, conditions tailored to the needs.

We strive for the comprehensive development of a person with an intellectual disability so that they gain independence according to their individual capabilities and a sense of their own identity and value.

We take care of full integration with the environment through cooperation with

educational institutions and institutions supporting child development, as well as organizations supporting the family socially.

There are three economies in Lithuania to a greater or lesser extent: the liberal economy, the public economy and the social economy. According to a concept established in Europe, the social economy (SE) in Europe works on the basis of education and communication and includes legal forms such as: associations, social enterprises, self-help societies, cooperatives, social funds and other organizations operating according to the principles and values listed below. In addition to the above-mentioned forms of operation of SE organizations, some non-governmental organizations of public benefit can also be classified as tools of SE and operate according to the detailed scheme below:

- the principles of the Charter of Social Economy of the European Association "Social Economy Europ";
- principles of social innovation;
- promoting the values of social (apolitical) democracy.

In countries of the world where the social economy (SE) is not yet fully developed, social business usually helps in its first steps. In this way, a new tradition has been formed in the EU that social entrepreneurship operating in it has also become an integral part of the SE market, trying to serve society in some way. Globally, it is assumed that social entrepreneurship accounts for about 10% on average. SE of each country. Social business is also more closed, i.e. it itself decides what activity will be carried out in the organization and only implements it. Social business also has a closed and internal membership, so external democratic control is necessary.

Social business in Lithuania is regulated by the "Law on the Development of Social Entrepreneurship". The SE market connects social business with SE organizations. The social economy works more through its connections and is collegial in nature. The social economy is characterized by uniting the societies of countries through the pursuit of social objectives, mitigating economic crises and effectively promoting the EU's socio-

economic relations. SE does not sell human resources and their skills, but it enlightens, teaches and prepares society for conscious living. SE governs everything not by capital, but by security, reliability and obtained ratings. Which enterprise was considered a social business in the past, and what is it today? If the pursuit of profit is not the sole and not the main goal of the enterprise, but a means to achieve social ends, then such a company could previously be called part of the SE. A social enterprise company was not established to meet the personal needs of this legal entity, but in order to achieve the set social goals, the profit obtained also had to be used to achieve the set social goals. Now, after Lithuania's accession to the EU, the principles of the Social Economy Charter and the principles of social innovation of the European association SE "Social Economy Europ" are additionally important and encourage respect for the values of social (apolitical) democracy. The social economy operates on completely different principles than the public or liberal market economy. The main principle of the social economy is social responsibility. For this purpose, a register of SE participants is kept in SOCIALTOP.LT. In the social economy, for consumers, this means conscious shopping, exchange, responsible consumption and effective saving, and for companies and organizations it means operating through consumer platforms, as a rule, based on a solidarity-based economic model, social connections and declared goals, enabling their potential competitors to compete freely, ensuring equal conditions for participation of market participants in every economy.

3. Descriptions of the situation of the social economy in selected countries



3.1. General characteristics and situation in Poland

3.1.1. Social economy entities and their role in society

Social economy entities (PES) are organizations that operate with a primary social goal and are not profit-oriented. The following institutions are important:

Non-governmental organizations, i.e. these are associations and foundations that carry out activities for the benefit of the community, without seeking to make a profit.

Social cooperatives, i.e. social cooperatives, are enterprises in which employees are also owners. Their goal is to meet the needs of the community, not to maximize profit.

Non-profit companies, i.e. organizations that conduct business activity, but their profits are not intended for shareholders or owners, but are reinvested for social purposes.

Each of these entities has its own specific characteristics and goals, but they are united by a common idea of acting for the good of society.

It is also worth mentioning such entities as social cooperatives. In Poland, cooperatives have a long tradition, dating back to the nineteenth century. Cooperatives operate in various sectors, such as agriculture (agricultural cooperatives), trade (consumer cooperatives), and housing (housing cooperatives). These are organizations that operate on the principle of democratic management by members who are also their owners.²

² National Cooperative Council. "History of cooperatives in Poland." KRS. Access: [krs.org.pl](http://www.krs.org.pl).

Another creation is associations. Associations in Poland are non-profit organizations that work for specific social, cultural, ecological or educational goals. Associations are very diverse, from small local groups to large organizations with a nationwide reach.³

In addition, it is worth mentioning foundations. Foundations in Poland operate on the basis of assets donated to them by their founders. They focus on achieving social, scientific, cultural or educational goals. Foundations can run a business, but profits must be used for statutory purposes.⁴

Social enterprises: These are companies that combine business goals with a social mission, reinvesting profits in community development, environmental protection or other social goals. Social enterprises in Poland often operate in areas such as care services, vocational rehabilitation or educational activities.⁵

- The role of ES in the economy and society

The social economy plays an important role in job creation, in particular for people at risk of social exclusion, such as people with disabilities, the long-term unemployed and young people entering their professional careers. Thanks to their activities, social economy entities support professional activation and increase the chances of these groups to enter the labour market permanently⁶

Social economy entities also actively support social and professional integration processes. Through the implementation of various social, educational and activation activities,

³ Non-governmental organizations service. "What is an association?" NGO.pl. Access: [ngo.pl](https://poradnik.ngo.pl/stowarzyszenie).

⁴ Act of 6 April 1984 on foundations. Journal of Laws of 1984 No. 21, item 97. Access: [isap.sejm.gov.pl](https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19840210097).

⁵ Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. "Social enterprises." MRiPS. Access: [mrips.gov.pl](https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/przedsiębiorstwa-spoeczne)

⁶ European Commission. "Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Country report: Poland." 2020. Dostęp: [europa.eu](https://ec.europa.eu).

they contribute to reducing exclusion and strengthening the independence of people in a difficult life situation⁷.

Supporting sustainable development is also an important area of social economy activity. Many social enterprises implement initiatives related to environmental protection, responsible use of resources and the development of local communities, contributing to improving the quality of life of both current and future generations⁸.

The social economy also plays an important role in building social capital. By developing cooperation between residents, social organizations, local governments and businesses, it strengthens trust, solidarity and civic engagement. These activities foster the creation of lasting social bonds and increase the capacity of local communities to solve problems together⁹.

3.1.2. Legal conditions, challenges and barriers to development

The development of the social economy in Poland depends on many factors, among which legal conditions, access to financing and the quality of institutional support are of particular importance. Although there has been a development in regulation of this sector in recent years, social economy entities still face numerous difficulties limiting their ability to operate¹⁰.

One of the most frequently indicated problems is limited access to capital. Many organizations base their activities on funds derived from projects or public grants that are of a periodic nature and do not ensure financial stability. Such a financing model makes it difficult to plan development in the long term, as well as to make investments related to business development

⁷ Polish Economic Society. "Social economy as a tool for social inclusion." PTE. Access: pte.pl.

⁸ The Center CSR.PL. "Sustainable Development in the Social Economy." CSR.PL. Access: csr.pl.

⁹ Institute of Public Affairs. "The Role of the Social Economy in Building Social Capital." ISP. Access: isp.org.pl.

¹⁰ European Social Fund. "Challenges of financing the social economy in Poland." ESF. Access: efs.gov.pl.

or increasing employment. An additional problem is the small number of financial instruments tailored to the needs of social enterprises, in particular preferential loans or investment financing¹¹.

The level of knowledge about the social economy is also important. Despite the growing interest in this sector, many people still equate its activities only with social assistance or charities. Limited social awareness translates into less interest in cooperation with social economy entities and insufficient use of their potential by public administration and the private sector.

Regulations governing the functioning of social economy entities are also of significant importance. The applicable legal solutions form the basis for conducting business, but their application is associated with the need to meet many formal requirements. For small organizations with limited human and administrative resources, the responsibilities of record-keeping, project accounting, and reporting are an additional burden and often require the help of external specialists.

The development of the sector is also limited by an insufficiently developed support system. Although there are institutions in Poland offering counselling and training for social economy entities, their offer does not always correspond to the real needs of the organisation. In many regions, there is still a lack of specialist support in the field of management, marketing, obtaining financing or building partnerships. This limits growth opportunities, especially for new start-up organizations¹².

The literature on the subject also draws attention to the difficulties associated with professionalization of the sector. Many social economy entities operate with limited human resources, which makes it difficult to develop managerial competencies and implement modern management methods. At the same time, cooperation between the

¹¹ Polish Agency for Enterprise Development. "Labour Market Barometers." PARP. Access: parp.gov.pl.

¹² Ombudsman for Small and Medium Enterprises. "Report on Bureaucratic Barriers in the Social Economy." RMŚP. Access: rzecznikmsp.gov.pl.

public, private and social sectors still does not fully exploit the potential of cross-sectoral partnerships that could contribute to greater sustainability and the effectiveness of the actions taken.

Removing the indicated barriers requires not only legislative changes, but also consistent strengthening of the support system for social economy entities. It is important to create stable funding mechanisms, develop advisory and training services, and carry out knowledge-sharing activities on social economy and its importance for local development and social inclusion¹³.

ES entities in Poland often face limited access to financing, which makes it difficult for them to grow and scale their business. There is also a lack of appropriate financial instruments dedicated to ES. Society, and sometimes decision-makers, are not always aware of the value and potential of the ES, which leads to insufficient support and low level of recognition of the ES. Complex and sometimes unclear legal provisions can hinder the activities of EC entities, especially those that are small and do not have adequate administrative resources. There is a lack of adequate infrastructure to support the development of ES, such as incubators, mentoring programs or support networks.

¹³ Institute for Enterprise Development. "Support infrastructure for the social economy." IRP. Access: irp.org.pl.

Legal conditions of ES:

The functioning of social economy entities in Poland is regulated by a number of legal acts defining the principles of conducting social activity and economic and economic cooperation, the way in which individual entities are organised and the forms of cooperation with public administration. In recent years, the legal system has been significantly organized by introducing comprehensive regulations concerning the social economy, which has contributed to increasing the transparency of the rules of operation of this sector.

The most important legal act is **the Act of 5 August 2022 on Social Economy** (Journal of Laws of 2024, item 113), which for the first time comprehensively regulated the functioning of the social economy sector in Poland. The Act defines a social economy entity and a social enterprise, indicates the rules for obtaining the status of a social enterprise, and defines the rights and obligations of entities operating in this area. This regulation also introduces solutions aimed at supporting the social and professional reintegration of people at risk of social exclusion and creating sustainable jobs for people in a disadvantaged situation on the labour market.

The Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activities and Volunteering, **which regulates the functioning of non-governmental organizations conducting public benefit activities, also remains an important element of the legal system.** The Act defines the principles of cooperation between public administration and social organisations, the conditions for obtaining the status of a public benefit organisation and the rights and obligations of volunteers. The regulations allow organizations to conduct business activity, provided that the income generated is allocated to the implementation of statutory goals.

A significant role is also played **by the Act of 27 April 2006 on social cooperatives**, which regulates the functioning of one of the most important forms of social enterprises. Its aim

is to support the professional and social activation of people at risk of exclusion by creating jobs and conducting social economic activity. Social cooperatives combine economic activity with the achievement of reintegration goals, thanks to which they are an important element of the social economy system.

The basic legal acts also include **the Act of 6 April 1984. on foundations**, defining the principles of establishing and functioning of foundations. The regulations indicate that the economic activity of a foundation may be conducted only as an auxiliary activity, while the income generated should be allocated to the implementation of statutory objectives of a socially useful nature. In the case of associations, however, the provisions **of the Act of 7 April 1989 – the Law on Associations**, regulating the rules of their establishment, functioning and conducting business activity, apply.

The development of the social economy is also supported by financial instruments provided for in the applicable regulations and national and European programmes. Social economy entities can benefit from subsidies and grants intended for the creation of new jobs, the development of social services, investments and the improvement of employee competences. An important source of funding remains funds from the European Funds for Social Development (FERS), European Funds for Regional Development (FEDR) and programs implemented by local government units.

The support system is complemented by preferential repayable instruments, in particular loans granted on more favourable terms than commercial loans. Publicly funded programmes, implemented m.in with the participation of Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego and financial institutions cooperating with it, enable social enterprises to finance investments, develop their activities and increase employment.

An important mechanism supporting the social economy sector are also solutions enabling cooperation with public administration. The applicable regulations provide for the possibility of entrusting social economy entities with the implementation of public tasks through open tenders, as well as the use of socially responsible public procurement

and social clauses. These instruments make it possible to take into account in procurement procedures not only economic criteria, but also social objectives, such as employing people at risk of social exclusion or supporting the development of local communities.

The current legal regulations create an increasingly coherent system supporting the development of the social economy in Poland. At the same time, the effectiveness of these solutions depends on their practical application, the stability of funding sources and the further development of cooperation between public administration, the non-governmental sector and social enterprises. In this context, it is important not only to improve legal regulations, but also to create conditions conducive to the professionalization of social economy entities and increasing their role in the implementation of public policies.

Regulations governing the activities of the ES.

Act of 5 August 2022 on the Social Economy, - For the first time, the Act comprehensively regulated the rules of operation of the social economy sector, organizing previously dispersed regulations and introducing uniform solutions regarding the organization, support and supervision of social economy entities.

Public Benefit Activities and Volunteering Act: It regulates the activities of non-governmental organizations and volunteering, defining the rules of operation of public benefit organizations that may conduct business activity to a limited extent.¹⁴

Social Cooperatives Act: Special provisions for social cooperatives that combine economic activity with social objectives, enabling the professional activation of people at risk of social exclusion.¹⁵

¹⁴ Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activities and Volunteering. Journal of Laws of 2003 No. 96, item 873. Access: [isap.sejm.gov.pl](https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20030960873).

¹⁵ Act of 27 April 2006 on social cooperatives. Journal of Laws of 2006 No. 94, item 651. Access: [isap.sejm.gov.pl](https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20060940651).

Foundations Act: It regulates the establishment and operation of foundations in Poland, defining the rules for managing the assets of foundations and the purposes for which profits

from business activity may be allocated.¹⁶

- Important legal instruments supporting the ES.

Grants and grants: Government financial programs, such as the Civic Initiatives Fund (FIO), that support the activities and development of ES entities through grants and grants.¹⁷

Preferential loans: Loan schemes with preferential conditions for social enterprises, such as those implemented by Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK).¹⁸

Public-private partnerships: Provisions to enable cooperation between the public sector and ES entities, for example in the provision of public services.¹⁹

¹⁶ Act of 6 April 1984 on foundations. Journal of Laws of 1984 No. 21, item 97. Access: [isap.sejm.gov.pl](https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19840210097).

¹⁷ Civic Initiatives Fund. "Subsidy programs for non-governmental organizations." FIO. Access: fio.gov.pl.

¹⁸ Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego. "Loan programs for social enterprises." BGK. Access: bgk.pl.

¹⁹ Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy. "PPP in the Social Economy Sector." MFPR. Access: [mfpr.gov.pl](https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl).

3.1.3. Practical applications of ES in different sectors

Examples of good ES practices in various sectors:

Agriculture: Agricultural cooperatives that allow small farmers to jointly manage the production, distribution, and sale of products. An example is the Agricultural and Trade Cooperative "Rolnik".²⁰

Social Welfare: Social enterprises providing care services for the elderly, disabled or homeless. An example is the "Barka" Mutual Aid Foundation, which runs numerous projects supporting people at risk of exclusion.²¹

Environmental protection: Foundations and associations dedicated to nature conservation, recycling and environmental education. An example is the "Arka" Foundation, which implements educational programs related to environmental protection.²²

Education and training: Non-profit organizations offering education and training programs for people with difficulties in the labor market. An example is the Association "Working Community of Social Organizations" (WRZOS), which conducts educational and training projects.²³

The impact of ES on solving social problems

Poverty reduction: ES entities contribute to poverty reduction by creating jobs and supporting local initiatives that increase residents' incomes.²⁴

²⁰ Agricultural and Trade Cooperative "Rolnik". "History and Activity." Access: [rolnik.pl](https://www.rolnik.pl).

²¹ Mutual Aid Foundation "Barka". "Activities and projects." Access: [barka.org.pl](https://www.barka.org.pl).

²² "Arka" Foundation. "Ecological projects." Access: [fundacjaarka.pl](https://www.fundacjaarka.pl).

²³ Association "Working Community of Social Organizations" (WRZOS). "Educational projects." Access: [wrzos.org.pl](https://www.wrzos.org.pl).

²⁴ Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. "The Role of the Social Economy in Poverty Reduction." MRiPS. Access: [mrips.gov.pl](https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina).

Social inclusion: ES promotes the integration of marginalized people by supporting their active participation in social and professional life, which contributes to their better functioning in society.²⁵

Sustainability: The activities of ES entities often focus on promoting sustainable practices that contribute to the long-term protection of the environment and the improvement of the quality of life in local communities.²⁶

Building social capital: By promoting cooperation, solidarity and mutual support, ES contributes to building strong, integrated communities, which translates into greater social cohesion and better functioning of local communities.²⁷

3.2. Situation of the social economy in Lithuania

The social economy has a long-standing tradition of development in many countries in Europe and North America. In the countries of the European Union, especially in the countries of Southern Europe, this sector plays an important role in the implementation of social services, professional activation and the development of local communities. Social economy entities are an important part of the European economy, contributing

to job creation, strengthening social cohesion and developing social entrepreneurship. According to the European Commission, the social economy sector accounts for around 8-10% of the European Union's gross domestic product and provides employment for millions of people. In Lithuania, the social economy is developing gradually, and in recent years there has been an increase in the number of social enterprises and organizations implementing activities for social inclusion and professional activation of people at risk of social exclusion.

²⁵ Institute of Public Affairs. "The Role of the Social Economy in Social Inclusion." ISP. Access: isp.org.pl.

²⁶ The Center CSR.PL. "Sustainable Development in the Social Economy." CSR.PL. Access: csr.pl.

²⁷ Institute of Public Affairs. "The Role of the Social Economy in Building Social Capital." ISP. Access: isp.org.pl.

3.2.1. What is the economy, business and social innovation? (Key concepts)

In most European countries, there are three basic sectors of the economy: the private sector, the public sector and the social economy sector. Each of them plays a different role in meeting social and economic needs, and their mutual complementarity is conducive to sustainable socio-economic development.

According to the approach adopted in the European Union, the social economy sector includes organisations engaged in economic or social activities whose primary objective is to achieve social benefits rather than maximising profit. Social economy entities include primarily cooperatives, mutual insurance companies, savings and credit unions, associations, foundations and social enterprises.

Depending on national legal regulations, the social economy sector may also include other non-governmental organizations operating in the public interest, provided that they pursue social objectives, apply democratic management principles, involve stakeholders in the decision-making process and allocate the surpluses generated primarily to the development of statutory activities and the achievement of social goals.

A common feature of social economy entities is that they combine economic activity with the implementation of a social mission. These organizations contribute to the development of local communities, create jobs, activate people at risk of social exclusion and provide services that respond to identified social needs. As a result, the social economy sector is an important element of modern socio-economic systems in European countries. The SE operating tools and how it works are described in more detail below:

- the principles of the Charter for the Social Economy of the European Association "Social Economy Europe";
- the principles of social innovation;
- promoting the values of social (apolitical) democracy.

The social economy is an economic activity involving enterprises and organisations with legal personality, decision-making autonomy and freedom of membership, as well as uniting communities by focusing on a single objective in order to stimulate development where needs arise that neither the state nor the liberal market can satisfy, or even charities. The dominant form of ownership in the social economy is cooperative ownership. The social economy also operates according to its own model of the collaborative economy based on solidarity, diverse consumer platforms and creates its own social innovations.

In the literature, the terms **non-governmental organizations (NGOs)**, **social enterprises** and **social economy** are often used interchangeably, even though they refer to different categories of entities and scopes of activity. The differences relate primarily to the objectives of operation, the method of conducting business activity, management principles and the manner of using the generated financial resources. In the documents of the European Commission, the social economy is defined as a sector comprising organizations

and enterprises whose primary goal is to achieve social benefits, while conducting economic activity in accordance with the principles of social responsibility, participation and reinvestment of the surpluses generated in the implementation of the social mission¹.

In order to organize the basic concepts used in this study, Table 1 presents a comparison of non-governmental organizations, social enterprises and social economy entities, taking into account their definitions, characteristic features and examples functioning in practice.

Table 1. comparison of NGOs in terms of selected features

Category	Definition	Basic Features	Examples
Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)	Organisations created by citizens, independent of public administration, acting primarily to pursue a social or public interest. They may conduct	lack of profit goal, social activity, voluntariness, independence	Foundations, Associations

Category	Definition	Basic Features	Examples
	statutory activity whether paid or unpaid, and in some cases also business activity supporting the achievement of statutory objectives.	from public administration	
Social Enterprise / Social Business	An entity conducting business activity, the primary goal of which is to achieve a positive social impact. The surpluses generated are wholly or mostly allocated to the implementation of the social mission, and the method of management takes into account the participation of stakeholders and social responsibility.	economic activity, social mission, reinvestment of profits, responsible management of	social cooperatives, reintegration enterprises, enterprises employing people at risk of exclusion
Social Economy	A sector that includes organizations and enterprises that combine economic activity with the achievement of social goals. Social economy entities are guided by the principles of solidarity, social responsibility, democratic governance and the priority of achieving social goals over profit maximization.	social and economic activities, cross-sectoral cooperation, reinvestment of surpluses, democratic governance	social enterprises, cooperatives, foundations, associations conducting business activity, mutual insurance companies

Source: Own study based on the European Commission (2021), OECD (2022) and EMES International Research Network (2019).

The European Commission defines the social economy as a sector that includes entities for which the primary goal is to achieve a positive social impact rather than maximizing profit. These organizations run a business, allocate the surpluses generated primarily to the implementation of the social mission, and use participatory management models involving employees, members and other stakeholder groups¹. Social enterprises are part of the social economy sector, while non-governmental organisations can belong to this sector if they operate in accordance with its principles and pursue social objectives.

Non-governmental organizations focus primarily on the implementation of the social mission and public benefit activities, while conducting business activity is complementary and serves to finance statutory goals. Social enterprises, on the other hand, conduct economic activity as a basic tool for achieving social goals, allocating the surpluses generated to the development of the organization and the implementation of the social mission. The social economy, on the other hand, is a broader category that includes a variety of entities operating in accordance with the principles of social responsibility, participatory management and the priority of achieving social goals over profit maximization.

The distinction between these concepts is important both from the perspective of scientific research and the practice of the functioning of the social economy sector. It allows for the proper identification of the roles of individual entities, the scope of their activities

and analyse their impact on socio-economic development. At the same time, it should be emphasized that social enterprises are part of the social economy sector, while non-governmental organizations can be included in this sector provided that they conduct activities in accordance with its basic principles and pursue social goals.

Such an approach is consistent with the definitions adopted by the European Commission, the OECD and the EMES International Research Network and forms the basis for further analyses presented in this study.

3.2.2. New specificities and infrastructure of the social economy market

In each of the other two economies mentioned (liberal and public), there are also enterprises and organizations that can be considered operating in the social economy market – these are enterprises that have decided to participate in it and declare social goals, as well as public sector associations with social goals. Social economy organisations

are subject to the Charter of Principles of the Social Economy of the European Association "Social Economy Europe", while social enterprises participating in this market are not subject to this Charter, they must only act in accordance with the law of the Republic of Lithuania and the rules of this market. The new model of social economy in Lithuania is based on examples of good global practices: Social Economy Round Table (Canada); Draft laws on the social economy (Spain); partly based on the solidarity model of the sharing economy (South America), etc. It should be noted that each of the three economies mentioned above operates actively through its main operating instruments – specialty exchanges. The new social economy that is emerging in Lithuania is now starting to operate through its own innovation in the field of social exchange – a public institution of social exchange. The functioning of the social economy is systemic.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the rebirth of the Lithuanian state, our Public Institution Social Exchange proposed a social innovation "Idea for Lithuania". The public and private sectors are already fully formed and well represented, while the civic sector does not yet have a more clearly defined and leading centre. Our organization proposed to implement this through the social economy. The social economy (SE) is a new, systemically operating economy in which the attention of all three sectors is directed towards highlighting and meeting the social needs of people or communities through social economy networking organizations, social exchange innovation, and social entrepreneurship. Sources: Social Economy, Institute of Social Economy, 2004, Kaunas and Public Institution Social Exchange Innovation (website: socialtop.lt).

The new specificity of the social economy in Lithuania is characterized by a new market infrastructure, characterized by governance based on the principles of social democracy – a feedback loop operating on the principle of a circle in which everyone is accountable to everyone. We must remember that the liberal principle of governance, sometimes called pyramidal, works from top to bottom.

The infrastructure of the social economy is also adapted to function within a single social economy, alongside the liberal (capitalist) economy.

The main tools for the functioning of the market infrastructure of the social economy:

- Institute of Social Economy (SEI – education, registers, forms of activity, Round Table on Social Economy (SEST), etc.);
- Social Exchange (SB – Solidarity Sharing Economic Model (SDEM), Consumer Platform, Social Economy Round Table (SEST);
- Council for the Promotion of Social Economy (SE) (SEST – Social Economy Law, setting social goals, development of the Social Economy market).

According to the globally accepted classification, the social economy (SE) operates through its networks, education and includes the following legal forms: cooperatives, mutual support organizations (mutual societies, credit cooperatives), associations and foundations, social enterprises. Non-governmental organisations working for the public good that have chosen to act publicly in accordance with the Charter of Principles of the Social Economy (SE) of the European Association "Social Economy Europe" below may also be classified as an SE if they have publicly declared the conditions under which they will become entities of an SE. The legal forms of a social enterprise are more typical of business economics. A social enterprise, like other civil society organisations, is characterised by partial rather than direct participation in the social economy, but it has the great advantage of using the market and social economy infrastructure.

The social economy is hugely popular in Europe because of its reliability, the constant connections it nurtures, and the high level of trust it enjoys in many regions. Examples of good practice also irrefutably prove the contribution of participants in the social economy to the process of strengthening civil society. By being closer to citizens, these organisations better understand and respond to societal needs, creating quality jobs. The social economy plays an important role in local and regional development, inviting and involving social partners in strategic dialogue and social responsibility.

In order to conduct strategic dialogue and education on the social economy (SE) operating through the network, the SE infrastructure organizations have additionally planned a "Social Economy Roundtable" (ASES) and appropriate training. Most communication errors from an economic and social perspective result from the lack of basic links between ASES. The social economy model that has begun to function in Lithuania offers society a new way of consciously acting in a socially responsible social market. It is widely accepted that the EU economy is probably the most socially responsible economy in the world. The new model of social economy that has begun to function in Lithuania raises the bar of this advantage in the EU even more.

Requirements of the social economy market?

General requirements for the social economy (SE): the principles of the EU Social Charter, the EU principles on social innovation and respect for the values of social (apolitical) democracy, which put individual choice first. In addition to the requirements mentioned, a market economy of a liberal nature, which wants to expand its market through the social economy, inevitably also requires: the recognition of a single community economy, that is, the social economy; voluntary rules for opening their own market.

What is social innovation?

Social innovation (hereinafter referred to as AI) is new ideas (innovative methods and models, products and social services) that help to meet societal needs, create social connections and contribute to strengthening cooperation between different groups in society. AI is created as a result of the market's inability to respond to specific societal needs, which is why civil society itself takes on the task of delivering them.

The features of SI are:

- 1) open action – knowledge is shared,
- 2) a cross-sectoral and integrated approach to problem solving,

- 3) engaged and empowered citizens/users,
- 4) responding to demand,
- 5) Focus on the individual case – solutions are adapted to local circumstances and individual needs.

In the social economy, innovation is constantly being introduced for the common good. Many of her innovative ideas, such as ethical finance and the fair trade movement, have gone mainstream. The Social Economy Round Table aims to help sectors of the economy jointly solve common problems.

Innovation in social exchange

Social exchange (hereinafter referred to as "SB") is the exchange of social aid and support taking place on the social economy market, according to the "rules of the game" established by society itself for its own good. The SB strives for systemic change through direct actions through the consumer platform and the "Solidarity Sharing Economic Model" (SDEM), using one of the most popular socially responsible solutions – allocating funds to the achievement of social goals. The SB innovation is in fact a completely new, systemic socio-economic approach to the Single Market. It is safe to say that this new Lithuanian innovation has been sought for many years by numerous European countries, the United Nations and even the Vatican.

The social economy is based on the assumption that economic and social activity should serve not only to achieve economic results, but also to improve the quality of life of residents and support people in a difficult situation. Its aim is to create solutions that respond to social needs, in particular in the field of social integration, professional activation, protection of employees' interests, family support and counteracting poverty and social exclusion.

In practice, this means the cooperation of various entities: public administration, non-governmental organizations, social enterprises, trade unions, religious organizations,

aid institutions and local communities. Their joint actions can contribute to addressing socio-economic challenges at local level, strengthening social solidarity and providing more accessible and diverse forms of support.

The social economy, understood in this way, complements the system of public services and market mechanisms, enabling the development of activities based on social responsibility, cooperation and respect for the needs of people and groups in need of special support.

After regaining independence, Lithuania focused its activities on economic transformation and the development of market economy mechanisms. In the following years, the importance of the social economy as an instrument supporting social integration, the development of local communities and the professional activation of people in a disadvantaged situation on the labour market gradually began to be noticed. This process was related both to national reforms and to the adaptation of social policy to the standards in force in the European Union.

In recent years, there has been a systematic development of the social economy sector in Lithuania. New social enterprises, foundations, associations and cooperatives are being established to carry out activities for social integration and the provision of social services. Umbrella organisations and cooperation networks also play an important role, representing the interests of social economy entities, conducting judicial activities and supporting the development of the competences of member organisations.

Despite the progress in the development of the sector, the social economy in Lithuania still faces challenges related to improving the legal framework, increasing public awareness and strengthening cooperation between public administration, NGOs and the private sector. The literature on the subject emphasizes that further development of the social economy requires the creation of stable mechanisms of cross-sectoral cooperation, the development of support systems

for social enterprises and the dissemination of knowledge about their role in socio-economic development.

This approach is in line with the European Union's policy guidelines, which point to the social economy as an important element supporting social cohesion, social innovation and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The experience of Lithuania and other countries shows that GDP growth does not always lead to poverty reduction and automatic solutions to other social problems. To this end, it is necessary to promote the social economy in Lithuania as a suitable social counterweight to the prevailing liberalism.²⁸

In most European countries, the social economy is an important element of the socio-economic system, complementing the activities of the public and private sectors. Its development is based on cooperation between social organizations, public administration, enterprises and local communities. The aim of social economy entities is primarily to meet social needs, strengthen social integration and create sustainable support mechanisms for people and groups in a disadvantaged situation.

The social economy sector includes, but is not limited to, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, associations, social enterprises and other organisations engaged in economic or social activity whose primary objective is to achieve social value. Depending on the national legal conditions, this sector may also include non-governmental organizations conducting public benefit activities and reinvesting the funds developed in the implementation of statutory objectives.

The functioning of social economy entities is based on several basic principles, such as the priority of achieving social goals over profit maximization, responsible

²⁸ Source: Monetary Studies, 2004. Economic theory and practice.
<https://www.lb.lt/uploads/documents/docs/publications/paliulyte.pdf>, R. Paliulytė (VU, 2004), Prof. Paweł Gylys.

management, cooperation with the local environment, stakeholder participation, and allocating the generated surpluses to the development of activities and the implementation of the social mission. Understood in this way, the social economy plays an important role in the development of local communities, job creation, professional activation of people at risk of social exclusion and building partnerships between the public, private and civic sectors.

One of the basic elements of the functioning of social economy entities is social responsibility, understood as striving to balance social, economic and environmental goals. Organizations in this sector operate in a way that takes into account the needs of different stakeholder groups, while maintaining the ability to develop in the long term and respond to changing socio-economic conditions.

Systematic analysis of the results of the actions taken and the use of feedback from beneficiaries, partners and local communities play an important role. This allows for the improvement of the services provided, better adaptation of activities to local needs and increasing the effectiveness of the implemented initiatives.

The development of the social economy is based on cooperation, knowledge exchange and building partnerships between the public, private and civic sectors. Such cooperation fosters a more efficient use of available resources, strengthens the resilience of local communities and facilitates the development of sustainable solutions to identified social problems.

Social responsibility is also reflected in the way individual entities operate. Public administration is responsible for creating conditions conducive to the development of social services and cross-sectoral cooperation. Companies, implementing the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), take into account the impact of their activities on employees, the natural environment and local communities. Non-governmental organizations and social

enterprises, on the other hand, focus on the implementation of the social mission, activation of people at risk of exclusion and strengthening social capital.

Social responsibility understood in this way is one of the pillars of the modern social economy and remains in line with the assumptions of sustainable development and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Its practical implementation is conducive to building lasting partnerships, increasing social cohesion and improving the quality of life of residents.

Modern European economies are based on the coexistence of three basic sectors: the private sector, the public sector and the social economy sector. Each of them performs different functions, but their cooperation is an important element of sustainable socio-economic development. The private sector is primarily responsible for market activity and the development of entrepreneurship, the public sector performs tasks related to the performance of public services and social policy, while the social economy sector focuses on meeting social needs by conducting economic activity subordinated to the implementation of the social mission.

The effectiveness of the functioning of these sectors depends on mutual cooperation and the creation of mechanisms enabling the exchange of information, experience and resources. Cross-sectoral partnerships foster better identification of societal needs, more effective use of available resources and the development of solutions to local social and economic challenges.

In the social economy, particular importance is attached to responsible management, transparency of operations, stakeholder involvement and reinvestment of surpluses generated in the implementation of statutory objectives. This approach makes it possible to combine economic activity with achieving sustainable social effects, contributing to the development of local communities, employment growth and reducing social exclusion.

Cooperation between the public, private and social sectors is currently one of the basic elements of socio-economic development policy

in the European Union countries. Its importance is emphasized in the strategic documents of the European Union, which indicate the social economy as an important instrument supporting social cohesion, social innovation and sustainable development.

Benefits for society resulting from the social economy:

- opens up the social economy (SE) market according to the "rules of the game" set by society itself;
- creates a beneficial opportunity for the three economies of the country to function within one common economy;
- creates new jobs in SE;
- promotes overall equivalence in all three areas: environmental, social and economic;
- increases the economic competitiveness of the country and raises its reputation by raising the socio-economic level;
- reduces the state budget funds allocated to social benefits;
- promotes education and smart growth through social innovation;
- promotes social cohesion;
- reduces social exclusion, inequalities and environmental problems;
- reduces emigration and increases the population;
- and more.

Productivity in SE is measured by comparing the available resources with the results:

- change in employment levels (employment rates);
- poverty reduction (number of people covered);
- increasing quality of life (reducing the number of people living in poverty);
- development of social ties (increase in the sense of community, stable help to those in need, etc.).

Organisations operating in the social economy can best be described by the following criteria:

- They are more effective in a competitive market, contributing to its efficiency, promoting solidarity and strengthening social cohesion.
- Their primary goal is social goals and benefits for society, not generating profit and distributing it to shareholders.
- Most often, their governance model is based on the principles of solidarity and reciprocity, based on democratic voting of all members, where "one person has one vote". The management of such organizations can be entrusted to employees, volunteers, and even individual umbrella organizations, coalitions, and their unifying public councils, which are an integral part of social economy organizations.
- They are flexible and socially innovative (they easily adapt to changing social and economic conditions, use user-friendly platforms or social systems).
- They are based on the principles of civic engagement and active participation, often voluntary.

Social work organizations are part of the social economy. They work to achieve goals that are beneficial to society (social, social or environmental) and are not solely focused on maximizing profit. Such companies often apply innovative principles when developing products and services or organizing their work and production. They often employ people from the most vulnerable groups in society, thus making a significant contribution to increasing social cohesion, creating new jobs and reducing social inequalities.

A social enterprise can operate in various forms, however, it differs from the traditional business model in that its primary mission is to exert social impact and benefit society – reducing or mitigating acute social problems or market failures – rather than maximizing shareholder profits. Therefore, most of the profit

generated is primarily intended for the achievement of social goals, i.e. reinvested in the development of its activities or used for social and charitable purposes.

A socio-business organization must:

- have a financially sustainable and profitable business model that allows them to generate most (or at least 50%) of their income through commercial activities;
- use innovative solutions (it does not have to be a completely new idea, but at least new in a given field, sector, geographical area, target group, etc.), social innovation or best practices in the development and sale of products or services;
- reinvest most of the profits generated in the development of social entrepreneurship or allocate them to solving social problems in order to increase the impact on society;
- clearly define the social or environmental mission in statutory documents and be able to justify its benefits to society;
- not to pay dividends to investors or shareholders, as its purpose is not to increase the shareholders' capital, but to enable the investor to recover the original investment;
- Provide employees with the opportunity to receive competitive, market-based remuneration and create better working conditions than in an average, traditional for-profit company;
- use open and transparent management methods, involving employees, shareholders and volunteers of the organization in making important decisions;
- to act in harmony with the environment and ensure that resources are used efficiently without harming it.

Despite the very wide range of activities of social enterprises, most of these types of organizations in the European Union operate in three areas:

- Labour market integration (training for the unemployed and reintegration into the labour market)

- Personal services (e.g. childcare, services for seniors, "remote" services, assistance to socially excluded people, etc.)
- development of socially excluded areas (e.g. social enterprises in very remote rural areas, development of housing/rehabilitation programmes in rural areas, etc.)

Benefits for society resulting from social activities

- creates new, long-term jobs;
- promotes a more sustainable business;
- increases the economic competitiveness of the country;
- reduces the state budget funds allocated to social benefits;
- promotes smart growth through social innovation;
- promotes social cohesion;
- reduces social exclusion, inequalities and environmental problems.

What is social innovation?

Social innovation is the development of new social ideas, the transfer and implementation of proven innovative methods and practices from other sectors (products, services, mechanisms) to meet social needs, solve long-standing social and environmental problems, and create new social connections and cooperation. The result of social innovation is the discovery of modern (new), often unconventional solutions. The spread of these innovations was caused by the development of information technologies and the changing balance of influences in favor of the individual (user). This is a principle that can be applied when creating a social enterprise or solving a selected problem.

Who is a social entrepreneur?

A representative of any profession can become a social entrepreneur if they are ambitious and persistent, want to solve an important social problem, and are able to discover and propose new ideas for implementing change on a large scale.

Instead of leaving the solution of social problems to the state, a social entrepreneur is able to recognize society's demand for certain services or products, understand what is not working, and solve the problem by using his knowledge, energy and ideas, as well as applying business principles to change the system or solve the problem.

The best social entrepreneurs are excellent talent hunters and living examples of how people who can turn their ideas into practical work and achieve results can achieve anything.

Social enterprises are organizations whose mission is to find creative and entrepreneurial solutions to society's biggest problems.

Social enterprises not only generate profit, but also solve the problems of poverty, lack of educational opportunities, unemployment, public health, and more.

What is the social economy?

Today's economy encompasses three distinct areas: the private sector, the public sector, and the social economy. The social economy is made up of foundations, non-profit organizations, cooperatives, associations and other groups of active citizens and volunteers whose goal is to serve society and transform it socially and economically.

Organisations operating in the social economy can best be described by the following criteria:

- They contribute to more effective competition in the market, promote solidarity and strengthen social cohesion.
- Their primary goal is not to generate profit and distribute it to shareholders, but to pursue goals that are beneficial to society.
- They are flexible and innovative (they easily adapt to changing social and economic conditions).
- They are based on the principles of active (and often voluntary) participation and involvement.

Most often, their model of governance is based on the principles of solidarity and reciprocity, based on the democratic vote of all members, where "one person has one vote". Often, the boards of directors of such organizations do not enjoy the trust of investors, but also employees, customers and even volunteers, who are an integral part of social economy organizations.

EU statistics:

- The social economy accounts for 10%. GDP of the entire European economy.
- The social economy employs more than 11 million workers, or 4.5%. of all employees.

What is social entrepreneurship and what distinguishes it?

The modern social economy includes various forms of conducting business, the common denominator of which is the combination of economic activity with the achievement of social goals. Among them, social business, also referred to in the literature as a social enterprise or social entrepreneurship, occupies a special place. Regardless of the terminology used, all these terms refer to organizations that use market mechanisms to solve social problems and improve the quality of life of residents.

The development of this business model is a response to the changing needs of society and the limited effectiveness of traditional social policy instruments. In many European countries, social enterprises have taken over some of the tasks previously carried out exclusively by public administrations or charities. At the same time, while running a business, they build their own financial stability and increase their independence from external sources of financing.

Social work organizations are part of the social economy. They work to achieve goals that are beneficial to society (social, social or environmental) and are not solely focused on maximizing profit. Such companies often apply innovative principles when developing products and services or organizing their work and production. They often employ people from the most vulnerable groups in society, thus making a significant

contribution to increasing social cohesion, creating new jobs and reducing social inequalities.

Social business is based on the assumption that economic activity can be used as a tool to achieve social goals. Selling products or services allows an organization to fund its mission, create jobs, and develop activities aimed at individuals and groups in need of support. The revenue generated is not an end in itself. They are primarily used to maintain the organization, improve the quality of services provided and expand the scope of business.

This approach distinguishes a social enterprise from a classic commercial company, whose primary task is to maximize the profit of the owners. It also distinguishes them from many non-governmental organizations that operate almost exclusively through public funds or donations. A social enterprise operates on the market, competing with the quality of its products or services, but the financial resources generated are primarily used to achieve statutory goals.

A socio-business organization must:

- have a financially sustainable and profitable business model that allows them to generate most (or at least 50%) of their income through commercial activities;
- use innovative solutions (it does not have to be a completely new idea, but at least new in a given field, sector, geographical area, target group, etc.), social innovation or best practices in the development and sale of products or services;
- reinvest most of the profits generated in the development of social entrepreneurship or allocate them to solving social problems in order to increase the impact on society;
- clearly define the social or environmental mission in statutory documents and be able to justify its benefits to society;
- not to pay dividends to investors or shareholders, as its purpose is not to increase the shareholders' capital, but to enable the investor to recover the original investment;

- Provide employees with the opportunity to receive competitive, market-based remuneration and create better working conditions than in an average, traditional for-profit company;
- use open and transparent management methods, involving employees, shareholders and volunteers of the organization in making important decisions;
- to act in harmony with the environment and ensure that resources are used efficiently without harming it.

Despite the very wide range of activities of social enterprises, most of these types of organizations in the European Union operate in three areas:

- Labour market integration (training for the unemployed and reintegration into the labour market)
- Personal services (e.g. childcare, services for seniors, "remote" services, assistance to socially excluded people, etc.)
- development of socially excluded areas (e.g. social enterprises in very remote rural areas, development of housing/rehabilitation programmes in rural areas, etc.)

Benefits for society resulting from social activities

- creates new, long-term jobs;
- promotes a more sustainable business;
- increases the economic competitiveness of the country;
- reduces the state budget funds allocated to social benefits;
- promotes smart growth through social innovation;
- promotes social cohesion;
- reduces social distancing

The analysis of the organizations visited during study visits to Poland, Lithuania and Italy allows us to indicate several common features, independent of the country or legal form of the organization.

The first is clearly defined **Social mission**. All the analyzed entities were created to respond to specific social needs. Depending on the nature of the organization, these were activities related to the professional activation of people at risk of social exclusion, family support, assistance to people with disability, mental health protection of children and young people or the development of social services. Examples of Lithuanian organizations such as **First pancake, Children's Line, Red noses** or **Caritas Lithuania**, as well as Italian social cooperatives **Our Lady of Charity** i **Osteria Povero Diavolo**, show that economic activity remains subordinated to the pursuit of clearly defined social objectives.

The second distinguishing feature is running an economic activity. Organizations offer services or products that respond to real market needs, thanks to which they obtain revenues that allow them to finance their current operations. This solution increases the financial independence of the organization and reduces dependence on grants or short-term projects.

Another feature is the way in which the financial surpluses are used. In social enterprises, profit is not paid to the owners, but is used for the development of the organization, the creation of new jobs, investments in infrastructure and expanding the range of services provided. Such a mechanism strengthens the durability of the organization and increases the scale of its impact.

Social enterprises are also distinguished by the way they are managed. In many cases, decisions are made with the participation of employees, volunteers or representatives of the local community. This model is conducive to greater involvement of the participants of the organization, building responsibility for jointly implemented activities and better recognition of the needs of beneficiaries.

Social enterprises are increasingly acting as local development animators. Their activities are not limited to the provision of services. Organizations initiate cooperation with local governments, schools, entrepreneurs and non-governmental organizations, involving various environments in solving social problems. The partnerships created in

this way increase the effectiveness of the actions taken and promote better use of local resources.

During the study visits, this was particularly evident in Italy, where social enterprises are an integral part of the local social service system. They cooperate with public administration, church organizations, universities and the private sector, jointly implementing projects that serve the residents. Similar solutions are also being developed in Poland and Lithuania, although the scale of cross-sectoral cooperation varies.

The development of social enterprises affects not only the improvement of the situation of people benefiting from their support, but also the functioning of entire local communities. Job creation, development of social services, activation of residents and strengthening cooperation between public institutions and civic organizations are conducive to building local social capital. Social enterprises become partners of local governments in the implementation of public tasks, while maintaining great flexibility and the ability to respond quickly to emerging needs.

The experience gained during the implementation of the Erasmus+ project indicates that the sustainable development of social business requires a properly organized support system. It includes access to advice, training, funding, partnership-building and tools to evaluate the results of activities. Particularly important is the development of competences of people managing organizations and systematic monitoring of the achieved social effects.

3.2.3. Examples of successful initiatives in Lithuania (m.in. First Pancake, Valley of Innovators, Social Taxi, Dignified Home)

Examples of successful and functioning social enterprises in Lithuania:

FIRST PANCAKE

"Pirmas blynas" is a social restaurant serving pancakes, where people with disabilities work. Everyone who comes here is greeted with a smile. The menu of the "Pirmo blyno" restaurant includes large and filling sweet and salty pancakes, one of which will satisfy the hunger of even the hungriest guest. The "First Pancake" is waiting for you and guarantees good mood and delicious food!

VALLEY OF INNOVATORS

The Valley of Innovators is a place where you can feel here and now. The new vision is a combination of powerful stories, unparalleled natural beauty, inspiring ideas and new experiences.

CITY LABORATORY

A group of enterprising people who create a modern and environmentally friendly social education center - the "Urban Laboratory" in Sapiehajski Park, in the Antokol microdistrict of Vilnius. Here, green initiatives and practices are "nurtured" and presented, which every city dweller can easily implement in their busy lives.

Inspired by examples of the ecological culture of Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Berlin, they try to bring them to our community and educate them about sustainable lifestyles, environmental protection and energy resources and modern urban gardening.

The members of the organization are united by common ideas – environmental protection, efficient use of energy, creating a sustainable society, etc.

SOCIAL TAXI

A social taxi is a unique service that helps to organize rides for people with mobility disabilities to places of economic and social employment (work, various organizations, hospital, university, cinema, theater, shop, meeting, etc.).

A DIGNIFIED HOME

Decent Homes aims to provide lonely and poor seniors with a dignified old age physically, mentally and financially, by helping them settle into self-sufficient, supportive families.

NEST FOR A CHILD

Baby set with high-quality, environmentally friendly and child-friendly products. What's more, by buying it, you will give a bit of peace, comfort and warmth to those who are currently unable to provide comfortable conditions for raising a child on their own.

The "All Newborns Are Equal" campaign has evolved into a social endeavor whereby you donate a second basic set to a socially at-risk mother for every purchase of a "Baby Nest" set. Children deserve to start their lives with everything they need, regardless of what family they were born into.

CREATIVE WORKSHOP "CREATIVE ANGLE 360°"

Creative Corner 360° is a social initiative that advances the ideas of sustainable consumption and secondary design and aims to create a safer and healthier environment. They carry out educational activities through creativity, organizing various types of events and activities. The main topic of the class is secondary design, i.e. they learn to give objects a second life by making them from secondary raw materials or production waste.

3.2.4. Situation, challenges and barriers for social enterprises in Lithuania

Situation of social enterprises in Lithuania

Social enterprises in Lithuania are becoming increasingly popular due to their potential to effectively address sensitive social problems related to high levels of poverty and social exclusion,

as well as the limited participation of certain social groups in the labour market. By combining social objectives with economic value creation, social enterprises can indeed contribute to economic growth by significantly improving the at the same time, the well-being of people [3]. However, social enterprises often face obstacles that prevent them from scaling up and expanding.

Several challenges faced by social enterprises in Lithuania can be highlighted:

1. In Lithuania, there is still no legalized status of a social enterprise. This means that there are no regulations for this business model, and there is no way to tell if a business is truly social and if it is achieving its social mission goals.
2. Lack of financial instruments for social enterprises. In the case of national programmes or European Union funds, knowledge of the project and proof that specific results will be achieved is required.
3. A negative attitude towards social enterprises still persists in society. In addition, negative perceptions of social enterprises often stem from the legacy of the experience of the Soviet Union.

3.3. The situation of the social economy in Italy

3.3.1. Legal framework and supporting legislation

Italy has a unique regulatory framework at international level with regard to the social economy²⁹. This framework is based on two main pillars: cooperative legislation and the Third Sector Code.

1- Cooperative legislation:

²⁹ Polidori S., Lori M. (2023), Social Enterprises: Social Economy Organizations in Territorial and Community Development, Rome, Inapp, WP, 102 <<https://oa.inapp.org/xmlui/handle/20.500.12916/3895>>

One of the foundations of Italian legislation in the field of social economy is Law 381/1991³⁰, which established and regulated social cooperatives. These organisations were created to achieve social goals and to work for disadvantaged groups through job placement and the management of social, health and educational services. Social cooperatives are one of the most consolidated models of social economy in Italy, and with the introduction of the third sector reform, they have been recognized by law as social enterprises.

2- Third Sector Code

In 2017, Italy introduced Legislative Decree 117/2017³¹, known as the Third Sector Code, which created a uniform regulatory framework for all non-profit organizations operating in the social economy. This Code replaced the previously fragmented system, providing greater coherence and transparency to the sector

.

The Code clearly defines which organisations are part of the third sector and lays down rules governing their activities, from administrative and tax management to governance.

Among the entities included are voluntary organizations (ODVs), social promotion associations (APS), philanthropic organizations, association networks, and mutual aid societies.

At the heart of Italian social economy legislation is the social enterprise, a legal form that allows private entities and businesses to carry out activities for civic, solidarity and socially useful purposes, on a non-profit-making basis, which constitutes an activity

³⁰ For more information, see Law No 381 of 8 November 1991, Disciplina delle cooperative sociali (<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1991/12/03/091G0410/sg>)

³¹ For more information, see Legislative Decree 117/2017 (<https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:decreto.legislativo:2017-07-03;117!vig=>)

in the general interest.

Activities considered to be in the general interest are:

- social interventions and services;
- healthcare interventions and services;
- health and social services;
- VET education and training activities;
- interventions and services aimed at protecting and improving the state of the natural environment and the careful and rational use of natural resources, with the exception of the usual activity of collecting and recycling municipal, special and hazardous waste;
- interventions aimed at protecting and improving the state of cultural heritage and landscape;
- education at undergraduate and postgraduate studies;
- scientific research of particular social importance;
- organising and managing cultural, artistic or recreational activities of social importance, including activities, including publication, promotion and dissemination of the culture and practice of volunteering and activities of general interest, referred to in this Article;
- social broadcasting;
- organizing and managing tourism activities of social, cultural or religious importance;
- out-of-school training to prevent early school leaving and achieve educational and training success, prevent bullying and combat educational poverty;
- instrumental services to social enterprises or other third sector entities;
- development cooperation;
- commercial, production, educational and informational, promotional,

representative, licensing of certification marks, carried out within or for the benefit of fair trade chains;

- services aimed at the integration or reintegration into the labour market of workers and particularly disadvantaged people;
- social housing and any other temporary residence activities aimed at meeting social, health, cultural, educational or employment-related needs;
- humane reception and social inclusion of migrants;
- microcredit;
- social farming;
- organization and conduct of amateur sports activities;
- revitalization of unused public property or property confiscated as a result of organized crime.

In addition, Legislative Decree 112/2017 provides that all social cooperatives automatically obtain the status of a social enterprise, without the need to amend their statutes, and can register in a special section of the commercial register.

A social enterprise must adopt responsible and transparent management, actively involving employees, users and other stakeholders, promoting a participatory management model.

Legislation supporting the social economy

The Italian legal framework also offers a number of legal instruments to support the development of the social economy. For example, the Single National Third Sector Registry (RUNTS) facilitates the administrative governance and transparency of organizations by providing them with access to tax incentives and economic benefits to do business.³²

³² Polidori S., Lori M. (2023), Social Enterprises: Social Economy Organizations in Territorial and Community Development, Rome, Inapp, WP, 102 <<https://oa.inapp.org/xmlui/handle/20.500.12916/3895>>

In addition, Italian law allows social enterprises and cooperatives to access public and EU funds to develop innovative projects and to support initiatives that promote employment and combat educational and social poverty.

With this robust regulatory apparatus, Italy is an international benchmark in the field of social economy. The combination of specific provisions on social cooperatives and a unified code for the third sector makes the Italian social economy a highly regulated and innovative sector, capable of responding to the needs of a developing society.

3.3.2. Main types of ES institutions (Social cooperatives, Associations, Foundations, Mutual Aid Societies, NGOs)

In Italy, the social economy is made up of different entities operating in different sectors to promote social and economic well-being.

The main types of social economy entities are:

SOCIAL COOPERATIVES

Social cooperatives in Italy are non-profit enterprises that aim to meet collective needs and pursue social goals such as community integration and prosperity. These organizations are regulated by Law No 381/1991, which distinguishes between 3 types of cooperatives:

- Type A: Type A cooperatives are oriented towards the management of social, health, educational, and training services. For example, they provide assistance to the elderly, disabled or disadvantaged through day care centres, nursing homes and family homes. They are also active in the education sector, combating phenomena such as early school leaving and supporting vocational training.

- Type B: Type B cooperatives aim to create employment opportunities for disadvantaged people, including people with physical and mental disabilities, people experiencing social or economic difficulties, and other vulnerable groups. They engage in various types of productive activities (agricultural, industrial, commercial, and service), aimed at incorporating the workforce of these categories of people.
- Mixed cooperatives: Mixed cooperatives (type A+B) are cooperatives in which both social and health services (type A) and professional integration (type B) coexist in order to offer a wider range of services and respond more effectively to the needs of the community.

Social cooperatives are one of the most dynamic and essential elements of the Italian social welfare system and social economy. These companies, with more than 15,000 active cooperatives, take care of 12% of the Italian population, exerting a significant impact in the fields of health, work, education and social assistance³³. Over the past five years, social cooperatives have created more than 50,000 new jobs and employ around 480,000 workers, more than 50% of whom are women. Around 78,000 disadvantaged people are employed in cooperatives.

With the introduction of the Single National Register of the Third Sector (RUNTS), social cooperatives account for around 90 percent of registered social enterprises, further consolidating their dominant role in the Italian social economy.

ASSOCIATIONS

Associations are non-profit organisations made up of individuals or entities pursuing common goals, often related to social, cultural, environmental or sporting issues. Their management is democratic, and members actively participate in decision-making by the general meeting, where each member has the right to vote regardless of

³³ Life (2021) From social cooperatives welfare for 12% of Italians. Life. [https:// www.vita.it/dalle-cooperative- social welfare for 12-Italians/](https://www.vita.it/dalle-cooperative-social-welfare-for-12-Italians/)

membership fee. These organizations can have different goals:

- Voluntary associations: offer assistance to vulnerable people such as the elderly, the disabled and families in need, often engaging in health and social support activities. They are a fundamental pillar of Italian prosperity.
- Cultural associations: promote artistic, educational and recreational activities by organizing cultural events and events aimed at supporting civic activity and personal development.
- Sports Associations: They promote social inclusion and health through sport, leading amateur teams, and promoting sporting events at local and national levels.
- Social Promotion Associations: These are oriented towards promoting socially useful activities for members or third parties, on a non-profit basis. They can organize cultural, recreational, sports, educational, environmental activities, etc. to improve quality of life and promote social cohesion.

Social promotion associations, unlike other associations, enjoy special privileges and have access to certain public funds.

Associations are a key element of the third sector in Italy, contributing not only to improving the quality of life through basic services, but also to promoting social cohesion and community development.

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS (VPO)

Voluntary organisations (VOs) are third sector entities regulated by the Third Sector Code (Legislative Decree 117/2017), originally introduced by Law 266/1991. These organisations, usually set up as associations, carry out activities in the general interest, mainly for the benefit of third parties, mainly using the voluntary work of their members. Their aim is to respond to specific social and economic needs through free and unpaid contributions from volunteers.

Unlike voluntary associations, which are a more general concept and not always structured, VOs must meet special legal requirements to be officially recognized. Voluntary organisations offer essential support in various fields, including health, social and psychological care, contributing to social cohesion and the development of solidarity

networks.

Teachers play a key role in Italian society, contributing to the well-being of the community through various channels:

- Non-medical organizations provide essential services to vulnerable people, such as the elderly, the disabled, and families in financial difficulty.
- They create solidarity networks that foster social inclusion, involving people from different age groups and backgrounds.
- They promote awareness-raising campaigns on issues such as the environment, human rights and public health.
- Teachers work with public institutions to fill gaps in services offered by the state, increasing the efficiency of the social welfare system.

Voluntary organisations are therefore an important pillar of the third sector, contributing to building a more inclusive and supportive society.

Foundations are entities governed by private law that have assets intended for the pursuit of public interest objectives, such as scientific research, social assistance or the promotion of culture. Unlike associations, foundations have a more stable and permanent structure, and the management of their assets is entrusted to the board of directors rather than the assembly of members.

Due to the way it operates and the implementation of statutory objectives, several basic types of foundations can be distinguished:

Cultural Foundations: Support the promotion and protection of artistic and cultural heritage by funding museums, exhibitions, and educational projects.

Scientific foundation: They contribute to research and innovation by investing in projects related to health, science and technology.

Social foundations: They operate locally to support the economic and social development of specific territories, often supporting social and employment initiatives.

Foundations, through their ability to generate and manage financial resources, play a key role in supporting long-term projects and contributing to scientific, cultural, and

social progress.

MUTUAL AID SOCIETIES (SOMS)

The Società di Mutuo Soccorso (SOMS) is one of the oldest forms of social economy in Italy, founded in the nineteenth century to offer economic and social support to workers in difficult times. Based on the principle of reciprocity, these non-profit organizations require members to make a periodic contribution to a common fund that can be used when needed, such as illness, accidents, or other economic emergencies.

Regulated by Law No. 3818/1886, the SOMS played a fundamental role in the construction of the Italian social welfare system before modern forms of social security and assistance were introduced. Although their role has been partially reduced with the advent of state services, they are still relevant in various sectors, in particular in complementary social security and healthcare.

The main functions of SOMS are:

- Healthcare – They offer health and social services to members and their families, such as reimbursement for medical expenses or access to specialist care.
- Economic support – They provide grants to cope with financial hardship, cover medical expenses, or provide assistance in the event of accidents or illness.
- Cultural and educational promotion - SOMS also organizes cultural and awareness-raising activities on health prevention and solidarity, keeping alive the mutual values that underlie their existence.

Mutual aid societies have played a key role in the history of Italian prosperity. In addition to direct support for workers, these organizations contributed to the formation of the first trade unions, promoting solidarity between workers. Even today, despite the evolution of the public aid system, they continue to play a key role in providing support to people in vulnerable situations, strengthening social and community cohesion.

Today, SOMS have adapted to new needs, offering complementary services and supporting health and social projects in collaboration with local authorities,

foundations and other sectors of the organisation's third sector. Despite the changes that have taken place over the centuries, their function of solidarity and assistance remains crucial for the Italian social economy.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS)

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are non-profit organizations that operate independently of governments, working to achieve the goals of international cooperation, human rights, environmental protection, and humanitarian aid. Funded primarily

by private donations and donations from philanthropists, NGOs may receive public funding in some cases. These organizations are guided by strong ideals and are active at the local, national, and international levels with the goal of promoting positive and sustainable change in society.

NGOs play a key role in several areas:

- They provide assistance in emergencies, such as natural disasters or humanitarian crises, by offering basic necessities and medical care.
- They implement projects to improve living conditions in disadvantaged communities, addressing issues such as poverty and lack of infrastructure.
- promote and defend fundamental rights, raising public awareness and influencing policy.
- NGOs working in this field are committed to protecting biodiversity, tackling climate change and promoting sustainable ecological practices.

3.3.3. Good practices of the institutions (Community of San Patrignano, Il Solco Consortium, Èbbene Foundation)

Social economy organisations play a key role in promoting collective well-being and sustainable development. Through their engagement in areas such as social welfare, culture, social inclusion and environmental protection, they contribute to creating a more cohesive and resilient

social fabric.

Below are some concrete examples of associations, cooperatives, foundations and NGOs that embody the principles of the social economy and show its positive impact on the community.

Community of San Patrignano

San Patrignano³⁴ is a non-governmental organization (NGO), recognized and accredited by the United Nations with the status of "Special Advisor to the United Nations Economic and Social Council". It offers a wide range of addiction recovery services , operating on the basis of an integrated model that includes a social cooperative, a social agricultural cooperative, a foundation, a vocational training association and a sports association.

Founded in 1978 by Vincenzo Muccioli in Coriano (RN), San Patrignano was founded with the aim of offering a concrete alternative to people with addiction problems, often marginalized by society. Today, it is one of the largest communities of recovery from addiction in Europe.

San Patrignano's strength lies in its holistic approach, which combines therapeutic rehabilitation with vocational training and social inclusion, creating an integrated rehabilitation pathway. An essential aspect is that the path offered is completely free, which is a strong message of inclusion and accessibility for anyone who needs it.

Over more than forty years, the community has welcomed more than 26,000 people, guaranteeing not only a pathway to detoxification from addictions, but above all personal recovery, based on work, education, and respect for oneself and others,

³⁴ SanPatrignano Community Website: [https:// www.sanpatrignano.org/](https://www.sanpatrignano.org/)

achieving a total recovery rate of 72% among those who completed the program.³⁵

This commitment has had a significant impact on the community, both in terms of crime prevention and reducing the health and social costs associated with drug addiction.

The impact of the activities of the community **of San Patrignano** on society is significant both in the social and economic dimensions. The effects of the organization's operation include not only the reduction of phenomena related to addiction and crime, but also the reduction of costs incurred by the health care system, social assistance and the justice system. In order to quantitatively evaluate the results achieved, the organization uses the **Social Return on Investment (SROI)** methodology, which allows to determine the social value generated in relation to the financial outlays incurred.

In 2023, the **SROI** for San Patrignano was **2.63**, which means that **for every euro invested in the community's activities, it generated €2.63 in social value**. The achieved result indicates that investments in rehabilitation and social reintegration bring measurable benefits not only to the participants of the program, but also to the whole society. These are due to, among other things, increasing the level of employment of people leaving therapy, reducing public expenditure on addiction treatment and social assistance, reducing the costs associated with crime and improving the quality of life of beneficiaries and their families.

The **SROI methodology** is based on a comparison of the total value of the social effects obtained with the total expenditure incurred for the implementation of the programme.

In practice, the calculation of the indicator can be presented using the following formula:

³⁵ A multidisciplinary study of retention in treatment and follow-up on a large sample of former community residents (Oltre la comunità, Franco Angeli editore,)" - University of Urbino and Pavia.

$$SROI = \frac{\text{Łączna wartość efektów społecznych}}{\text{Całkowite nakłady finansowe}}$$

The interpretation of the indicator is relatively simple – a value greater than **1** means that the project generates social benefits exceed the costs incurred, while the higher the indicator, the greater the social value created thanks to the activities carried out.

San Patrignano's experience shows that social impact assessment can also be a useful management tool for other social economy actors. For smaller organizations, a full SROI analysis is not always necessary. It may be sufficient to use a simplified matrix including the identification of stakeholders, the determination of results, the selection of indicators and the estimation of the value of the social effects achieved. Such an approach makes it possible to monitor the effectiveness of activities, increases the transparency of the organization's functioning and facilitates obtaining funds for the implementation of subsequent projects.

San Patrignano also has a positive impact on the local economy, thanks to the production activities it offers, from agriculture to viticulture, from handicrafts to gastronomy. These activities not only provide training, but also enable guests to acquire specific skills that make it easier for them to reintegrate into the world of work. This not only helps individuals rediscover their own worth and skills, but also contributes to changing society's perception of drug addicts, recognizing them as individuals who can bring value and knowledge.

San Patrignano also stands out for its prevention program called "WeFree", an educational project that engages young people throughout Italy that aims to raise awareness and prevent the risk of addiction. Every year, thousands of students participate in educational courses designed to strengthen personal awareness and a sense of responsibility for themselves and others.

San Patrignano's impact on society is therefore profound

and multidimensional: on the one hand, it rehabilitates people through a model of social economy based on production and work, and at the same time it has an important educational

and preventive function. This approach, which combines solidarity, sustainable economic development and social inclusion, is a concrete example of how the social economy can address some of the most complex and deep-rooted challenges of contemporary society.

1- Il Solco Consortium

Consorzio Il Solco³⁶ represents an important reality in the scene of territorial prosperity, exerting a significant influence on the province of Ravenna and the neighboring provinces of Ferrara, Forlì-Cesena and Rimini. Its mission is focused on promoting the social and professional integration of the most vulnerable.

With 18 affiliated type A and B social cooperatives, it supports the elderly, disabled and disadvantaged people through a wide range of social welfare services, re-employment pathways and an ongoing commitment to education, rehabilitation and self-reliance support.

The impact of the consortium is visible in the lives of those who have been helped: the elderly who receive care and services to maintain a dignified life, people with disabilities who find concrete support on the path to autonomy, and disadvantaged people such as convicts, addicts or people suffering from mental pathologies, who manage to reintegrate into the world of work and society through job placement pathways.

In particular, Solco has gained recognized expertise in the field of professional integration, helping these people not only to find employment, but also to build a path of personal and professional development that fosters real economic and social emancipation.

³⁶ Strona internetowa Consorzio Il Solco: [https:// www.solcoravenna.it/](https://www.solcoravenna.it/)

One of the most innovative projects of the consortium is "Housing First", a program that aims to help people in a difficult housing situation find a stable and dignified solution, going beyond the traditional concept of temporary assistance. This approach has lasting effects, as it not only offers accommodation, but also accompanies users in their quest for autonomy through support in job search, vocational training and social inclusion. The consortium, together with Associazione Isnet, carried out a social impact assessment of the project, which showed that 60 percent of participants noticed an improvement in their health and 74 percent improved their employment status. The "Housing First" project has also achieved an excellent economic impact indicator. The SROI (Social Return On Impact) index is 1.93, which means that for every euro invested, 1.93 euros of social value is generated, mainly due to the improvement of the employment conditions of participants and the reduction of the costs of social services.³⁷

In addition, the consortium is actively involved in social farming, offering professional integration opportunities to disadvantaged people, such as people with disabilities or those with a history of work dependence. Through social agricultural cooperatives, it develops projects that combine agricultural production with social rehabilitation, promoting autonomy and re-employment. It is also committed to the production of organic and zero-mileage products, paying special attention to environmental impact and promoting a sustainable model that respects the territory, guaranteeing high quality food and reducing the ecological footprint.

The consortium is also a leader in the reception of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, offering basic services such as food, accommodation and healthcare, but also cultural and professional integration pathways that foster long-term integration. Through its coordinating role, Il Solco facilitates

³⁷ Social impact assessment of the activities under the project "Housing First" Ravenna, Isnet Association

interaction between public authorities, the private social sector and the local community, contributing to the creation of a "climate of trust" that is essential for the success of joint initiatives.

In short, Il Solco is not only a service provider, but also a social transformation agent that has a profound and lasting impact. By promoting dignity, autonomy and inclusion, the consortium contributes to building a more equitable and supportive community where every person, regardless of the difficulties they have faced, can find their place.

3 - Èbbene Foundation

The Èbbene Foundation³⁸ represents the innovative Local Foundation model, with an approach focused on proximity as a core value for the well-being of communities and territories. Its mission is based on the idea that closeness embraces all people, making each person an integral part of the generative social fabric. Through a network of Places, Centers and Nodes of Bliskospice, the Foundation works to create synergies between the different realities operating in Italy, aggregating meaningful experiences that have a common approach. This process of systematizing initiatives aims to ensure that each person can be supported in their life journey by building individual Life Plans that take into account all individual and family dimensions.

The Èbbene Foundation is committed to collaboration, acting as a synthesis point for the aspirations of organizations with different matrices. The Foundation promotes the creation of a proximity network that permeates every territory, building on the work of the Centers for the Support of the Civic Economy and Proximity. A key principle of Èbbene's approach is the circular economy applied to people: the foundation is based on the premise that even people perceived by society as excluded can play an active role in the process of social change, contributing to the development of their communities

³⁸ Strona internetowa Foundation Well: [https:// www.ebbene.org/](https://www.ebbene.org/)

through regaining empowerment, personal development and the acquisition of new competences.

Through emblematic projects such as "Regenerated Communities", which led to the creation of a neighborhood center in Messina to give space to young people and enable them to take care of their own territory, and "Accùra", a social health center dedicated to vulnerable people in Palermo, the Foundation shows its concrete commitment to promoting social inclusion and collective well-being. In addition, through the "Prosperity of Proximity" initiative, Èbbene aims to create centers throughout the country, increasing the social engagement of new generations and promoting their protagonism.

The Foundation works with a variety of partners to address the challenges faced by vulnerable people, including those in the mental health department. Through this synergistic work, the Èbbene Foundation acts as an agent of social transformation, in which the prosperity of the nearby is not seen as a cost, but as a driving force for economic development that starts with people's talents and leads to sustainable business experiences. In this way, the Foundation contributes to building a more just, solidarity-based and inclusive society, guaranteeing every person, regardless of the difficulties they face, the opportunity to find themselves in the community.

3.3.4. ISNET project societal objectives and research partnerships

One of the characteristic elements of the Italian social economy system is a developed model of cooperation between public administration, third sector organizations, social enterprises and scientific institutions. This cooperation is based on the assumption that effective solving of social problems requires the involvement of many actors representing different sectors of the economy and the use of their complementary competences.

During the study visit, the project participants had the opportunity to learn about the practical functioning of this model through meetings with representatives of social economy organizations operating in the Emilia-Romagna region. Particular attention was paid to the mechanisms of cooperation between social enterprises, social cooperatives, local government units and research institutions. These solutions enable joint planning of activities, exchange of experiences and creation of services that respond to the needs of local communities.

An important element of the Italian model is the development of partnerships based on the principle of co-design (co-progettazione) and co-programming (co-programmazione). These mechanisms are regulated in **the Third Sector Code (Codice del Terzo Settore)**, which sets out the rules of cooperation between public administration and social organizations in the planning and implementation of activities serving the public interest. Such a solution enables the active participation of social organizations in the design of social services and increases the effectiveness of the interventions implemented.

During the study visits, it was observed that cross-sectoral cooperation includes not only joint implementation of projects, but also conducting research, exchanging expert knowledge and evaluating the results of the activities undertaken. Social economy organizations benefit from the support of experts representing various fields, such as management, law, finance, digitization or social impact measurement. This allows to increase the professionalization of the sector and develop innovative solutions responding to changing social needs.

Study visits, workshops and working groups are also an important tool supporting the development of cooperation, during which representatives of various institutions exchange experiences and jointly develop solutions to local social problems. Such a model is conducive to knowledge transfer, adaptation of good practices and building lasting partnerships between organizations operating at the

local, regional and national level.

The examples observed during the study visit confirm that the Italian model of social economy is based primarily on cooperation, specialization and systematic development of organizational competencies. Thanks to this, it is possible to create integrated social services, more effectively support people at risk of social exclusion and increase the social impact of the projects implemented.

Table 2. Areas of cooperation between entities and their importance for the development of the social economy

Area of cooperation	Characteristics	Importance for the development of the social economy
Co-programming	Joint determination of social needs by public administration and social organizations.	Better align services with the needs of local communities.
Co-design	Development and implementation of social services by public and social partners.	Increasing the quality and effectiveness of the activities carried out.
Local partnerships	Cooperation between social organizations, local governments, universities and enterprises.	Integration of resources and development of local social initiatives.
Knowledge transfer	Organization of study visits, workshops and exchange of experiences.	Dissemination of good practices and development of competences of the sector.
Expert advice	Supporting organizations in the fields of law, finance, governance and social impact measurement.	Professionalization of social enterprises.
Social impact assessment	Monitoring the social, economic and environmental effects of the activities carried out.	Improving the quality of services and increasing the effectiveness of interventions.

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie: Decreto Legislativo 3 luglio 2017, n. 117 *Codice del Terzo Settore*; European Commission (2021), *Building an Economy that Works for People: Action Plan for the Social Economy*; CIRIEC (2017), *Recent Evolutions of the Social*

Economy in the European Union.

The presented list indicates that the Italian model of social economy is based on focus primarily on cross-sectoral cooperation and the active participation of social organisations in the planning and delivery of public services. Of particular importance are the mechanisms of co-programming and co-design, which enable the use of knowledge and experience of different partners in solving social problems. The analysis carried out during the study visit confirmed that the development of the social economy in Italy is supported not only by appropriate legal regulations, but also by an extensive network of cooperation, professional advice and systematic exchange of experience between organizations. These solutions can be a valuable inspiration for social economy entities operating in Poland and Lithuania.

4. Partnerships between Social Economy Entities



Social economy partnerships are a form of cooperation between different PES entities operating in a given area, such as non-governmental organizations or social enterprises, m.in. The aim of these partnerships is to jointly solve social and economic problems and develop local communities.³⁹

The most complete, although quite general definition of local partnership can be found

in the publication of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy entitled: "Through cooperation to success". Local partnership in the labour market. This partnership is understood there as a platform for cooperation between various partners who jointly and systematically plan, design, implement and implement activities and initiatives aimed at the development of the local socio-economic environment and building local identity among community members.⁴⁰

In other words, local partnership is about the cooperation of representatives of different groups living or operating in a given area, striving to fully exploit the potential of the area and solve problems. A key element of local partnership is to identify local needs and meet them through bottom-up initiatives implemented in broadly understood collaborations between local PES.

So far, only cooperation between the public and business sectors has been formally regulated on the basis of the Public-Private Partnership Act. However, work is underway on the Act on Public-Social Partnership, which recognizes

³⁹ SGH Journals: Majka Łojko, "Local Partnership in the Social Economy as a New Paradigm for Building Social Cohesion", <https://econjournals.sgh.waw.pl/kwes/article/view/196/175>

⁴⁰ Sobolewski A. (ed.), Through cooperation to success. Local Partnership on labour market, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2007, Warsaw, p.10.

non-governmental organizations, church organizations and groups associating representatives of the local community as the social side.⁴¹

Figure 1. Diagram illustrating the stages of establishing social economy partnerships

HOW TO ESTABLISH A PARTNERSHIP IN THE SOCIAL ECONOMY?

PARTNERSHIP FORMATION PROCESS

1. DIAGNOSIS OF LOCAL NEEDS Recognizing the problems and needs of the local community on the basis of data, consultations and analysis of the situation.	2. IDENTIFICATION OF PARTNERS Selecting organizations and institutions that have the competences, resources and experience necessary to achieve common goals.	3. DEFINING A COMMON MISSION AND OBJECTIVES Establishing a common mission and strategic goals responding to the diagnosed social needs.
4. DEFINING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES Division of tasks and determination of responsibilities of partners according to their competences and potential.	5. DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATION RULES Establishing the principles of partnership functioning: decision-making, communication, information flow, conflict resolution.	6. PREPARATION OF THE ACTION PLAN Develop a joint action plan: timetable, scope of tasks, sources of funding, indicators and monitoring method.
7. IMPLEMENTATION OF PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES Implementation of planned activities, regular communication, ongoing problem solving and joint decision-making.	8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION Evaluation of the effects of cooperation based on indicators, conclusions and recommendations, improvement of activities.	

⁴¹ The Act of 19 December 2008 on public-private partnership, Dz.U. 2009 No. 19, item 100.

Figure 2. Diagram illustrating the areas and characteristics of joint action

DIFFERENT SECTORS – A COMMON GOAL

PARTNERSHIP - Joint action to solve social problems and local development.

Sectors forming the partnership:	Success factors of portership:
• PUBLIC SECTOR: local governments, public institutions, offices • SOCIAL SECTOR: non-governmental organizations, social enterprises, social cooperatives • PRIVATE SECTOR: entrepreneurs, companies, employers • EDUCATION AND SCIENCE SECTOR: schools, universities, research centres • LOCAL COMMUNITY: residents, informal groups, volunteers	• Shared vision and goals • Trust and openness • Commitment of all partners • Effective communication • Clear division of roles and tasks • Monitoring and evaluation • Stable and diverse sources of funding

The presented model is universal and can be used by non-governmental organizations, social enterprises, local government units, as well as educational institutions and other stakeholders involved in the development of the social economy.

The process of building a partnership is presented as a series of eight interrelated stages, the implementation of which makes it possible to create a sustainable and effective system of cooperation between representatives of different sectors. The starting point is the diagnosis of local needs, including the analysis of social problems, the identification of resources and the recognition of the expectations of residents and institutions operating in a given area. A properly conducted diagnosis is the basis for planning further activities and allows to determine the real priorities for the development of the local community.

The next stage is to identify partners whose competences, experience and resources can contribute to the achievement of common goals. Partnership in the social

economy should be cross-sectoral and include representatives of public administration, non-governmental organisations, social enterprises, the private sector, educational institutions and the local community. Diversity of partners increases the potential for cooperation and enables a comprehensive approach to solving social problems.

After gathering the partners, the stage of defining a common mission and strategic goals follows. All actors involved should agree on the course of action, define the expected results and adopt a common vision for the development of the partnership. The goals should respond to identified social needs, be achievable and accepted by all participants in the cooperation.

An important element of the process is also the precise definition of roles responsibilities of the individual partners. The division of tasks should result from competences and experience of each organization, which is conducive to the efficient use of available resources and reduces the risk of duplication of activities. A clear definition of responsibilities increases the transparency of cooperation and facilitates the coordination of implemented projects.

The central part of the diagram presents the idea of partnership as a space for cooperation between different sectors. Representatives of the public, social, private sectors, education and science, and the local community function around a common goal. Each of these groups brings different competences, resources and experiences to the partnership, creating a local social economy ecosystem together. The cooperation of these environments allows us to respond more effectively to the needs of residents and increases the effectiveness of the activities carried out.

Further steps in the process include the development of rules for cooperation and the preparation of a joint action plan. Partners determine how to communicate, make decisions, exchange information, resolve conflicts, and monitor progress. Then, a schedule of activities is developed, sources of funding, implementation indicators and a system for evaluating results are determined.

After the planning phase is completed, the partnership moves on to the implementation of the planned activities. Cooperation includes the implementation of social projects, the organization of trainings, the development of social services, the professional activation of residents and the initiation of new projects responding to local needs. Ongoing communication between partners and flexible response to emerging challenges are crucial during this period.

The last element of the model is the monitoring and evaluation of the partnership. Systematic evaluation of the activities carried out makes it possible to analyse the degree of achievement of the assumed goals, identify the strengths and weaknesses of cooperation and formulate recommendations for the further development of the partnership. In practice, both quantitative indicators are used, such as the number of partners, projects or beneficiaries, as well as qualitative indicators relating to the level of cooperation, satisfaction of participants and social impact achieved.

The diagram also highlights the factors that determine the sustainability of the partnership. These include, above all, a common vision of development, mutual trust, active involvement of all partners, effective communication, transparent division of responsibilities, systematic monitoring of results and diversification of funding sources. In practice, it is these elements that determine the stability of cooperation and the ability of the partnership to implement long-term projects.

4.1. Definition, characteristics and objectives of local partnerships

The analysis of the definitions presented in the table below indicates that local partnership is understood as a permanent and voluntary form of cooperation between entities representing various sectors of social and economic life. Regardless of the approach adopted, the authors emphasize the importance of joint planning of activities, integration of resources, co-responsibility of partners and focus on solving social problems and supporting local development. In the context of the social economy, local partnerships are one of the basic mechanisms increasing the effectiveness of social enterprises and non-governmental organizations, enabling more effective use of the potential of local communities and building lasting intersectoral relations.

Table 3. Definitions of Local Partnership

Author / source	Definition of a local partnership	Key elements of the definition
European Commission (2021)	Local partnership is a voluntary and structured cooperation of entities representing the public, social and private sectors, the aim of which is to jointly solve social problems and support sustainable local development by using the resources and competences of all participants.	Cross-sectoral cooperation, local development, common goals, use of resources.
OECD (2020)	Local partnership is a cooperation structure involving various institutions and organizations operating in a specific area, whose task is to coordinate activities, effective use of local resources and joint planning of socio-economic development.	Coordination of activities, socio-economic development, effective management of resources.

Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy (2022)	Local partnership means permanent cooperation between local government units, non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurs, labour market institutions and other entities working for the development of the local community, based on co-responsibility for the implementation of common social and economic goals.	Sustainability of cooperation, co-responsibility, development of the local community.
Jerzy Hausner (2008)	Local partnership is a process of cooperation between entities representing the public, economic and civic sectors, based on dialogue, co-responsibility and joint undertaking of activities aimed at solving social problems and supporting local development.	Social dialogue, cross-sectoral cooperation, solving social problems.
Barbara Frączkiewicz-Wronka (2010)	Local Partnership is a voluntary system of cooperation between institutions representing different sectors, the aim of which is to integrate the resources, competences and experience of partners in order to solve social problems more effectively and improve the quality of life of residents.	Integration of resources, improvement of quality of life, cooperation of different sectors.

Source: own study based on: European Commission (2021), Building Partnerships for Sustainable Development; OECD (2020), Local Development and Social Economy; Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy (2022), National Social Economy Development Programme until 2030. Economics of Social Solidarity; Hausner J. (2008), Public Management; Frączkiewicz-Wronka B. (2010), Local Partnership as an Instrument for Solving Social Problems

CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCAL PES PARTNERSHIPS:

- **Voluntary cooperation** is the basic principle of the functioning of local partnerships. The participation of individual entities results

from their conscious decision to cooperate and readiness to jointly pursue goals that meet the needs of the local community. The involvement of partners is not the result of a formal obligation, but results from the conviction of the benefits of taking joint actions.

- **Equality of partners** means that all entities participating in the partnership have comparable rights in terms of co-deciding on the directions of development of cooperation and share responsibility for the results achieved. Despite the diverse organizational, financial and human resources potential, the partnership is based on mutual respect and respect for the competences of each of its participants.
- **Complementarity of resources** is one of the most important factors determining the effectiveness of a partnership. Individual organizations bring different experiences, competencies, human resources, expertise and organizational capabilities to the cooperation. The mutual complementarity of the partners' potential allows for the implementation of projects that would be much more difficult or impossible to carry out if a single organization operated.
- **The long-term nature of cooperation** is conducive to building lasting relationships between partners and allows for planning projects that go beyond short-term projects financed from external funds. The stability of the partnership increases the possibility of achieving sustainable social results, supports the development of local institutions and facilitates the acquisition of new partners and sources of financing.
- **Orientation towards the needs of the local community** means that the planning and implementation of partnership activities are based on recognizing the real problems and expectations of the residents. The initiatives undertaken are to improve the quality of life, increase the availability of social services, strengthen civic activity and create conditions conducive to sustainable local development. Thanks to this approach, partnerships become a tool for effectively responding to

social and economic challenges occurring in a given community.

Partnership understood in this way is not only a form of cooperation between institutions representing different sectors, but also a mechanism enabling building social capital, strengthening trust and developing lasting relations conducive to the development of the social economy. The experience of the project partners in Poland, Lithuania and Italy confirms that this approach is the basis for the effective functioning of local partnerships and increases their ability to solve complex social problems.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PES LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS:

- **Social integration** consists in creating conditions enabling the active participation of people at risk of social exclusion in social and professional life. Local partnerships support the reintegration process through the development of social services, the organization of activation activities, the creation of jobs and the strengthening of the independence of beneficiaries. Particular attention is paid to people with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, seniors, young people and other groups in need of support.
- **Improving the quality of life of residents** is carried out through joint initiation and implementation of projects responding to the needs of the local community. The activities of the partnerships include, among others, the development of educational, cultural, health, care services and initiatives related to environmental protection. The comprehensive nature of the actions taken is conducive to increasing the availability of public services and improving the living conditions of residents.
- **Strengthening social capital** means developing cooperation, trust and civic activity among residents and institutions operating in a given area. Partnerships create a space for exchanging experiences, joint planning of activities and involving

various groups of stakeholders in the process of local development. As a result, the level of co-responsibility for the functioning of the community increases, lasting inter-sectoral relations develop, and residents more often undertake initiatives serving the common good⁴².

Why are local PES partnerships important?

- By joining forces, partners can achieve more than acting alone.
- Partnerships allow you to analyze problems from different perspectives and implement more effective solutions.
- Thanks to partnerships, residents have a greater impact on the development of their town.
- Collaboration allows for better use of available resources.

Examples of areas of cooperation within local partnerships:

- Creating jobs for people at risk of social exclusion
- Development of local tourism
- Environmental protection
- Supporting seniors
- Development of culture and education

Local partnerships in the social economy are an effective way to solve social and economic problems at the local level. By working together between different actors, it is possible to achieve greater effects and create more sustainable development.⁴³

Cooperation between ES organizations brings numerous benefits:

- Concerning effective social inclusion strategies.
- Aimed at local communities.

⁴² <http://www.espoleczna.spoldzielnie.org/index.php?id1=14>

⁴³ Regional Centre for Social Economy in Krakow, "Local Partnerships in Social Economy"

- By adapting the best solutions to local needs.

Table 4. Features of local partnerships

Area	Description
Characteristics of local partnerships	
Voluntary	The partnership is created on the basis of a voluntary decision of all participants who consciously undertake cooperation for common social and economic goals.
Equality of partners	All entities participating in the partnership have an equal position, participate in decision-making and are responsible for the implementation of joint activities.
Complementarity of resources	Each partner brings their own competences, experience, organizational, financial or human resources to the cooperation, which increases the effectiveness of the implemented projects.
Long-term nature of cooperation	Partnerships are created with a view to the implementation of long-term activities and sustainable development of the local community, and not only individual projects.
Orientation to the needs of the local community	All activities of the partnership result from the diagnosis of local needs and are aimed at improving the quality of life of residents.
Objectives of local partnerships	
Development of the local economy	Creating new jobs, supporting social enterprises and developing local entrepreneurship.

Social inclusion	Inclusion of people at risk of social exclusion in social and professional life through the activation and development of social services.
Improving the quality of life of residents	Implementation of projects in the areas of education, culture, health, social assistance, environmental protection and local services.
Strengthening social capital	Building trust, developing cooperation between institutions and increasing the civic activity of residents.
The importance of local partnerships	
Synergy effect	Combining the potential of many institutions makes it possible to achieve results that are impossible to achieve by individual organizations acting alone.
Comprehensive problem solving	Cooperation between different sectors allows us to analyze problems from multiple perspectives and prepare more comprehensive and sustainable solutions.
Active participation of residents	Partnerships involve residents in the planning and implementation of activities, increasing their impact on the development of the local community.
Efficient use of resources	Joint planning and coordination of activities enable better use of human, organizational and financial resources.
Examples of areas of cooperation	
Professional activation	Creating jobs for people at risk of social exclusion and developing social enterprises.

Development of local tourism	Promotion of cultural heritage, local products and services provided by social enterprises.
Environmental protection	Joint implementation of activities related to the circular economy, recycling, environmental education and protection of natural resources.
Support for the elderly	Organization of care services, activation of seniors and development of intergenerational volunteering.
Education and culture	Organization of trainings, cultural events, workshops and activities developing the competences of residents.
Benefits of social economy cooperation	
Exchange of knowledge and experience	Dissemination of effective methods of management, social activation and implementation of social services.
Joint implementation of projects	Combining the potential of organizations in the implementation of initiatives financed from national and European funds.
Transfer of good practices	Adaptation of proven organizational and social solutions to the local conditions of the partners' functioning.
Development of social innovation	Creating new models of cooperation and implementing innovative services that respond to the needs of local communities.

4.2. Sharing knowledge and experience on social inclusion

The exchange of knowledge and experience between social economy entities is a key element in the creation of effective social inclusion strategies. By working together

and sharing good practices, organizations can achieve a greater impact on social change and improve the quality of life of excluded people.

Advantages of knowledge and experience exchange

- By working together, organizations can make better use of their resources, avoid mistakes, and achieve better results.
- The exchange of knowledge allows us to discover new solutions and approaches to social problems.
- Building relationships with other organizations allows you to create broader coalitions and increase the reach of activities.
- Participation in knowledge exchange programs allows employees of the organization to develop professionally and acquire new skills.
- Sharing experiences contributes to increasing public awareness of the problems of excluded people and the needs of local communities.⁴⁴

Disadvantages of knowledge and experience exchange

Table 5. Limitations and challenges related to the exchange of knowledge and experience between social economy organizations

Challenge	Description	Possible consequences for cooperation
Differences in approach to work	Organizations participating in the cooperation may differ in organizational culture, management method, procedures and methods of implementation of activities. This diversity can make it	The risk of misunderstandings, prolongation of the decision-making process and difficulties in coordinating joint activities.

⁴⁴ Regional Centre for Social Economy in Krakow, "Local Partnerships in Social Economy"

	difficult to reach an agreement and plan projects together.	
Limited time and human resources	Effective knowledge exchange requires the involvement of employees, organization of meetings, trainings and networking activities. Organizations with limited human resources may find it difficult to actively participate in such initiatives.	Less cooperation, limited number of joint activities and slower transfer of knowledge and good practices.
Concerns about the protection of knowledge and intellectual property	Some organizations may limit the scope of information provided for fear of losing developed organizational solutions, innovative working methods or competitive advantage.	Reduced openness of partners, less willingness to share experiences and hindered transfer of social innovations.
Difficulties in assessing the effects of knowledge exchange	The results of cooperation and exchange of experience are often long-term and qualitative, which makes it difficult to assess them unambiguously using standard performance indicators.	Problems with monitoring results, assessing the impact of cooperation and justifying the need for further funding for partnership programmes.

Source: own study based on literature on knowledge management, cross-sectoral partnerships and the experience of the Erasmus+ project Inclusion and Integration – Competences in the Field of Social Economy.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ <https://www.es.malopolska.pl/publikacje/pobierz/40,estrateg-model-w%C5%82%C4%85czania-ekonomii-spo%C5%82cznej-do-lokalnych-strategii-i-program%C3%B3w.pdf>

Examples of knowledge and experience exchange between social economy entities in Poland

Table 6. Examples of exchange of knowledge and experience between economic entities

A form of knowledge and experience exchange	Characteristics	Benefits for social economy organizations
Collaboration networks	Social economy organisations participate in national and regional cooperation networks that enable the exchange of information, good practices and joint initiatives. Examples are networks created by Social Economy Support Centres (OWES), regional federations of non-governmental organisations and sectoral networks of social enterprises.	Building partnerships, developing cross-sectoral cooperation, knowledge transfer and increasing the organizational potential of network participants.
Conferences, seminars and trainings	Events organized by public administration, universities, OWES and non-governmental organizations allow for the presentation of good practices, exchange of experience and development of competences of the staff of the social economy sector.	Improving the qualifications of employees and leaders of the organization, disseminating innovative solutions and developing professional competencies.
Mentoring programs	As part of mentoring programs, experienced representatives of social enterprises and non-governmental organizations support people starting their business in the social economy sector. This process includes advice, consultation and individual support in the field of organization management.	Development of managerial competencies, reduction of the risk of making organizational mistakes and more effective implementation of new social initiatives.

Joint implementation of projects	Project partnerships created by non-governmental organizations, social enterprises, local government units, universities and entrepreneurs enable a practical exchange of experience during joint planning and implementation of social projects.	Developing cooperation, mutual learning, increasing the effectiveness of activities and the possibility of obtaining national and European funds for joint initiatives.
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Source: own study based on the experience of the Erasmus+ Inclusion and Integration – Competences in the Field of Social Economy project, the National Programme for the Development of the Social Economy until 2030. The Economy of Social Solidarity (Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, 2022) and literature on cooperation and knowledge management in the social economy sector.

- There are many cooperation networks in Poland that connect non-governmental organizations, social enterprises and local governments. Examples of such networks are: the Network of Local Initiatives, the Network of Non-Governmental Organizations, or the Social Economy Network.
- NGOs regularly organise conferences and trainings where representatives of various organisations can share their experiences.
- Mentoring programs allow you to establish relationships between experienced employees of the organization and beginners, which allows you to transfer knowledge and skills.
- Cooperation in the implementation of joint projects allows for the exchange of knowledge and experience in practice.⁴⁶

The exchange of knowledge and experience between social economy entities is extremely important for the development of the sector and the effective implementation

⁴⁶ <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/0c441eaa-fcdb-46b5-8454-465dee3cd791>

of social goals. By working together, organisations can better respond to societal needs, increase their impact and contribute to building a fairer and more sustainable society.

4.3. Joint implementation of projects aimed at local communities

Cooperation between social economy entities in the implementation of projects aimed at local communities is an increasingly common practice. By combining strengths, diverse competencies and resources, these organizations can respond more effectively to societal needs, create innovative solutions and achieve greater impact on local development.

Why is it worth implementing joint projects?

- By joining forces of different actors, it allows us to use complementary resources, increase the effectiveness of activities and achieve better results.
- Cooperation allows you to reach a wider audience and implement projects with a wider reach.
- Joint activities contribute to building trust and cooperation between different social groups, which leads to the strengthening of social capital.
- The exchange of ideas and experiences fosters the emergence of new, creative solutions to social problems.
- Thanks to cooperation, it is possible to take action on many different levels, which allows for comprehensive solving of social problems.⁴⁷

Examples of joint projects

⁴⁷ <https://www.es.malopolska.pl/publikacje/pobierz/40,estrateg-model-w%C5%82%C4%85czania-ekonomii-spo%C5%82ecznej-do-lokalnych-strategii-i-program%C3%B3w.pdf>

- These are forms of cooperation within the social economy that are gaining popularity. NGOs, local governments, shops and food producers work together to collect surplus food and donate it to those in need.
- Local partnerships often take action to improve the appearance and functionality of public spaces. Residents, architects, officials and entrepreneurs work together to create projects for green squares, playgrounds and bicycle paths.
- Partnerships are being established in many Polish cities to help refugees and other people from abroad integrate into the local community. Non-governmental organizations, schools, offices and residents themselves jointly organize language courses, professional workshops and cultural events.
- Local partnerships can contribute to the promotion of tourism in smaller towns. Non-governmental organizations, local entrepreneurs and local governments work together to create attractive tourist offers, organize cultural events and promote local products.⁴⁸

4.4. Challenges and barriers to cooperation

Being aware of the potential barriers and problems that may arise when creating local partnerships can help to prevent them and find effective solutions. The most common problems include:

- Different organizations may have different organizational cultures, which can make collaboration difficult.
- Collaboration requires time and employee commitment, which can be difficult for organizations with limited resources. Lack of time and willingness to cooperate often results in the fact that cooperation exists only "on paper".
- Organizations may be reluctant to share their knowledge and experience for fear of losing their competitive advantage.

⁴⁸ <https://www.es.malopolska.pl/publikacje/pobierz/40,estrateg-model-w%C5%82%C4%85czania-ekonomii-spo%C5%82ecznej-do-lokalnych-strategii-i-program%C3%B3w.pdf>

- It can be difficult to assess the effectiveness of joint projects, especially for long-term initiatives.
- Uncooperative organizational structure of partners.
- Problems with communication and information exchange, both within the institution and between partners.
- Ignorance of the partner's activities and common goals.
- No specific partnership leader.
- A poorly defined common goal of action.
- Conflict of interest between partners during the course of cooperation.
- Inefficient actions.⁴⁹

4.5. Conditions for the functioning of the ES in Italy from the perspective of international projects

Main features of the social economy in Italy

In Italy, we have legislation that is unmatched both in Europe and in the world. On the one hand, we have the provisions on cooperatives with articulation and a constitutional basis, which are characterized by a reference to the historic Law 381/91, which established social cooperation. On the other hand, we have the Third Sector, which is regulated by a unified corps by Legislative Decree 117/2017. In other European countries there is nothing similar, while Italy has created a Code that defines a framework

Article 1 Concept and classification of social enterprise (in Italian law)

All private entities, including those established in the forms set out in Book V of the Civil Code, which, in accordance with the provisions of this Decree, carry out on a permanent and main basis economic activities in the general interest, non-profit-making, and with civic, solidarity and socially useful objectives, adopting responsible and transparent management methods and fostering the widest involvement of employees, users and other stakeholders in their activities, can obtain the status of a social enterprise.

⁴⁹ <https://rops.krakow.pl/pliki-do-pobrania/wpis,partnerstwa-lokalne-w-ekonomii-spolecznej,84>

that has its own coherence and merit for better organizing a previously fragmented sector.

A social enterprise should be treated as a special form of organization functioning within the Third Sector. Unlike many other non-governmental organizations, its primary task is to conduct business activity subordinated to the achievement of social goals. In Italian law, a social enterprise has been distinguished as a distinct organisational form, the activities of which are focused on the provision of services of general interest and the implementation of activities in the general interest.

At the same time, the possibility of running a business is not reserved only for social enterprises. Italian law also allows for this possibility in relation to other Third Sector entities, such as voluntary organisations, associations, foundations or philanthropic organisations. In their case, however, the business activity is of an auxiliary nature and serves primarily to obtain funds for the implementation of statutory objectives. On the other hand, in a social enterprise, economic activity is an integral element of the organization's operating model and is a basic tool for the implementation of its social mission.

It is this last difference that is most important and is often confused: **every social enterprise is a Third Sector organization, but not every Third Sector organization is a social enterprise**. A social enterprise was created precisely to **combine economic activity with the achievement of social goals**, while other organizations can conduct economic activity only as an instrument supporting their statutory activity.

Reform of the Italian Third Sector, introduced **by Legislative Decree No. 112 of 2017**, has put in order the rules of functioning of social enterprises. According to the new regulations, **social cooperatives automatically obtained the status of a social enterprise**, without the need to change their statutes. They were entered into a special section of the Register of Enterprises, which confirmed their special role in the social economy system.

The regulations also specify which entities can obtain the status of a social enterprise. These may be private organisations and undertakings engaged in business activity on a continuous basis, provided that their primary objective is not to make a profit, but to carry out activities serving the public interest.

This includes, in particular, social, civic and solidarity activities that respond to the needs of local communities and contribute to improving the quality of life of residents.

In practice, this means that a social enterprise in Italy uses economic activity as a tool for the realization of its social mission. The financial resources generated are allocated primarily to the development of the organization and the achievement of social goals, and not to maximize the profit of the owners.⁵⁰tag.

The following activities are considered to be of a general nature:

- Intervention activities and social services;
- Intervention activities and health care services;
- Social and health benefits;
- Educational, educational and training activities;
- interventions and services aimed at preserving and improving environmental conditions and the careful and rational use of natural resources, excluding routinely practiced activities consisting in the collection and recycling of urban, special and hazardous waste;
- Interventions for the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage and landscape;
- Undergraduate and postgraduate education;
- Scientific research of particular social importance;
- Organisation and management of cultural, artistic or recreational activities of social importance, including activities, including publishing, promotion and dissemination of the culture and practice of volunteering and activities of general interest referred to in this article;
- Broadcasting audio in communities;
- Organization and management of tourism activities of social, cultural or religious importance;

⁵⁰ Peġen tekst: [legislative decree 112/2017](#)

- Extracurricular training to prevent early school leaving and educational and training success, prevent bullying and combat educational poverty;
- Instrumental services for social enterprises or other third sector entities;
- Development cooperation;
- Commercial, manufacturing, educational and informational, promotional, representative and certification mark licensing activities carried out within or for the benefit of fair trade supply chains;
- Services aimed at the inclusion or reintegration into the labour market of employees and disadvantaged persons;
- Social housing and any other temporary housing activity aimed at meeting social, health, cultural, educational or employment needs;
- Humane reception and social integration of migrants;
- Microcredits;
- Social agriculture;
- Organization and management of amateur sports activities;
- Re-management of unused public property or property confiscated by organized crime.

The activities of an enterprise of general interest are considered to be carried on as the main purpose when its revenues exceed seventy percent of its total revenues. An activity of general interest, regardless of its purpose, is also considered to be an economic activity in which, in order to achieve civic, solidarity and socially useful objectives, employees in a very difficult situation and people with disabilities or beneficiaries of international protection, homeless people who are in a situation of poverty that makes it impossible to find and maintain an independent place of residence are employed.

Generativity, understood as the ability to find new solutions for the life of the community, is an aspect inscribed in normative dictates, in the ability to achieve the civic, solidarity and socially useful goals required of this type of enterprise. These are goals

whose responses are mobile, resulting from the fact that the very needs and requirements of the social fabric are constantly changing.

The arguments presented show that we are facing an economic model that has a "software" of actions the same for all the organizations that compose it, consisting of not distributing profits and assets, but with the priority of the person over capital, with democratic or participatory management principles. The perception is that, starting with a different way of doing the economy, we can also rethink the issue of institutions and social cohesion. It is therefore important to emphasize the economic dimension.

In this context, there are many aspects that make social enterprises-cooperatives independent and unique economic phenomena capable of intervening in social needs with an innovative approach:

- they are often created "from the bottom" on the initiative of civil society leaders, in some cases in connection with volunteering projects and associations already established in a given territory;
- they are capable of combining economic, social and participatory dimensions in a way that is not artificial, but concretely embedded in socio-economic contexts;
- evaluate relational aspects with a constant focus on the human factor;
- emphasise the initiative of citizens as individuals capable of actively participating in solving social problems;
- promote stakeholder engagement through participatory decision-making processes, local rooting resulting from a specific knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of a given area;
- They develop networks of actors and organizations that are not part of the social base, as a result of close interaction with local stakeholders and their needs.

The world of social cooperatives is a living reality, with 7.2 million people cared for by 15,000 active social cooperatives in our country, which take care of 12 percent of the population, in fact being the backbone of the Italian social welfare system. Bearers of a

new cultural and economic paradigm, thanks to social cooperatives, social welfare has become a business. And this happened thanks to the focus on women and young people in particular. Over 480,000 people are employed in social cooperatives, of which over 50% are women, and 50,000 jobs have been created in the last five years. 78 thousand people are employed in conditions of physical, mental and social disability (40 thousand disabled people, 18 thousand people with disabilities and over 20 thousand people with other serious problems). With the launch of the Single National Register of the Third Sector (RUNTS), social cooperatives under l.381/91 account for about 90 percent of the total number of social enterprises, while the remaining 10 percent are non-social cooperative entities.

With regard to sectors of activity, around 49 percent of social enterprises operate in typical social care sectors, managing social services such as day care centres for the elderly and disabled, social housing for the elderly and disabled, and family homes. Another area of activity is the professional inclusion of the weak and disabled (12.2 percent), followed by cultural and sports services (6.1 percent), catering, hospitality and tourism promotion services for the area (4.3 percent). Hence the leading role of Italian social cooperatives in key sectors such as work, health, education, environment, care, training and professional inclusion of people with disabilities. Thoughts are made of the importance of combating school dropout, action against food poverty and working with vulnerable people, in a system that tends to exclude and marginalise people with personal difficulties.

5. Good practices in partner organizations



The concept of best practices derives from the achievements of the science of business management. Its idea can be traced back to Taylor, who used the term "the one best way" (Kanigel, 1997). Contemporary studies on good practices appeared in the eighties of the twentieth century, such as the works of T.J. Peters and R.H. Waterman (1982). In the 1990s, due to the development of the concept of New Public Management in public institutions, best practices began to be identified with the public sector.⁵¹

5.1. What are good practices and their criteria in NGOs?

Generally speaking, "good practices" are all solutions and ways of operating outperform commonly used solutions based on typical tools. Well described, they are a model and a reference point for the development and implementation of similar solutions by other non-governmental organizations. They refer to procedures, methods, processes, programs, initiatives, and sometimes transformations or innovations.

It can be said that "good practice" defines an action that has brought specific, positive results, contains an element of innovation, is durable and repeatable, and can be applied in similar conditions elsewhere or by other entities.⁵²

⁵¹ GOOD PRACTICES IN BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT dr Renata Brajer-Marczak Studia Informatica Pomerania nr 1/2017 (43) | www.wnus.edu.pl/si | DOI: 10.18276/si.2017.43-02 | 15–25

⁵² Innovativeness in social economy entities in Poland. Qualitative study. Arkadiusz Karwacki, Aldona Glińska-Noweś Social Economy No. 2/2015, pp. 21–42 ISSN: 2081-321X, eISSN: 1898-7435 DOI: 10.15678/ES.2015.2.02

Criteria of good practice in NGOs

In the paper "Entrepreneurship and Social Benefits: Identifying Good Practices in Economics", the following criteria for the selection of good practices are suggested

Figure 3. A list of criteria for evaluating effective practices in the surveyed organizations.

CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

1. EFFECTIVENESS • Achieving the assumptions• Implementing the plans• Realizing the mission of the organization• Linking plans and goals• Contributing to further development• Recognizing the environment by conducting research, talking to the project addressees and gathering information about the real needs of people	2. PLANNING • Analysis of the situation and conditions• Development of an action strategy• Preparation of an operational action plan	3. INNOVATION • The level of novelty of the proposed practice
4. PERFORMANCE • Qualitative and quantitative analysis• Analysis of the use of tangible resources (finance, technology, infrastructure)• Analysis of the use of intangible resources (human and social capital)	5. REFLECTIVITY • Existence of evaluation tools and their use• Assessment of the objectivity of the tools• Use of evaluation results to improve activities	6. VERSATILITY • Possibility of adapting completed projects to new or similar conditions and contexts or using them as a source of inspiration
7. ETHICS • Compliance of the proposed action with the law and moral norms applicable in a given society, industry or area of activity • Good image of the organization	8. ENTREPRENEURSHIP • Usefulness to achieve the mission• Having a "business line"• Financial independence• Operating in a niche market area• Economic rationality• Recognizing a group of beneficiaries and customers	9. REALIZING SOCIAL BENEFITS • Job creation• Impact of the project on the independence of beneficiaries• Adequacy of practice in relation to needs• Provision of good quality services

Own development based on the assumptions of the design evaluation.

The diagram presented presents a set of criteria that can be used to assess the quality and effectiveness of activities carried out by social economy organisations. The presented model includes nine mutually complementary areas, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of both the process of planning and implementation of projects, as well as the social, organizational and economic results achieved. Taking into account all the presented criteria makes it possible to identify the strengths of the organization and indicate areas for improvement.

The first element of the model is **effectiveness**, understood as the degree of achievement of the assumed goals and the compliance of the achieved results with the mission of the organization. Both the implementation of the adopted action plans and the ability of the organization

to respond to the real needs of the community are evaluated. An important element of this area is the diagnosis of local needs, including research, consultations with beneficiaries and systematic collection of information used in the planning of subsequent activities.

The second criterion is **planning**, which includes the analysis of social, economic and organizational conditions, the preparation of development strategies and the development of detailed operational plans. Well-planned activities increase the likelihood of achieving the expected results and allow for effective use of available resources.

Another area is **innovation**, referring to the degree of novelty of the proposed solutions. Social economy organizations are increasingly looking for new methods of providing services, developing social innovations and implementing solutions that respond to the changing needs of residents. Innovation includes both the creation of new services and the improvement of existing organizational models.

An important element of the assessment is also **efficiency**, understood as the rational use of available resources. Both tangible resources, such as financial resources, infrastructure and technologies, as well as intangible resources, including employee

competences, organisational knowledge and social capital, are analysed. High efficiency means achieving the best possible results with optimal use of available resources.

The fifth criterion is **reflectivity**, understood as the ability of an organization to systematically evaluate its own activities. It includes the use of monitoring and evaluation tools, the analysis of the results achieved and the use of conclusions to improve the actions taken. Learners are more flexible and better adapted to changing environmental conditions.

Another area concerns **universality**, i.e. the possibility of using developed solutions in other organizations or communities. Good practices should be adaptable to different organisational and social conditions, so that they can inspire further initiatives in the social economy sector.

An important element of the model is also **the ethics** of the activities carried out. Social economy organisations should operate in accordance with applicable laws and ethical principles, guided by social responsibility, transparency of operation and respect for the rights of beneficiaries and partners. Maintaining high ethical standards affects the credibility of the organization and strengthens social trust.

The eighth criterion is **entrepreneurship**, understood as the ability to combine the implementation of a social mission with rational running of a business. It includes the ability to identify the needs of beneficiaries and customers, search for new sources of financing, take advantage of market opportunities and build the economic stability of the organization. Entrepreneurship allows to increase the financial independence of social economy entities and strengthens their resilience to changes in the environment.

The last element of the model is **the realization of social benefits**, which is the basic distinguishing feature of the organization of the social economy. The impact of the activities carried out on improving the situation of beneficiaries, job creation, development of independence of people covered by support and the quality of services

provided is primarily evaluated. Of particular importance is the compliance of the implemented projects with the real needs of local communities and the durability of the achieved effects.

The presented criteria create a coherent model for evaluating the activities of social economy organizations. Their combined use allows us to analyze the organization not only

from the perspective of the economic results achieved, but above all in relation to the quality of management, efficiency of resource use, compliance with the social mission and the impact exerted on the development of local communities. The model can be used as a tool supporting strategic planning, monitoring of results and the process of evaluating activities carried out by social enterprises and non-governmental organizations.⁵³

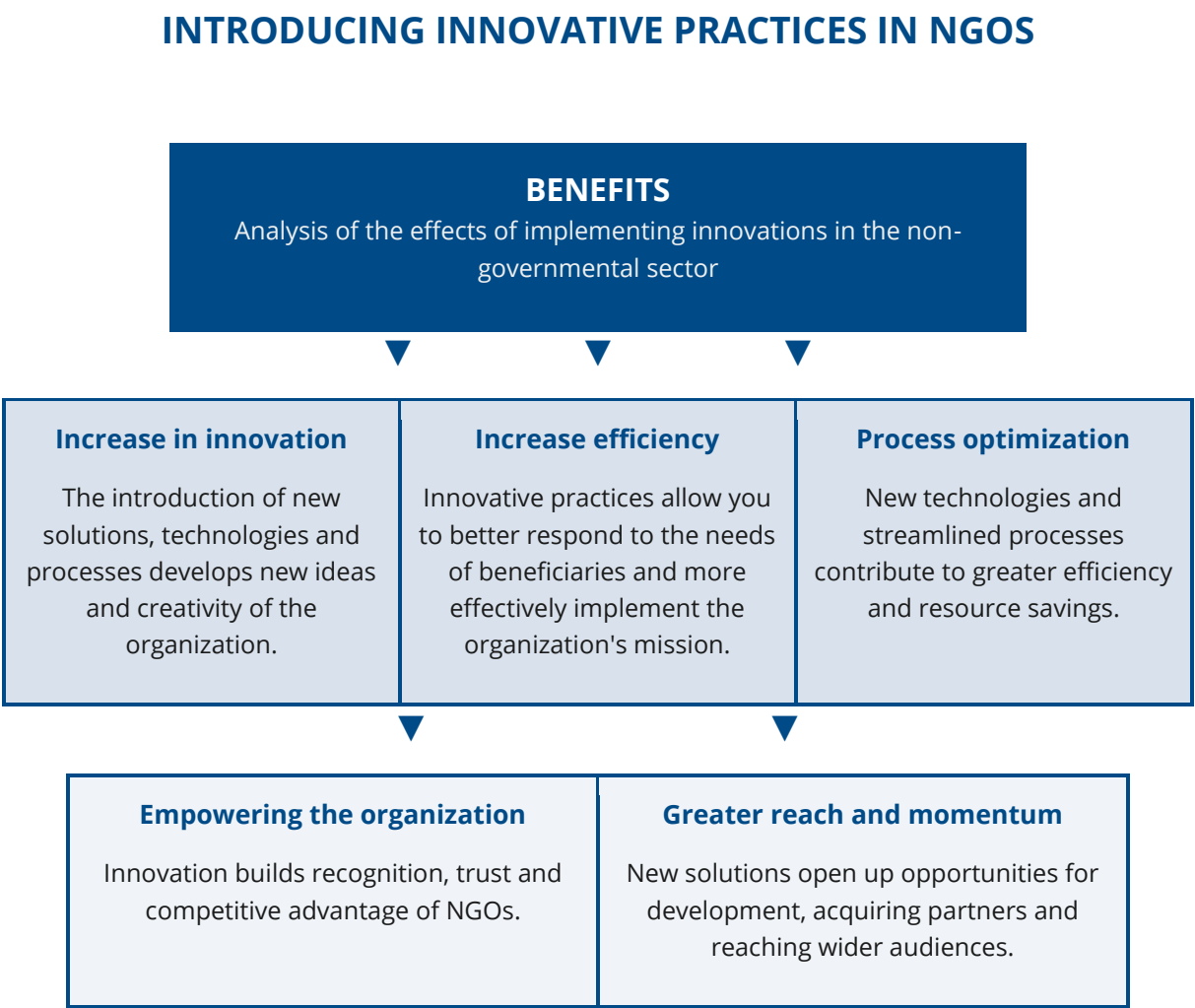
5.2. Introduction of innovative practices

Introducing innovative practices in an NGO organization brings many benefits. Good practices often assume the introduction of new solutions, technologies or processes that can contribute to the growth of innovation and momentum of the organization.

It is worth remembering that good practice effective in one organization does not necessarily have to be effective in another. Each organization has its own unique needs, goals, and conditions that need to be taken into account when implementing good practices.

⁵³ Karwińska A., Wiktor D. (2008), *Entrepreneurship and Social Benefits: Identification of Good Practices*, Social Economy texts, no. 6 (pp. 6-8):

Figure 4. A multi-level model of the benefits of implementing innovative practices in non-governmental organizations (NGOs).



Source: Own study based on empirical research.

It should be emphasized that not all good practices identified in one organization can be automatically applied in every other entity, which results from the unique elements

characterizing the socio-economic or institutional environment of individual organizations.⁵⁴

5.3. Case studies – good practices of NGOs in Poland

5.3.1. Social Enterprise "Kitchen of Conflict" (KK)

Kuchnia Konfliktu (KK) is an unusual social enterprise with its registered office | in Warsaw, which combines cuisine with a social mission. Below I will present key information about its activities, history, mission and achievements.



The Conflict Kitchen began its operations in 2016, initially operating seasonally in the summer. Thanks to a crowdfunding campaign and an auction of works of art at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, it was possible to raise funds for the purchase of a food truck and its equipment, as well as for professional training of employees. In 2016, after winning the CEE Starters competition, it acquired sponsors who helped open a permanent restaurant in the center of Warsaw.

The mission of the Conflict Kitchen focuses on the professional activation and integration of refugees and immigrants into the labor market. The company strives to:

- **Breaking stereotypes** about foreigners and refugees.
- **Promote cooperation** in a multinational and multicultural team.
- **Supporting refugees** in the labour market by providing a safe and discrimination-free working environment.

⁵⁴ Final report Benchmarking of smart specialization monitoring systems and the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process Benchmarking at the regional level Authors: dr Marcin Pierzchała – principal investigator, dr Tomasz Geodecki, Wojciech Onyśków, Agnieszka Otręba-Szklarczyk, Wacław Piekara, Karolina Rożniatowska, Marcin Rzepka, Magda Szczypka, dr Dariusz Szklarczyk, dr Roksana Ulatowska Cooperation: Marta Lesiak, Jacek Pokorski, Jacek Szut (PARP)

- **Creating a community and a meeting place** to counteract loneliness and social exclusion of foreigners.

KK employees acquire new professional skills, improve their Polish language and integrate into the community, which helps them regain their self-esteem and self-confidence. The company also organizes counseling meetings for refugees, helping them solve everyday problems, such as looking for housing, writing CVs or translating documents. It also supports them in cases of domestic violence by establishing contact with appropriate organizations.

Even though KK is a small business, it employs 10 people, serves about 35 customers a day, and supports about 40 refugees. The company is self-sufficient, although it does not generate much profit.

The Cultural Centre has won many awards and distinctions, which confirm the effectiveness of its activities:

- **2018:** "Discovery of the Year" award in the Jacek Kuroń competition for the Best Social Enterprise of the Year and a distinction for Jarmila Rybicka, the founder of KK, in the Businesswoman of the Year competition.
- **2017:** "Social Initiative of the Year" in the National Geographic Traveler competition and the Residents' Award in the S3KTOR 2017 competition.
- **2016:** Special Award "Nocny Marek" by Aktivist magazine, victory in the CEE Starters competition, the Lord's Skin Award 2016 and a distinction by the Ashoka Foundation as the best social start-up.

The CC effectively identifies and solves the problems of social exclusion, unemployment and discrimination against migrants in the labour market. He regularly monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of his work through surveys and employee meetings, which allows for ongoing adaptation of activities to the needs of employees and customers. KK's business model, based on culinary activities, is innovative and can be replicated elsewhere.

In the future, KK plans to diversify its sources of funding and improve its business model, seeking additional funds from grants and national and European institutions. The company's goal is to support foreigners and socially excluded people so that they can implement their plans and ideas for the future, not necessarily related to work in gastronomy.

Conflict Kitchen is an excellent example of a company that successfully combines business goals with a social mission, supporting the integration and professional activation of refugees and immigrants.⁵⁵

Assumptions and Methodology: Conflict Kitchen (KK) is a social enterprise that works for the professional activation of refugees and their integration into the labor market and society. The Catholic Church carries out its mission through:

- 1 Restaurant and Catering: Offering vegetarian dishes inspired by cuisines from different parts of the world, often affected by conflicts.
- 2 Culinary Workshops and Training: Organizing workshops and trainings that allow refugees to acquire new professional skills and integrate into the local community.
- 3 Counselling and support: Helping refugees with everyday problems, such as finding housing, filling out VAT returns, writing CVs, as well as in crisis situations, such as domestic violence.

Benefits and Results Achieved by Implementation

1. Refugees gain financial stability and new skills, which increases their chances in the labour market.

⁵⁵ GOOD PRACTICES OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES Annex I of Transnational Report on Successful Stories and Recommendations For Social Entrepreneurship Enhancement Instytut Ochrony Środowiska – Państwowy Instytut Badawczy (POLAND) Foundation "Institute for Private Enterprise and Democracy" (POLAND) Emphasys Centre (CYPRUS) DIMITRA Education & Consulting SA (GREECE) Social Enterprise International LTD (UK) Tiber Umbria Comett Education Programme (ITALY) Warsaw, 09.2020

2. KK employees have the opportunity to improve their Polish language and co-create an educational and cultural program.
3. Through the activities of the CC, negative stereotypes about foreigners are broken down, and a positive example of cooperation in a multinational team is promoted.
4. KK offers help in situations such as domestic violence or legal problems, working with appropriate organizations.
5. Former KK employees often become independent and pursue professional careers or set up their own businesses.

Possibility of Transfer to Other Organizations

KK's business model is designed to be open source, which means that it can be successfully used and replicated by other organizations. KK offers support and know-how to others who want to open a similar business. An innovative model of solving social problems through culinary activities, workshops and catering services can be adapted to different local contexts, where there are similar problems of integration of refugees and foreigners.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ <https://kuchniakonfliktu.pl/> accessed from 01-08-2024

5.3.2. Social Cooperative "Siedlisko" (Our Beloved Home)



Our Beloved Home - social cooperative "SIEDLISKO"

In the Polish reality, people with intellectual disabilities do not have many job opportunities. They need adequate support, which they are usually unable to obtain from employers. Young people with disabilities are most likely to stay at home without working, leading to social isolation and many forms of exclusion. In order to counteract such situations, a unique Association was established in the Opole region 14 years ago. As a result of his actions, a few years later, the first nursing home in Poland was opened, in which about 60% of the staff were disabled people.

The beginnings of the social cooperative called Siedlisko date back to 2006, when the Siedlisko Association for Assistance to Disabled People was founded in Zawadzkie, in the Opole Voivodeship. The initiative to create the Habitat was taken by teachers, parents and guardians of children and young people with mental disabilities. The founders wanted to develop a model of active support for the independence of this group and at the same time solve the problem of professional passivity. Initially, the organization focused on activities aimed at equalizing educational opportunities for children, young people and graduates of a special school complex at the social welfare home in Zawadzkie. Educational, therapeutic and recreational trips were organized, and funds were obtained for the treatment of children. The Association has established friendly relations with institutions and organizations operating in the Strzelce district and the local community, which has contributed to its constant development. Soon, the authorities of Siedlisko began efforts to open a center for the elderly and chronically ill, where people with disabilities found employment. It lasted 6 years. The establishment of the nursing home

was possible thanks to the favor of the local authorities (the Kolonowskie municipality sold the closed primary school building on preferential terms, located in Staniszcze Wielkie in 2010) and co-financing from the European Regional Development Fund under the Poland-Czech Republic Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013. Siedlisko was established on 1 July 2015, conducting activities in the field of providing round-the-clock care services for the elderly and chronically ill, as well as catering services, which are the main source of income of the organization, covering all its liabilities resulting from its activities. In both industries, people with disabilities work under the supervision of qualified personnel. They are employed in auxiliary positions related to the performance of basic care activities and in gastronomy, e.g. peeling vegetables, cleaning, washing dishes, etc.

Currently, the company takes care of 24 seniors and employs 31 people, of which 24 are people at risk of social exclusion. As part of its catering service, Siedlisko cooperates with local schools, kindergartens and hospitals, e.g. in Ozimek. The company serves about 600 meals a day. Both for seniors in the Nursing Home and for all clients using catering, the company offers high-quality services. The concept of the kitchen is based on healthy and natural food, free of preservatives and enhancers, which is in line with modern consumer trends and results in numerous orders.

The Siedlisko nursing home is not only the first such complex in the Opole region, but also a unique idea on a national scale. The company professionally activates people with disabilities, while creating great conditions and a place for seniors, enabling integration with the local community.

The idea of merging two groups at risk of exclusion and marginalization has worked well so far. A habitat is a place where stereotypes are broken and the differences between healthy and sick people are blurred. Cooperation is based on a partnership relationship. People with disabilities get along well with seniors, creating a unique atmosphere of this place. The company is profitable not only in the financial context, but above all it has a huge social value. The activities carried out

by the association are increasingly noticed on the national forum. The company is already well known in the region and works with local authorities and the community. In 2018, Siedlisko received a distinction in the Icebreakers competition at the regional stage (the edition included 4 voivodeships: Lower Silesia, Lubuskie, Opole and Silesia). Icebreakers is a competition promoting the employment of people with disabilities and eliminating social divisions towards people with disabilities. Siedlisko also won the Main Prize and the title of Social Enterprise of the Year 2019 in the Jacek Kuroń Competition. The company was awarded for creating a unique workplace in the local community. The greatest achievement of the association is the continuous development of the company, increasing the number of employees and seniors. The habitat maintains a stable financial situation thanks to effective fundraising, high quality of services provided and a positive impact on the local community. It is worth noting that the interest in places in the nursing home is very high (about 7 calls a week asking for a place).

The success of the company is undoubtedly related to the experience of the leaders of the organization, who were educators and teachers in a special school before founding the company, so they knew perfectly well the needs of their charges and the problems related to working with people with disabilities. Thanks to this, it was possible to develop an effective plan for social and professional activation. "We taught most of our employees at school. Now the sick help other patients. We have noticed that people with disabilities are confined to their homes after graduating from school. They are physically fit, have many interests and a desire to work. We should use it somehow, so they work here, earn money, are treated like other employees," said Magdalena Grzymek, a member of the association's board (Wrona and Ruszczewska, 2018), in one of the interviews. The working hours of disabled people and the scope of duties are fully adapted to their capabilities and willingness. These are usually simple, repetitive tasks. The authorities of the association emphasize that the most important factors in working with people with

disabilities are: lack of competition and feelings of stress, an understanding approach to the employee and a clear division of duties. With the right rules, people with disabilities can work like healthy people. It is also worth emphasizing the approach to caring for seniors living in a nursing home. In Siedlisko, the "active model" was adopted, the basic assumption of which is to use the individual potential of each resident in the course of care. An individual approach allows for the intensification of the social activity of the elderly, which in turn often brings them considerable satisfaction. For example, physically fit residents of Siedlisko do not receive meals in their rooms, they are mobilized to eat meals together on the ground floor. The association also organizes many entertainment and educational activities for seniors, trips, visits and many other similar actions, which are carefully reported on social media. The photos available on the Siedliska Facebook profile show the everyday life in the nursing home full of optimism. Thanks to this, the public perception of his activities is met with enthusiasm and sympathy.

A similar solution was implemented by the Czech partner of the association. As part of the project, disabled people from the Czech Republic completed an internship in Siedlisko, which prepared them for paid employment.⁵⁷

Assumptions and Methodology of the Siedlisko Social Cooperative

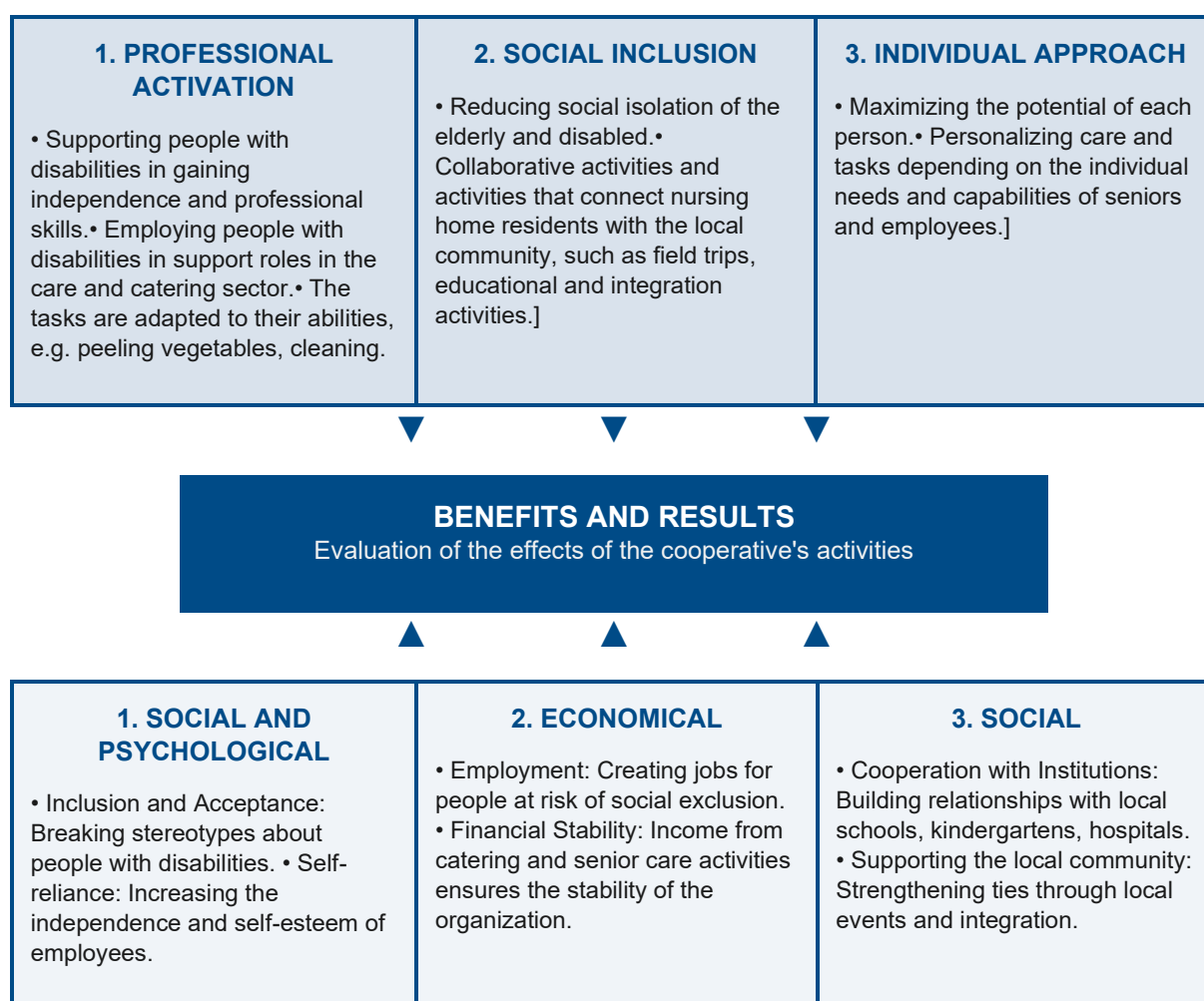
The Social Cooperative "Siedlisko" represents the model of a social enterprise, in which economic activity has been subordinated to the achievement of social goals. The functioning of the organization is based on a combination of care services with professional activation of people at risk of social exclusion. As a result, economic activity becomes a tool for creating jobs, developing the independence of beneficiaries

⁵⁷ GOOD PRACTICES OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES Annex I of Transnational Report on Successful Stories and Recommendations For Social Entrepreneurship Enhancement Instytut Ochrony Środowiska – Państwowy Instytut Badawczy (POLAND) Foundation "Institute for Private Enterprise and Democracy" (POLAND) Emphasys Centre (CYPRUS) DIMITRA Education & Consulting SA (GREECE) Social Enterprise International LTD (UK) Tiber Umbria Comett Education Programme (ITALY) Warsaw, 09.2020

and providing services that respond to the needs of the local community.

Figure 5. Model of the structure of assumptions, benefits and results of the Siedlisko Social Cooperative.

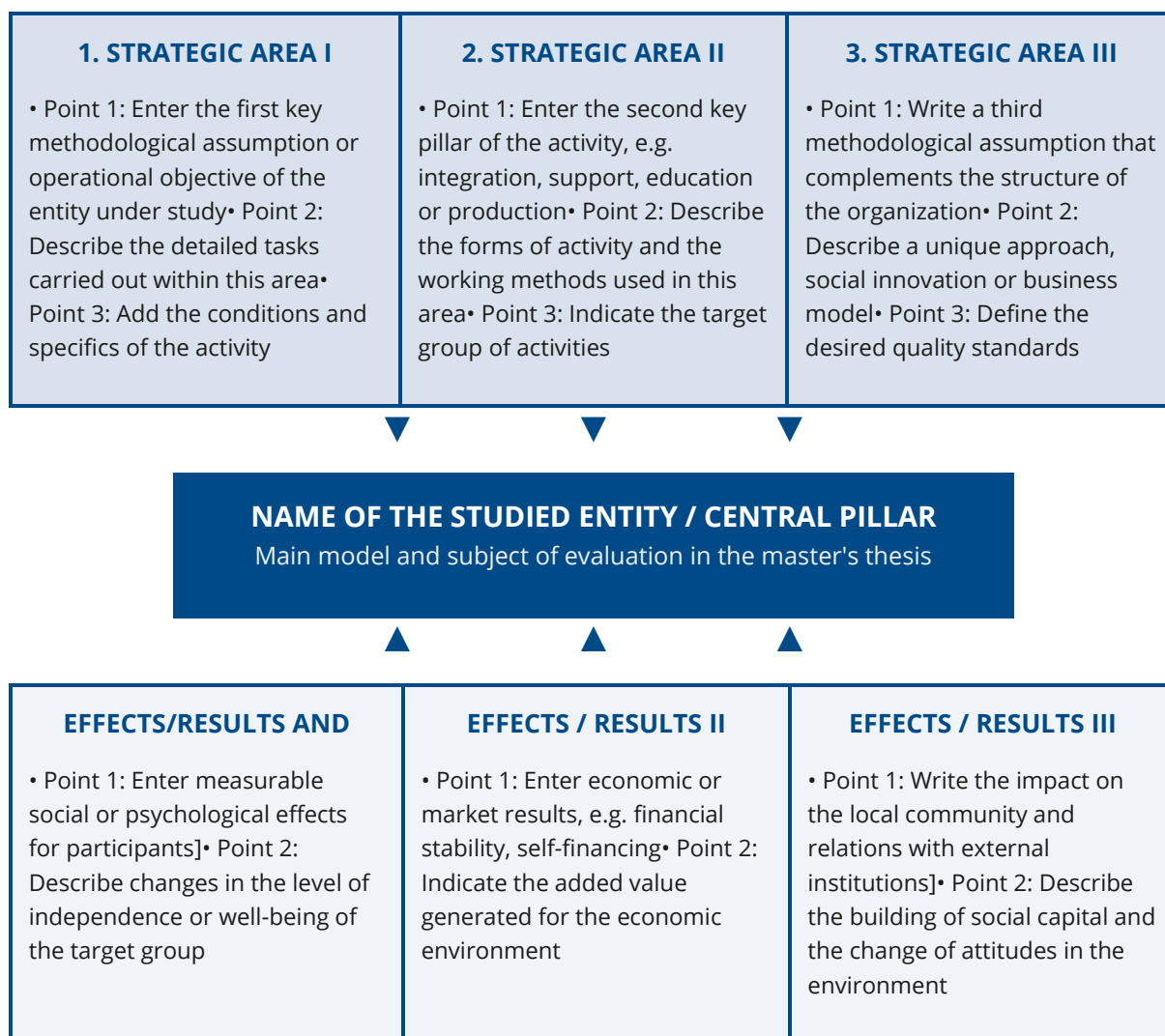
ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE SIEDLISKO SOCIAL COOPERATIVE



Source: Own study based on empirical data of the entity

Figure 6. A model of the functional and resultant structure of the next studied subject.

ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE INVESTIGATED ENTITY – ANOTHER CASE STUDY



Source: Own study.

One of the basic directions of the organization's activity is the preparation of persons with disabilities to actively participate in the labour market. This process is not limited to employment, but includes the gradual development of professional and social

competences. The scope of the assigned duties is each time adapted to the individual capabilities of employees, thanks to which people participating in the program can perform tasks in accordance with their predispositions. These include, but are not limited to, assistance in preparing meals, cleaning work and activities supporting the functioning of the nursing home. Such an organized work process allows you to gain professional experience, increases the sense of responsibility and promotes building independence.

The second pillar of activity is social integration. The organization takes measures to reduce the isolation of the elderly and people with disabilities through their active participation in the life of the local community. Integration events, workshops, educational activities and trips are organized, in which the residents of the nursing home, employees, volunteers and residents of the region participate. Such initiatives are conducive to establishing interpersonal relationships and building a positive image of people with disabilities as active participants in social life.

The model of functioning of "Siedlisko" assumes an individual approach to both to the residents of the nursing home, as well as people employed in the cooperative. The scope of support and work organization take into account the state of health, level of independence, experience and capabilities of each person. This allows for more effective use of the potential of participants and ensures greater effectiveness of rehabilitation and activation activities.

The effects of the organization's activities are visible on several levels. In the social dimension, there is an increase in the activity of people with disabilities, an improvement in their functioning in the local environment and a gradual reduction of stereotypes concerning this group. Employment also affects the development of economic independence and strengthens the sense of agency and responsibility for one's own life.

Parallel business activity provides the organization with a stable financial foundation. Revenues come mainly from the provision of care services and catering and catering activities. Diversification of income sources increases the economic security of

cooperatives and reduces dependence project financing and enables further development of the business.

Cooperation with the institutional environment remains an important element of the model. The cooperative maintains relations with local government units, educational institutions, health care entities and social organizations. Jointly implemented initiatives allow for the development of the local system of social services and strengthen cooperation between institutions acting for the benefit of residents.

The experience gained by "Siedlisko" indicates that the developed solutions can also be used by other social economy organizations. The versatility of the model results primarily from the possibility of adapting it to local conditions and the needs of individual groups of recipients. This approach is confirmed by the activities carried out within the framework of international cooperation, during which the organization shares its experience with foreign partners.

Training and educational activities are also conducive to the dissemination of the model. The organization provides knowledge on professional activation, the provision of care services and the management of social enterprises during study visits, workshops and conferences. In this way, practical experiences become a source of inspiration for other social economy actors interested in implementing similar solutions.

The example of the "Siedlisko" Social Cooperative shows that it is possible to effectively combine business activity with the achievement of social goals. The sustainability of this model is determined primarily by the individualization of support, cooperation with the local environment, diversified sources of financing and consistent investment in the development of the competences of employees and beneficiaries.

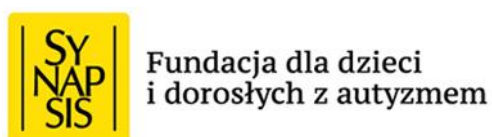
Table 7. The model of functioning of the Social Cooperative "Siedlisko"

Area of activity	Model characteristics	Results
Professional activation	Adaptation of workplaces to the capabilities of people with disabilities, employment in gastronomy and care services, development of professional competences.	Increase in employment, development of independence, gaining professional experience.
Social inclusion	Organization of integration events, workshops, trips and intergenerational activities involving residents and beneficiaries.	Reducing social isolation, increasing social activity, building local ties.
Individualization of support	Adapting the scope of duties and services to the needs and capabilities of each person.	Higher effectiveness of social and vocational rehabilitation, improvement of the quality of life of beneficiaries.
Economic model	Financing of the activity through care services and catering and catering activities.	Financial stability of the organization and the possibility of further development.
Local partnerships	Cooperation with local government, schools, kindergartens, health care facilities and social organizations.	Development of a local cooperation network and increasing the availability of social services.
Transfer of good practices	Organization of trainings, study visits, international cooperation and dissemination of experience.	Deploy the model to other organizations and regions.

Source: own study based on the materials of the Social Cooperative "Siedlisko",

With its comprehensive methodology and effective practices, "Habitat" is a model for other organizations that want to introduce social change and create inclusive workplaces.⁵⁸

5.3.3. Laboratory of Miscellaneous Things SYNAPSIS



Workshop of Miscellaneous Things SYNAPSIS

The SYNAPSIS Various Things Workshop was founded by the SYNAPSIS Foundation, which provides professional assistance to children and adults with autism. The SYNAPSIS Various Things Laboratory provides employment and occupational therapy for adults with autism spectrum disorders.

The SYNAPSIS Foundation was founded in 1989 to help people with autism and their families. In the first years, co-workers, teachers and parents were trained. New diagnostic methods were introduced, and therapeutic and educational methods were adapted to the needs of the Program of Assistance to Autistic Children and Their Families. In September 1993, a team of therapists specializing in child development disorders was established.

In the years 2004-2007, the SYNAPSIS Foundation implemented the "Partnership for Rain Man" project, which created a model of a social enterprise

⁵⁸ <http://siedlisko.org.pl/> accessed from 05-08-2024

for people with autism spectrum disorders, created by institutions from three sectors – NGOs, private companies and public administration. International partners also participated in the project. The project was co-financed by the European Social Fund as part of the EQUAL Community Initiative and funds from the Marshal's Office of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship in Warsaw.

The construction of the building for the social enterprise in Wilcza Góra near Warsaw began in 2005 and lasted for a year. The SYNAPSIS Various Things Workshop was launched in March 2007, and the first adults with autism were hired a month later. Currently, the laboratory provides employment and therapy for 24 people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders from Warsaw and the surrounding area.

According to estimates ("More and more cases of autism"), in 2018 there were about 70,000 adults with autism in Poland. Most of these people are not working or have problems finding a job, and work is very important in their therapy and rehabilitation. That is why the SYNAPSIS Foundation has established the SYNAPSIS Various Things Workshop. The studio combines business and social activities – by creating workplaces tailored to the needs of people with autism, it provides professional and social activation. Work in the Studio was supposed to be a transitional stage, enabling employees to take up employment on the open labor market.

Four workshops were organized: carpentry, ceramic, office and paper workshops, as well as handicrafts, in which stained glass, jewelry, etc. are created. The number of employees increased from 20 to 24, as planned. The specificity of autism disorders does not allow for mass production; The workshop produces "tailor-made" products, in short series or as single copies. The production process must be adapted to the skills of each employee, and at the same time the product must respond to the customer's needs. During the existence of the workshops, a work model, sales channels and marketing activities were developed to maintain and increase sales.

Currently, the main source of funding is PFRON funds intended for the activities of ZAZ, donations from the SYNAPSIS Foundation, profits from the sale of products and occasionally projects. Due to insufficient funds, staff salaries are insufficient, and the modernization of the workplace, equipment and equipment is postponed.

The result of the "Partnership for Rain Man" project is the first social enterprise in Poland, employing 24 adults with various autism spectrum disorders. It was the only project out of a hundred in the EQUAL program in which the construction of the building was financed (Atlas of Good Practices). The project was awarded the title of "Best Investment in Human" by the European Social Fund in 2007 and the European Entrepreneurship Award 2007.

Thanks to the Laboratory, employees work systematically (all on the basis of an employment contract), receive professional support and learn to be independent. They are not residents of nursing homes and do not sit idle at home. The continuous operation of the Studio, despite the completion of the start-up project, is considered the most important achievement and priority for the founders. For 13 years, the Laboratory has been conducting professional and social rehabilitation activities for people with autism through workshops, individual and group training, and external internships. Revalidation activities are carried out, m.in, in the form of training, art therapy or board games. Employees acquire the skills and competences necessary for independent, effective cooperation – communication, organization of place and time of work, cooperation in a group. The company provides employment and therapy for 24 adults. The support staff consists of a manager with a marketing team, a fundraiser, a team of job coaches and an industrial designer. The studio offers training and study visits on the functioning of this type of enterprise, and also cooperates with local non-governmental organizations.

The Studio's strategy focuses mainly on:

- maintaining the online store, daily updates and seasonal offer,
- active search for customers on the Internet/social media and regular information campaigns regarding the Studio's products,
- promotion of products and the Workshop during local events, conferences, etc.,
- presentation of products at the Lesznawola Commune Office and the headquarters of the SYNAPSIS Foundation,
- organizing promotional meetings with potential business clients, representatives of state and local government administration,
- maintaining regular contact with existing customers, including business customers,
- offering training on working with people with autism and the opportunity to observe practical solutions used,
- cooperation with local NGOs.

The team of trainers regularly participates in competence building trainings to increase knowledge about autism disorders. Employees are periodically evaluated, the system for implementing new work coaches is updated, and innovative projects are implemented as part of the Foundation's activities. Creating a model enterprise for use by other organizations was part of the plan. The possibility of organizing a study visit, the purpose of which is to observe the practical solutions used in the Studio, can be a source of inspiration and practical knowledge about working with people with disabilities.

Constant adaptation of the Studio's offer to the changing market with the full participation of supporting staff, development of local activities in the Piaseczno district, increasing individual sales, concluding long-term contracts with the business sector and increasing participation in environmental projects.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ GOOD PRACTICES OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES Annex I of Transnational Report on Successful Stories and Recommendations For Social Entrepreneurship Enhancement Instytut Ochrony Środowiska – Państwowy Instytut Badawczy (POLAND) Foundation "Institute for Private Enterprise and Democracy" (POLAND) Emphasys Centre (CYPRUS) DIMITRA Education & Consulting SA (GREECE) Social Enterprise International LTD (UK) Tiber Umbria Comett Education Programme (ITALY) Warsaw, 09.2020

Description of the Assumptions and Methodology of the Practice

The SYNAPSIS Various Things Workshop was created to provide adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) with employment opportunities and occupational therapy. It is a project of the SYNAPSIS Foundation, whose mission is to support people with autism and their families in Poland.

Assumptions

The presented diagram presents a model of the functioning of the SYNAPSIS Various Things Laboratory, which is a social enterprise created by the SYNAPSIS Foundation to support adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The organization's activity is based on a combination of economic activity with the achievement of social goals, the primary task of which is to increase the professional and social independence of people with autism and prepare them for the most independent functioning in professional life.

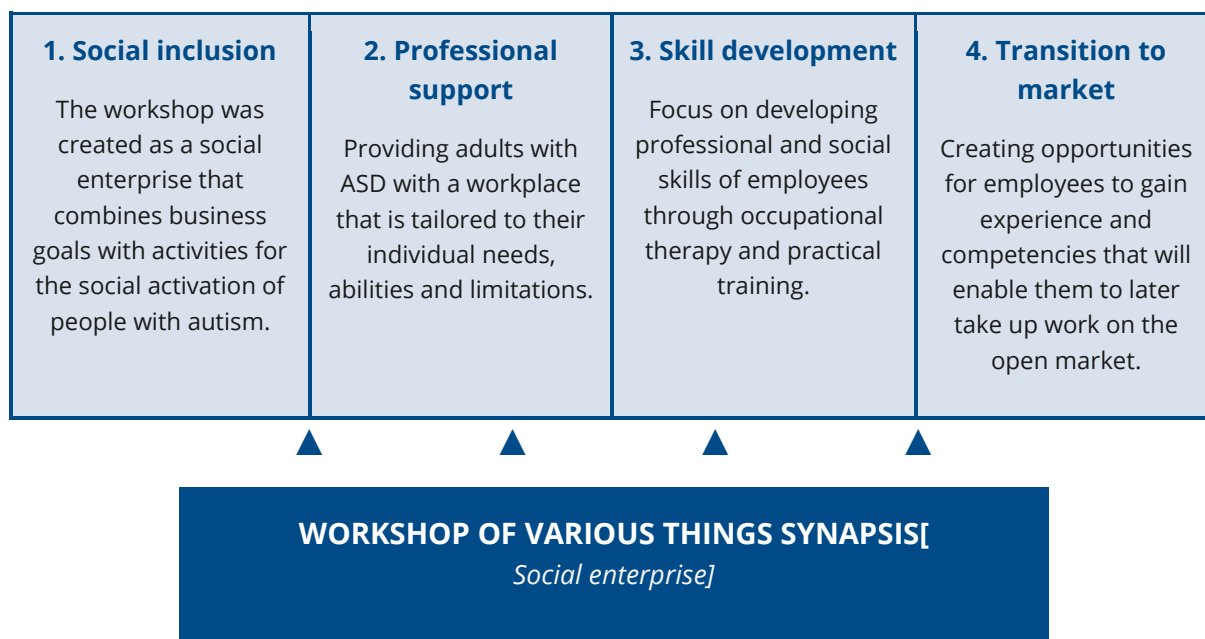
At the center of the model is the SYNAPSIS Workshop of Various Things, which serves as a social enterprise combining economic activity with the process of social and professional rehabilitation. The adopted concept assumes that employment is not only a source of income, but above all a tool for developing competences, building a sense of agency and strengthening the social activity of people with ASD.

Figure 7. Scheme of assumptions and methodological structure of the SYNAPSIS Laboratory of Various Things.

WORKSHOP OF THINGS OF VARIOUS SYNAPSES

Assumptions and Methodology of Practice

The SYNAPSIS Various Things Workshop was created to provide adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) with employment opportunities and occupational therapy. It is a project of the SYNAPSIS Foundation, whose mission is to support people with autism and their families in Poland.



MAIN OBJECTIVE

Building professional and social independence of people with autism, increasing their independence and supporting them in achieving their full potential in a friendly and supportive work environment.

Source: Own study based on the design assumptions of the SYNAPSIS Foundation.

The first pillar of the model is social inclusion. The organization was created with the aim of counteracting the social exclusion of people with autism by creating a work environment conducive to their active participation in social life. The functioning of a social enterprise makes it possible to build interpersonal relationships, develop cooperation skills and break stereotypes about the professional capabilities of people with autism spectrum disorders. Thanks to daily contacts with employees, customers and

social partners, the participants of the program gradually increase their independence and social competences.

The second element of the model is professional support, the basic assumption of which is to create jobs tailored to the individual capabilities of employees. The organization takes into account the diverse level of functioning of people with ASD, properly selecting the scope of duties, the organization of workplaces and the manner of performing the tasks entrusted to them. Such a solution allows for effective use of employees' potential, while reducing barriers to professional activity.

Another pillar of activity is the development of professional and social competences. The process of preparation for work includes both practical performance of professional duties and therapeutic and training activities. Participants gain experience related to work organization, interpersonal communication, responsibility for performed tasks and functioning in a team. The developed competences increase their chances for further professional development and active participation in social life.

The last element of the model concerns preparation for entering the open labour market. The workshop serves as a transitional environment in which people with autism can gain work experience, develop competencies and prepare for employment outside the social enterprise. As a result, the participants of the program increase their competitiveness on the labor market and gain greater economic independence.

The lower part of the diagram presents the main goal of the organization's activity, which is to build professional and social independence of people with autism by creating a safe, friendly and adapted to their needs work environment. The implementation of this goal is carried out with the use of an individual approach to each employee and systematic support for their development.

The presented model shows that a social enterprise can effectively combine economic activity with the implementation of a social mission. The example of the SYNAPSIS Workshop of Various Things confirms that a properly designed work

environment, taking into account the needs of people with autism spectrum disorders, creates real opportunities for professional development, increases the level of social integration and prepares participants to function independently on the open labor market. This model can be an inspiration for other social economy organizations undertaking activities for the professional activation of people with disabilities and the development of services supporting the process of their social and professional integration.

Methodology

Table 8. Methodology of the SYNAPSIS Laboratory of Various Things

An element of methodology	Characteristics	Importance for the functioning of the organization
Individualized approach to the employee	The organization of work is based on an individual diagnosis of the needs, capabilities and competences of each person with autism spectrum disorders. An adapted daily schedule and scope of responsibilities are prepared for each employee, taking into account their predispositions and limitations.	It increases the comfort of work, develops independence, reduces stress and enables effective use of employees' potential.
Varied work workshops	The activity is carried out in specialized workshops, including carpentry, ceramics, papermaking, handicraft and office workshops. Production is carried out in short series with high quality workmanship and the possibility of adapting tasks	It allows you to develop a variety of professional skills, increases the attractiveness of the company's offer and allows you to adjust the workplace to individual predispositions.

	to the competences of employees.	
Training and specialist support system	The work process is supported by job trainers and marketing and sales specialists. They provide ongoing substantive support, help develop professional competences and support the organization of business activity.	It increases the quality of the work performed, facilitates the development of professional competences and increases the effectiveness of the functioning of the social enterprise.
Social Enterprise Model (ZAZ)	The Laboratory functions as the Occupational Activity Center (ZAZ), which makes it possible to combine business activity with the achievement of social goals. The financing model includes funds from the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PFRON), the sale of products and support from donors and partners.	It ensures the financial stability of the organization, enables the employment of people with disabilities and the development of social and economic activity.
Cooperation with the institutional environment	The organization develops partnerships with non-governmental organizations, enterprises, public administration units and other institutions supporting people with disabilities. Cooperation includes the implementation of	It strengthens the local cooperation network, increases the recognition of the organization, facilitates the acquisition of new partners and develops employment opportunities for people with ASD.

	joint projects, product promotion, and educational and social activities.	
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Source: own study based on materials of the SYNAPSIS Foundation

The model of functioning of the SYNAPSIS Laboratory of Various Things has been developed with a view to creating conditions in which people with autism spectrum disorders can develop their professional and social competences in an environment adapted to their individual needs. The company's activity combines the process of social and vocational rehabilitation with conducting economic activity, thanks to which work becomes not only a source of income, but also an important element supporting the development of independence and preparation for performing social roles.

The basis of work organization is an individual approach to each employee. The diversity of functioning of people with autism means that there is no one universal model of professional activation. For this reason, the scope of duties, the organization of the workplace and the daily schedule are adapted to the capabilities, predispositions and needs of a particular person. Such a solution increases the sense of security, facilitates adaptation to the work environment and allows you to gradually develop professional competences.

Work takes place in several specialized studios, the profile of which corresponds to the different interests and capabilities of the program participants. Depending on individual predispositions, employees perform tasks in a carpentry, ceramic, paper, handicraft or office workshop. Production is based on short

series of products, which allows to maintain high quality of products and flexibly adapt the work process to the capabilities of the employees. Such a system allows you to acquire practical professional skills while maintaining an appropriate pace of work.

Constant support of specialists plays a significant role in the activation process. The course of work is supervised by work coaches who help employees in performing everyday duties, developing independence and overcoming difficulties that arise during the implementation of tasks. The organization also benefits from the knowledge of marketing and sales specialists, thanks to which it is possible to effectively run a business and promote products manufactured by employees.

The Laboratory functions as a Vocational Activity Centre, which is an important element of the entire organisational model. This status allows you to use support instruments for entities employing persons with disabilities, including funds from the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons. The financing is complemented by revenues obtained from the sale of products and funds obtained from donors and cooperating partners with the organization. Basing your business on several sources of financing increases the stability of the company and allows you to plan its development in the long term.

Extensive cooperation with the institutional environment is another important element of the Laboratory's functioning. The organization maintains relations with local government units, non-governmental organizations, enterprises and public institutions supporting people with disabilities. These partnerships include the implementation of joint ventures, educational activities, promotion of the social economy and the development of new initiatives responding to the needs of the local community. Cooperation with various environments increases the opportunities for the development of the organization, and at the same time creates a broader system of support for people participating in the professional activation program.

The experience of the SYNAPSIS Laboratory of Various Things indicates that the effectiveness of the professional activation process depends on the combination of

several mutually complementary elements. Individualization of support, a properly organized work environment, the presence of qualified staff and stable organizational facilities create conditions conducive to the professional development of people with autism. At the same time, business activity allows an organization to maintain economic sustainability and achieve social goals in a systematic manner. The developed model may be a reference point for other social economy entities planning to develop services supporting people with autism spectrum disorders and implement solutions conducive to their social and professional integration.

Benefits and Results Achieved by Implementation

Benefits

- The workshop provides a workplace for 24 adults with autism, which contributes to their social and professional activation.
- Employees acquire social and professional skills, such as communication, work organization, cooperation in a group, which are necessary to function in the open labor market.
- Enabling employees to participate in social life, which has a positive impact on their well-being and self-esteem.
- The workshop is a model for other organizations and social enterprises that want to support people with disabilities.

Results

- The "Partnership for Rain Man" project has won awards such as the "Best Investment in Human" from the European Social Fund and the European Enterprise Award.
- The studio has been operating since 2007, constantly developing its activities and adapting its offer to the changing needs of the market and the local community.
- Thanks to the activities of the Laboratory, social awareness of autism and the need for support for people with ASD has increased.

Possibility of Transfer to Other Organizations

The solutions developed by the SYNAPSIS Various Things Studio are universal and are not limited to the specifics of one organization. On the contrary, many elements of the model used can be implemented by social enterprises, non-governmental organizations and public institutions carrying out activities for the professional activation and social integration of people with disabilities.

Table 9. The potential of the transfer of the model of functioning of the SYNAPSIS Laboratory of Various Things

Transfer Area	Characteristics	Applications in other organizations
Work organization model	The model of operation of the SYNAPSIS Laboratory of Various Things is based on a combination of economic activity with professional activation of people with autism spectrum disorders. The organization creates a work environment tailored to	The solution can be used by social enterprises, non-governmental organizations and institutions planning to create jobs for people with disabilities. Study visits and analysis of the organizational model can be a source of good practices and inspiration for the

	the needs of employees and enables the development of professional and social competences.	implementation of similar solutions.
Cross-sectoral cooperation	The functioning of the organization is based on cooperation with local government units, non-governmental organizations, enterprises and public institutions. Partnerships include project implementation, educational activities and the development of social services.	The model of cooperation can be adapted in other regions as an example of building local partnerships supporting the development of the social economy and the integration of people at risk of social exclusion.
Individualization of the work process	The organization adjusts the scope of duties, job positions and support system to the capabilities and needs of each employee. Individualization includes both the organization of work and the development of professional and social competences.	The principles of individual work planning can be implemented in social enterprises, occupational activity institutions and other organizations employing people with autism or other types of disabilities.

Source: own study based on materials of the SYNAPSIS Foundation,

Particularly noteworthy is the comprehensive nature of the developed model, which combines individual support of beneficiaries, a properly organized work environment, professional preparation of staff and developed cooperation with local partners. This approach increases the sustainability of the organization, facilitates the achievement of the assumed social results and at the same time allows you to conduct business activities that ensure the financial stability of the social enterprise.

The experience of the SYNAPSIS Foundation shows that the effectiveness of professional activation of people with autism spectrum disorders depends not only on creating appropriate jobs, but also on building lasting partnerships with public administration, non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurs and the local environment. An important element of the model is also the individualization of the work process, allowing for adjusting the scope of duties and support methods to the capabilities of each employee.

- The SYNAPSIS Various Things Workshop can serve as a model for other organizations that want to create jobs for people with disabilities. Study visits to the Laboratory can be an inspiration and a source of practical knowledge.
- A collaborative approach between NGOs, the private sector and public administrations can be adapted to different contexts to create effective social enterprises.
- The principles of adapting workplaces and tasks to the individual needs of employees can be implemented in other organizations that employ people with autism or other disabilities.

Transfer Guidelines

Transfer Guidelines

- Any organization interested in adapting the model should conduct an analysis of local needs and opportunities in order to adapt the working methods to the specifics of their region.
- A key aspect is to ensure stable funding, including the use of available public funds and building partnerships with the private sector.
- It is essential to provide appropriate training for staff and to create a team of specialists who will support employees in their daily work and skills development.

Figure 9. Adaptation Structural Diagram

EXAMPLES OF MODEL ADAPTATION

Practical directions of implementation and business development

01. SETTING UP NEW ZAZ

Scaling the model: Organizations in other regions can set up similar Occupational Activity Centres, using the experience and knowledge gained by the Workshop.

02. DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration with local NGOs, businesses, and administration: It can help you successfully implement the model in new locations.

03. SOCIAL EDUCATION

Social education: Organizing information campaigns and educational workshops to raise awareness about autism and promote a model of working with people with ASD.

Examples of adaptation:

- **Establishing new ZAZs:** Organizations in other regions can set up similar Occupational Activity Centres, using the experience and knowledge gained by the Workshop.
- **Developing local** partnerships: Working with local NGOs, businesses, and administrations can help you successfully implement the model in new locations.
- **Social education:** Organizing information campaigns and educational workshops to raise awareness about autism and promote a model of working with people with ASD.

The SYNAPSIS Workshop of Various Things is an example of an innovative approach

to supporting people with autism by creating adapted workplaces, which can be an inspiration for other organizations in Poland and around the world.⁶⁰

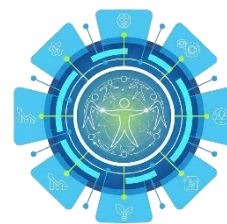
Each of these organizations contributes to positive social and ecological change using its unique approach and methodology. Their actions:

- They promote social inclusion by offering support and employment to people from different social groups, including refugees, people with autistic disorders and people experiencing life crises.
- They support sustainability through organic production practices and the promotion of healthy lifestyles and sustainable nutrition.
- They raise public awareness of diversity, acceptance and inclusion by conducting education and social campaigns.

⁶⁰<https://synapsis.org.pl/> accessed from 06-08-2024

Through these practices, their operating models can be adapted and developed in other communities, promoting sustainability and social inclusion on a wider scale.

6. Solutions and models of cooperation that can be used in adult education



An analysis of good practices identified during study visits to Italy and Lithuania indicates that many of the solutions used can be adapted by adult education organisations. This applies both to the way the learning process is organized, as well as to the building of local partnerships and cross-sectoral cooperation. Solutions combining education with professional practice, social activation and the development of competences necessary for the labour market are particularly important.

Table 10. Overview of solutions and models of cooperation that can be used in adult education

Best practice	Solution description	Applicability in adult education
Ortoinsieme (Italy)	Learning through practical work in a social enterprise and individual support of participants.	Organization of vocational courses based on <i>the method of learning by doing</i> , mentoring and internships in social enterprises.
Hostaria Rò e Bunì (Włochy)	Gastronomy as a tool for social integration and professional activation.	Creating professional workshops and programs developing practical and social competences of adults.
Povero Diavolo (Italy)	Employing migrants and developing professional competences in a real work environment.	Migrant integration programmes including language learning, professional competence development and mentoring.
San Patrignano (Italy)	Comprehensive rehabilitation combined with education, work and development of social competences.	Individual educational paths for people at risk of social exclusion and social and professional reintegration programs.
Food Bank (Litwa)	Cooperation of social organizations, volunteers and enterprises in the	Developing civic education, volunteering and projects teaching responsible resource management.

Best practice	Solution description	Applicability in adult education
	implementation of social activities.	
Save the Children (Litwa)	Support for families through the cooperation of many institutions.	Creating local adult education centers cooperating with social organizations and public institutions.
National Network of Poverty Reduction Organizations (Litwa)	Networking of organizations and joint development of social solutions.	Developing educational partnerships and exchanging experiences between adult education organisations.
First pancake (Litwa)	Vocational training in a social enterprise and gradual increase in the independence of participants.	Implementation of a practical vocational education model combined with coaching and mentoring.
"L" Foundation (Poland)	Supporting education, building a strong community through the organization of cultural, social and ecological initiatives	Organization of workshops and trainings aimed at developing digital and soft competences among adults.
ŁOWES (Łomża Social Economy Support Centre)	Comprehensive support for social enterprises and non-governmental organizations, including consulting, incubation and grants.	Organization of specialist training and counselling to support the development of competences and professional activation of people at risk of exclusion.
Charity (Poland)	A social enterprise combining job creation with commercial and ecological activities (recycling, refurbishment and sale of second-hand items).	Practical education in the area of conscious consumption and ecology and learning commercial skills through work for socially excluded people.
ZAZ ARGENTA in Łomża (Poland)	Occupational Activity Centre, which creates fully adapted workplaces for people with a significant and moderate degree of disability.	Rehabilitation through employment, development of competences and a sense of independence thanks to the support of specialists and access to on-the-job training.
Sopotek (Poland)	A social café and restaurant, the main goal of which is the	Practical training in the catering industry allowing adults to gain

Best practice	Solution description	Applicability in adult education
	social and professional reintegration of the long-term unemployed and people with disabilities.	experience, develop skills and return to the labour market.

The analysis indicates that the solutions used by the visited organizations are universal and can be used by adult education institutions regardless of the country of operation. A common element of most models is the departure from traditional forms of education in favor of education based on experience, practical performance of tasks and close cooperation with the local social and economic environment.

Solutions using mentoring, individual development paths, work-based learning (*learning by doing*), cross-sectoral cooperation and building local partnerships. These internships increase the effectiveness of the educational process, facilitate the development of professional competencies and strengthen the labour market activity of participants.

From the perspective of adult education, it also seems particularly valuable to include social enterprises in the education process as places of gaining work experience. This approach allows you to combine the development of competencies professional practice, and at the same time supports the achievement of social goals by activating people at risk of exclusion.

Based on the analysis, the following solutions can be implemented:

1. Using social enterprises as places for practical learning and gaining work experience.
2. Introducing mentoring and individual development paths for participants.
3. Developing partnerships between non-governmental organizations, local governments, social enterprises and educational institutions.
4. The use of *learning by doing* and experiential education.

5. Combining the development of professional competences with the formation of social and civic competences.
6. Inclusion of volunteering and social activities in educational programs.
7. Systematic assessment of the social effects of implemented programs using social impact indicators.
8. Creating international cooperation networks to exchange experiences and good practices.

7. Project activities



7.1. Study visits

7.1.1. Study visits to Poland



Project titled "Inclusion and Integration – Competences in the Field of Social Economy" co-financed by the European Union.

One of the elements of the project were study visits organized in Poland on days **13–16 March 2024**, which was attended by representatives of partners from Italy and Lithuania. The aim of the visits was to familiarize the participants with the functioning of Polish social economy entities, exchange experiences and identify possible solutions to be used in the activities carried out by the project partners. An important issue addressed during the meetings was also the analysis of the possibility of using digital tools, including artificial intelligence (AI), in the activities of social economy organizations.

The program of the visits included meetings with representatives of social enterprises and institutions supporting the development of the social economy. The participants had the opportunity to learn about models of work organization, ways of managing social and economic activity and solutions used in the field of professional activation and social integration of people at risk of exclusion. Particular attention was paid to the practical aspects of the functioning of social enterprises and cooperation between the social sector, public administration and local partners.

An important element of the program were workshops on the use of modern technologies in the social economy. The discussion focused on the possibilities of using artificial intelligence in improving administrative processes, analyzing data on the needs of local communities, supporting organizational management and improving communication with stakeholders. Participants exchanged experiences on the potential benefits and limitations associated with the implementation of solutions based on digital technologies in the activities of social economy entities.

During the visit, the legal and organizational conditions of the functioning of the social economy in Poland were also analysed and compared with the solutions in force in Italy and Lithuania. This allowed to identify similarities and differences between national support systems and to identify factors that should be taken into account when adapting foreign experiences to local conditions. Particular attention was paid to the role of cross-sectoral partnerships, the development of staff competencies and the use of innovative management methods.

The study visit also created a space for the exchange of experiences between the project partners and a joint discussion on the directions of development of the social economy. The information obtained was used in the development of cooperation models, training paths for social economy facilitators and the recommendations presented in this manual.

The activities carried out confirmed that the development of the social economy requires combining international experience with local legal and institutional conditions. At the same time, they pointed to the growing importance

of digital competences and the use of new technologies as tools supporting the management of social organizations, the development of services and increasing the effectiveness of activities undertaken for the benefit of local communities.

7.1.2. Study visits to Lithuania

From **9 to 12 September 2024** a study visit to Lithuania was organized as part of the Erasmus+ project "**Inclusion and Integration – Competences in the Field of Social Economy**", implemented by partners from Polish, Lithuania and Italy. The event was hosted by **Šalčininkų specialioji mokykla**, while the meetings were attended by representatives of all partner organizations of the project. The program of the visit included both working meetings on the implementation of the project and visits to organizations representing various models of social economy functioning in Lithuania.

The first day of the visit was devoted to the organizational meeting of the project partners, during which the objectives of the visit were presented, the schedule of further activities was discussed and the next stages of the project results were planned. An integral element of the program was also a visit to **the Pirmas Blynas social enterprise**, which conducts catering activities and at the same time carries out activities for the professional activation of people with disabilities and people at risk of social exclusion. The participants had the opportunity to learn about the organization of the work process, the method of individual support for beneficiaries and solutions enabling combining business activity with the achievement of social goals.

The next day included a project meeting devoted to the assessment of the progress of work on the project results and presentations of partner organizations and institutions cooperating with the social economy sector. The discussion focused on the analysis of the materials developed so far, the identification of areas that need to be supplemented and the planning of the next stages of international cooperation.

An important element of the program were visits to Lithuanian organizations conducting social activities. In **the Maisto Bankas** organization, the participants got acquainted with the model of obtaining and distributing food intended for people in a difficult life situation. Particular attention was paid to cooperation with food producers, retail chains and non-governmental organizations, as well as the importance of reducing food waste as an element of the circular economy.

During the visit to **the Gelbėkit vaikus** organization, solutions for the protection of children's rights and comprehensive support for families at risk of social exclusion were presented. The functioning of community centres, educational programmes, preventive activities and cooperation with public institutions responsible for the implementation of social policy was discussed.

The program also included a meeting with representatives of **Nacionalinis skurdo mažinimo organizų tinklas**, a nationwide network of organizations working to combat poverty and social exclusion. The discussion concerned the role of umbrella organizations in representing the interests of the non-governmental sector, building cross-sectoral partnerships and cooperation with public administration in creating social policies.

The last days of the visit were devoted to networking meetings and debates on the development of the social economy and the further implementation of the project. The participants analysed legal solutions in place in Lithuania, compared them with the experiences of Polish and Italy, and discussed the possibilities of adapting good practices in individual partner countries. The meetings ended with a summary of the most important conclusions, exchange of experiences and determination of directions for further international cooperation.

The study visit made it possible to learn about various models of functioning of social economy entities and to identify solutions that can be used by organizations conducting activities in the field of adult education, professional activation and social integration. Particularly valuable were the experiences on cross-sectoral cooperation, practical methods of supporting people at risk of social exclusion, the development of volunteering

and building local partnerships. The conclusions from the visit were used in the development of recommendations, cooperation models and training paths presented in this manual.



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7.1.3. Study visits to Italy

The study visit carried out in the Emilia-Romagna region was one of the key elements of the process of identification and transfer of good practices in the field of social economy. This region is one of the most developed European areas where economic activity effectively combines economic goals with the implementation of social tasks. The program of the visit was developed in such a way as to enable participants to learn about various models of functioning of social enterprises and to assess the possibility of their adaptation to the conditions of other European countries.

During the visit, solutions used by social enterprises operating in the sectors of gastronomy, social agriculture, retail trade and social services were analysed. Particular attention was paid to the mechanisms of professional activation of people at risk of social exclusion, the organization of work in social enterprises and cooperation with local public, social and economic partners.

The subject of observation were organizations representing different models of social economy. **La Scartata** presented a model of professional reintegration based on organic production and supported employment. In **RIGAS / Poco di Buono**, the functioning of a solidarity purchasing group supporting local producers and employing people with disabilities was presented. In turn, **Povero Diavolo** and **Hostaria Rò e Bunì** showed the possibilities of using catering activities as a tool for the social integration of migrants, people experiencing homelessness, former persons deprived of liberty and other groups at risk of exclusion. An important element of the program was also the analysis of the activities of **Ricreazioni** and **Ortoinsieme**, where social activities were combined with environmental education and social farming, respectively.

During the visit, participant observations, meetings with representatives of organizations and expert discussions were held on the possibility of transferring selected solutions to the social economy systems functioning in Poland and Lithuania. This made it possible to identify the factors determining the effectiveness of social enterprises, in particular the importance of local partnerships, individualization of the support process, practical vocational training and systematic cooperation with public administration and the local community.

The experience gained during the visit became the basis for the development of models of cross-sectoral cooperation, training paths for social economy facilitators and recommendations for the development of social enterprises. The analysed solutions indicate that the sustainability of social effects depends

on the simultaneous use of professional activation mechanisms, building local partnerships, professionalisation of management and systematic assessment of the social impact of the activities carried out.



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An analysis of the Italian experience confirmed that the effectiveness of social enterprises results from the integration of economic activities with social objectives and close cooperation with the local institutional environment. The study visits made it possible to identify solutions that can be used by social economy organizations and institutions providing adult education. The conclusions from the visit were then used in the development of transnational cooperation models, implementation recommendations and training paths for social economy facilitators.

Link: <https://filaryrozwoju.eu/trzy-wizyty-studyjne-za-nami-w-ramach-projektu-wlaczenie-i-integracja-kompetencje-w-obszarze-ekonomii-spoecznej/>

7.2 Workshop visits

7.2.1 Workshop visits to Lithuania

Workshop visit to Lithuania as part of the development of transnational models of social economy

Workshop visit organised in Lithuania on **21-24 May 2025** was the final stage of the process of exchanging experiences between the project partners from Polish, Lithuania and Italy. Its main objective was to summarize the results of previous study visits, verify the developed solutions and develop joint recommendations for the development of the social economy and adult education. An important element of the meeting was also the analysis of the possibilities of adapting good practices to the different legal and organizational conditions of partner countries.

The program of the visit included both working meetings of the project partners and visits to organizations representing various areas of social services. The participants learned about the solutions used by organizations carrying out activities for people with disabilities, children and youth, women experiencing violence, chronically ill people and people at risk of social exclusion. This allowed to broaden the perspective on the functioning of the social economy and indicated the possibilities of using cross-sectoral cooperation in the provision of social services.

Of particular importance were the visits to the organizations **Raudonos Nosys, Caritas Lithuania, Pirmas Blynas, Vilniaus Moterų Namai, Vaikų linija** and the Hospice Care Center. The presented models of action showed various ways of responding to social needs – from psychosocial support and crisis assistance, through professional activation of people with disabilities, to the development of volunteering and specialist care services. The analysis of these experiences confirmed that the effectiveness of social activities results from combining professional services with the active participation of local communities and sustainable cooperation of non-

governmental

organizations

with public administration and social partners.

An important element of the visit were also workshops and networking meetings, during which the partners compared the solutions functioning in Poland, Lithuania and Italy. Discussions focused on identifying the factors determining the effectiveness of social enterprises, the competences necessary to work in the social economy sector and the possibilities of developing joint training materials for social economy facilitators. The result of the work was the development of a catalogue of good practices and recommendations constituting the basis of this manual.

The workshops confirmed that the development of the social economy requires not only effective organizational models, but also systematic international cooperation, exchange of experience and improvement of the competences of people responsible for the creation and implementation of social services. A joint analysis of the partners' experiences has led to the development of transnational cooperation models, training paths for facilitators and recommendations for the development of social economy organisations in different national contexts.

On the basis of the analyses and expert discussions, solutions with high adaptive potential were identified:

- developing cross-sectoral partnerships in the provision of social services;
- individualization of support for people at risk of social exclusion;
- the use of social enterprises as a tool for professional activation;
- development of volunteering and involvement of local communities;
- creating a network of cooperation between social economy organizations;
- exchange of good practices as an element of improving staff competencies;
- developing joint educational materials and training programs for social economy facilitators;

- strengthening international cooperation as a tool for the development of social innovation.

The presented experiences formed the basis for the development of cooperation models, implementation recommendations and training paths presented in the following chapters of the manual.



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WORKSHOP VISIT IN LITHUANIA



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7.2.2 Workshop visits to Poland

The workshop visit to Poland took place on **9-13 June 2025 in Łomża and Tykocin** as part of the Erasmus+ project "Inclusion and Inclusion – Competences in the area of social economy". Its main objective was to familiarize partners from Polish, Lithuania and Italy with the Polish model of social economy functioning and to present practical examples of cooperation between local government units, non-governmental organizations, social enterprises and labour market institutions. The program of the visit included both study visits in selected institutions, as well as workshops, expert meetings and project sessions devoted to the exchange of experiences and the development of joint recommendations.

One of the most important elements of the visit was to learn about the functioning **of the Łomża Social Economy Support Center (ŁOWES)**, which is an example of a regional system of support for social economy entities. The participants learned about the mechanisms of counselling, local animation, incubation of new social enterprises and financial instruments supporting the development of non-governmental organizations and social cooperatives. Particular attention was paid to the role of support centres as institutions integrating the activities of public administration, the social sector and entrepreneurs, which enables more effective creation of local partnerships and the development of social services.

An important point of the program was also a visit to **the ARGENTA Occupational Activity Centre**, operating in the Łomża Industrial Park. The participants had the opportunity to learn about the model of a social enterprise, the activity of which combines economic goals with professional activation of people with disabilities. The process of preparing beneficiaries for work, the organization of workplaces adapted to the individual capabilities of employees, the system of support for work coaches and solutions enabling maintaining employment on the open labor market are presented. The analysis of this case made it possible to identify the social enterprise as an effective tool for social and professional integration of people at risk of exclusion.

Another important element of the visit was to learn about the activities **of the L Foundation**, which runs educational, activation and integration programs addressed to people at risk of social exclusion. The participants got acquainted with the methods of working with beneficiaries, the organization of social services and the cooperation of foundations with public institutions and local partners. Attention was drawn to the importance of individualization of support and a comprehensive approach to solving social problems by combining educational, professional and integration activities.

A visit to the **Charity and Eatery**, which is an example of a local center of social activity and volunteering, also aroused great interest. Solutions enabling the involvement of residents in social activities, organization of food aid, educational initiatives and the

development of volunteering were presented. The presented activities showed that local activity centers can act as a community integrator and strengthen social capital by building a network of cooperation between residents, non-governmental organizations and local government.

An important component of the program were also meetings with representatives of **the International Institute for Child Development**, during which the importance of education, family support and development of social competences of children and young people was discussed. Discussions focused on the possibilities of using modern educational methods and international cooperation in the field of development of social services and preventive activities.

A significant part of the visit was devoted to the analysis of the role **of local government** in the development of the social economy. During the meeting at **the Tykocin Commune Office**, solutions concerning the cooperation of the municipality with non-governmental organizations, social enterprises and labor market institutions were presented. The mechanisms of making public infrastructure available to social organizations, co-financing projects, implementing activation programs and developing digital services supporting residents were discussed. Particular attention was paid to the importance of local partnerships as a tool for more effective response to the needs of communities and more efficient use of public resources.

These issues were complemented by a meeting with the management of the school in Tykocin and specialists dealing with housing policy. Solutions for supporting pupils from socially disadvantaged families were presented, and the local system of social housing and cooperation between schools, social assistance and public administration were discussed. The discussion showed that effective counteracting social exclusion requires close cooperation between educational institutions, local governments and social organizations.

An integral element of the visit was **a workshop conference on the social economy**, during which participants took part in discussion panels and practical workshops on the creation and functioning of social enterprises. The event enabled the exchange of experiences between representatives of organizations from Polish, Lithuania and Italy and discussion on the directions of development of the social economy in Europe. A special place was occupied by issues related to the professionalization of the sector, the development of competences of social economy facilitators, the assessment of social impact and the use of innovative methods of managing social organizations.

The final stage of the visit was the project meetings of the partners, during which the results of all previous study visits carried out in Poland, Lithuania and Italy were analysed. A comparison of models of social economy functioning in partner countries was carried out, transferable solutions were identified and assumptions of the project's intellectual product were developed. Discussions also focused on the possibilities of further cooperation between partner organizations, directions for the development of the training program for social economy facilitators and methods of disseminating the project results.

The analysis of the course of the workshop visit allows us to conclude that the Polish model of social economy is characterized by a high level of cross-sectoral cooperation and a significant role of institutions supporting the development of social enterprises. Solutions concerning the functioning of social economy support centres, professional activity establishments and partnerships created between public administration, non-governmental organisations and social enterprises proved to be particularly valuable.



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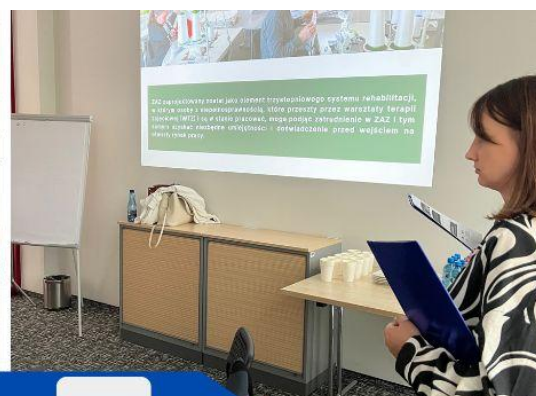
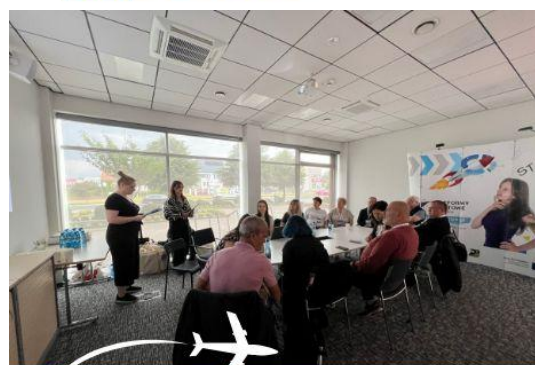


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WORKSHOP VISIT IN POLAND



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7.2.3 Workshop visits to Italy

The workshop visit to Italy took place on **29 September – 3 October 2025** in the Emilia-Romagna region (Rimini) as part of the Erasmus+ project **„Inclusion and Integration – Competences in the Field of Social Economy”**. Its main objective was to learn about the Italian model of social economy and to identify innovative solutions in the field of social inclusion, social entrepreneurship, volunteering and cooperation between the public sector, social organizations and academia. The program of the visit included study visits to social economy organizations, meetings with experts, panel discussions and project workshops devoted to the development of recommendations and good practices that can be used in partner countries.

The first substantive element of the program were visits to organizations operating in the Rimini region and a meeting summarizing the project activities so far. The partners analysed the achieved project results, assessed the progress of the planned activities and identified the priorities for the next stages of cooperation. The discussion focused on the exchange of experiences between organizations from Polish, Lithuania and Italy and the identification of solutions that can be used in the development of joint project products.

An important point of the visit was the meeting in **Khairos S.r.l.** and in the newly emerging socio-cultural space of **Settebello**. The participants got acquainted with the process of urban revitalisation carried out with the use of cultural activities as a tool for social integration. A model of cooperation between public administration, social organizations, the private sector and residents in the implementation of projects aimed at reviving degraded urban spaces is presented. Particular attention was paid to the importance of culture as a tool for building social bonds, activating residents and strengthening local identity.

Another element of the program was a visit to **the University of Bologna – Rimini Campus**, where a debate was held on social innovations and cooperation between the university and the socio-economic environment. During the meeting, the concept of the

so-called "third mission of the university" was presented, assuming the active involvement of academic institutions in the development of local communities through knowledge transfer, support for social entrepreneurship and the implementation of research and implementation projects. The discussion allowed the participants to identify the role of the university as a partner supporting the development of the social economy through education, research and cooperation with social organizations.

A significant part of the visit was devoted to learning about the activities **of VolontaRomagna – the Volunteer Centre of the Romagna Region**. During the meeting, a model of an organization supporting the development of volunteering and cooperation of non-governmental organizations operating in the region was presented. The impact of the reform of the Italian third sector on the functioning of social organizations, the development of volunteer services and new challenges related to the professionalization of social activities were discussed. Particular attention was paid to the role of volunteer centres as institutions supporting the development of competences of non-governmental organisations, coordination of volunteer activities and building local partnerships.

An important element of the program was also a visit to **Caritas Rimini** and the **Madonna della Carità Social Cooperative**. The participants learned about the model of comprehensive support for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion implemented by Caritas and a cooperating social enterprise. Current data on the scale of poverty and new social problems appearing in Italian society were presented. Activities undertaken in the field of professional activation, food aid, family support and job creation for people in a difficult life situation were also discussed. The analysis of this model has shown the importance of cooperation between charities and social enterprises as an effective way to counteract social exclusion.

An interesting example of social entrepreneurship was a visit to **Osteria Povero Diavolo**, run by **Aldeia Social Cooperative**. During the meeting, the history of the establishment of a social restaurant and the model of its functioning based on combining economic activity with the implementation of social goals were presented. The principles ensuring the economic sustainability of the enterprise, ways of involving the local community and

the importance of social gastronomy as a tool for professional activation and social integration are discussed. The participants had the opportunity to get acquainted with a practical example of a social enterprise operating in the conditions of a competitive market while maintaining a strong social mission.

The last day of the visit was summarizing. During the **brainstorming workshop** , participants identified the most important needs of the social economy sector, indicated barriers to development and proposed solutions developed during the project. This was followed by a final debate, during which the results of all project activities were evaluated, the conclusions of the study visits were presented, and recommendations were developed for the further development of the social economy and the transfer of good practices between partner countries. The meeting also resulted in the definition of a catalogue of solutions recommended for use in the development of a textbook and a training programme for social economy facilitators.

An analysis of the course of the workshop visit shows that the Italian model of social economy is based on strong cooperation between social organizations, public administration, academia and social enterprises. Solutions concerning the use of culture as a tool for social integration, professionalization of volunteering, cooperation between universities and the social sector and conducting business activities by social enterprises pursuing social goals turned out to be particularly valuable. The experience gained was used in the development of models of local partnerships, a training program for social economy facilitators and recommendations for the implementation of innovative solutions supporting the development of social economy in Poland, Lithuania and Italy.





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