

Katarzyna KATANA  
Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice

## ON SOCIAL INNOVATION – A DESCRIPTION OF THE PHENOMENON

**Summary.** The article constitutes a description of literature survey concerning innovation, in particular the social innovations. The aim of the analysis is to pay attention to the phenomenon of social innovation, as it has recently become an indispensable element of social life.

The article contains definitions of innovations, a presentation of innovations in both economic and sociological context, as well as a description of innovation types. Next, the social innovation is elaborated on, the analysis of what social innovation is, as well as the essence of the innovation is presented.

**Keywords:** innovation, types of innovation, social innovations.

## KILKA SŁÓW O INNOWACJACH SPOŁECZNYCH. PRÓBA PRZYBLIŻENIA TEMATU

**Streszczenie.** Niniejszy artykuł stanowi omówienie przeglądu literatury dotyczącej zagadnienia innowacji, a w szczególności innowacji społecznych. Celem opracowania jest zwrócenie uwagi na innowacje społeczne, które w ostatnim czasie stały się nieodzownym elementem życia społecznego.

W artykule omówione są definicje innowacji, przedstawiono proces innowacji w ujęciu ekonomicznym oraz na gruncie socjologii, opisano również rodzaje innowacji. Następnie rozważania skupiły się na innowacjach społecznych, dokonano analizy, czym są innowacje społeczne oraz jaka jest ich istota.

**Słowa kluczowe:** innowacje, rodzaje innowacji, innowacje społeczne.

### 1. Introduction

A number of definitions may be come across while analyzing the subject literature concerning innovation issues, which is caused by the fact that the subject matter of innovation

has evolved and changed over the years, having been examined in many respects. Initially, innovation constituted a part of economic studies; with the passing of time, however, the discourse of innovation has become a subject of a number of disciplines, including social studies. Within this field, social innovation started to be elaborated on, which has become an increasingly popular issue in recent years, because of the role it plays in the process of improving the life of an individual and the society.

## 2. Innovation – a definition

It was J. Schumpeter, a prominent economist, who introduced the notion of innovation into the economic studies in 1911. According to him, innovation is a complex issue which encompasses a combination of five different elements, mainly:

- Introducing a new product, which consumers have never come across, or setting new features to a particular product,
- Introducing a new production method, which has never been used in a given branch of industry,
- Opening a new market, where a given branch of home industry has never operated before, while it is of no significance whether the market had already existed or not,
- Procuring a new source of resources or semi-finished products, while it is of no importance whether the source had already existed, or it is to be generated,
- Introducing a new structure of organization within a given industry, e.g. holding or breaking a monopoly<sup>1</sup>.

According to Schumpeter, innovations come into being as a result of actions and decisions made by entrepreneurs in order to generate new functions of production. The foundation of innovation is a technological, organizational and social change, whereas its most crucial feature is its discontinuity<sup>2</sup>.

In his considerations, P. Drucker defines innovation as a particular tool for entrepreneurs, thanks to which change leads to starting a new business or providing new services. Innovation is a particular tool of enterprise; it is an action which gives new possibilities to resources, it creates wealth<sup>3</sup>.

M. Porter believes that innovation should be considered as technological improvement, better ways of performing an action, which may manifest itself in changing a product or

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<sup>1</sup> Schumpeter J.: *Teoria rozwoju gospodarczego*. Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 1960, s. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Nowakowska A.: *Region innowacyjny- procesy innowacji i polityka innowacyjna w rozwoju regionu* [w:] Nowakowska A., Przygodzki Z., Sokołowicz M.: *Region w gospodarce opartej na wiedzy. Kapitał ludzki – Innowacje – Korporacje Transnarodowe*. Wydawnictwo Difin, Warszawa 2011, s. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Drucker P.: *Innowacja i przedsiębiorczość: praktyka i zasady*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1992, s. 29.

process, or it can lead to create a new approach to marketing issues or new forms of distribution<sup>4</sup>.

L. Białoń claims that innovation should be examined from different angles; he defines innovation as "introducing changes into economic and social systems, whose effect is an increase in the use of products/services, technological processes and management systems, an improvement of management efficiency, conservation and improvement of natural environment, better interpersonal communication, and finally, an improvement of both professional and private life of society"<sup>5</sup>.

P. Weryński, on the other hand, defines innovation as: "multidimensional actions that lead to the creation and then introduction of new solutions, which enable to hold a competitive advantage over others. In its minimum version, innovation brings about survival in the constantly variable environment"<sup>6</sup>.

Oslo Manual handbook, in turn, investigates the issue of innovation in a very broad context, mainly as a number of actions concerning science, technology, commerce, finance or organizational issues, the aim of which is the preparation and introduction of either brand new or significantly improved products and processes, while they are novel at least from the point of view of the company that is introducing them. Some of these actions are innovational as such, some must contain an element of a novelty; they are all essential to prepare and introduce the innovation, nevertheless<sup>7</sup>.

J. Baruk assumes that innovation is a process which provides added value and a particular level of novelty to the organization itself, its suppliers and clients, through the preparation of new solution procedures, choices and services, as well as new commercialization methods<sup>8</sup>.

## 2.1. The innovation process

Innovation can be described as novelties introduced into an organization or a market. They are different from the already existing solution in terms of quality. Innovation may be twofold in character, either material or not, but its effect is always a technical, technological, economic, organizational or social change. The innovation process is a dynamic sequence of recurring actions, from the very idea of an innovation, through its preparation, introduction, promotion, market sale, diffusion and the development in time<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Porter M.: The competitive advantage of nations. The Macmillan Press Ltd., London 1990, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> Białoń L. (red.): Zarządzanie działalnością innowacyjną. Wydawnictwo Placet, Warszawa 2010, s. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Weryński P. (red.): Matryca potrzeb marketingowych w sektorze MMŚP. Testowanie i upowszechnienie narzędzia. Wydawnictwo Difin, Warszawa 2013, s. 173.

<sup>7</sup> OCDE: Oslo Manual. The measurement of scientific and technological activities. Paris 2005, s. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Baruk J.: Wiedza w procesach tworzenia innowacji. „Organizacja i Kierowanie”, nr 4 (147), 2011, s. 118.

<sup>9</sup> Dolińska M.: Innowacje w gospodarce opartej na wiedzy. Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2010, s. 13-14.

As it was already mentioned above, innovation constitutes an increasingly broad and complex issue, and it is examined by a number of scientists representing many different fields of study.

A company's search for innovation and its introduction strongly influences the society, therefore it should be emphasized that innovation processes take place in the society. It is the individuals, who belong to the society, that generate innovational ideas in order to finally accept or reject them. Inventions and scientific discoveries lead to changes in the means of production and the results of their application in practice, which causes changes in the way people think, in their ideas and approaches towards the world, as well as in interpersonal relationships; thus, the process creates new social relationships<sup>10</sup>.

P. Sztompka, within his sociological considerations, undertook an analysis of the innovation process as a relationship of an individual and the society – mainly, the process of institutionalization. According to Sztompka, there are five stages of the institutionalization process. It starts the moment an individual begins to act in a new way or they start spreading that this new way of action is right and good. An individual departs from the old tradition and starts manifesting originality and creativity. This stage is called the initial innovation. The second stage is the disclosure of innovations, when a change in behavior or a presentation of a new product takes place. This step does not mean a success yet, it enables, however, to move on to the next stage, which is innovation filtering. The third stage depends on the nature of the innovation itself, and these can be either some informal actions (e.g. criticism on the part of friends) or formal ones (e.g. being negatively assessed by a superior, being rejected by corresponding authorities). When the innovation is not rejected at the stage of filtering, the next stage begins, which is diffusion of innovations. At this stage the innovation spreads over society, which may cause the following reactions:

- Adaptation, i.e. radical change, which is a permanent acceptance of the innovation,
- Amplification, i.e. total change, which is based on positive feedback and it triggers off self-reinforcement processes,
- Dispersion, i.e. partial change, which means introducing slight changes, which do not lead to violating the foundations of a given structure,
- Insulation, i.e. marginal change, which means introducing the innovation but with no radical transformations of the already existing order,
- Compensation, i.e. lack of change, which means a negative reception of the innovation, which causes a decrease in the influence of a given innovation,
- Overcompensation, i.e. total rejection of the innovation, which leads to actions opposite to the intended ones.

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<sup>10</sup> Szczepański J.: *Elementarne pojęcia socjologii*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1965, s. 248.

A final consequence of the aforementioned innovation process is a change coming into being, and then the innovation becomes a norm, but only until another innovation appears<sup>11</sup>.

Although they are considered from the perspective of a number of disciplines, the innovation processes mentioned above all reflect the same mechanism. No matter what the reason for introducing an innovation is, it has to lead to a change, which is to be for the better.

M. Domańska emphasizes that innovations result from changes, and they also bring about new changes within a company, as well as in its market surroundings. Innovations influence the socio-economic development, they shape the development of economy, the economic condition and the competitive status in the market; also, they have an influence on the living conditions and the quality of life of individuals, clients, who represent different social groups<sup>12</sup>.

## 2.2. Types of innovation

Reference literature contains a number of classifications concerning innovation, as the issue is considered from many different angles. The classification of innovations depends mostly on its purpose. Most frequently the following four types of innovations are mentioned in the subject literature:

- technical innovations - changes in technical parameters of machines and devices, which lead to improvement through introducing new elements or updating all solutions,
- technological innovations - changes in the technology of a production process through introducing new elements or a brand new technology,
- organizational innovations - a change in the organizational scheme of a management entity, which is reflected in the reorganization of the scheme or replacing some of its old elements with new components of the organizational scheme,
- social innovations - changes that take place within the structure of a local society, in people's approaches, customary patterns and the general culture of the society.

The types of innovations described above are not independent of one another. They complement and determine each other, which results from an immediate relationship among different areas of knowledge and various fields of study, which are used in the innovation processes, i.e. technical and natural sciences, social and economical studies, etc. The introduction of change processes, starting from production techniques, through technological changes and the changes concerning operational organization, as well as changes in the sphere

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<sup>11</sup> Sztompka P.: Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa. Wydawnictwo Znak, Warszawa 2009, s. 420-429.

<sup>12</sup> Dolińska M.: op. cit., s. 21.

of organizational structures of a company, may influence changes in people's lifestyles, their customs and culture, which, in turn, may be conducive to new innovational ideas<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. Social innovations

Social innovations have been existing for a long time, but it was only recently when the issues became the subject of scholars' interest. Nowadays, there is no one, universal definition of social innovation. The multitude of definitions of the notion mostly results from the differences in social, cultural and economic traditions.

According to the "European Commission Guide to Social Innovation," the notion is defined as introduction of novel ideas in order to satisfy social needs. The essence of social innovation is the improvement of people's well-being and prosperity. Social innovations refer to a whole process, in which new responses to social needs have been developed in order for better social results to be achieved. There are four main elements that constitute the process of social innovation; these are:

- identification of new social needs or the already existing needs that have been insufficiently satisfied,
- development of new solutions as a response to the arisen social needs,
- assessment of the effectiveness of the new solutions, which were created to satisfy the needs of society,
- calibration of the effective social innovations<sup>14</sup>.

The National Center for Research and Development prepared a definition of social innovation for the "Social Innovations" programme, which describes the process as "solutions, that simultaneously meet social demand and cause permanent transformation within given social groups. Such solutions may refer to new products, services or processes, that facilitate different solutions to typical social problems"<sup>15</sup>.

According to F. Westley, social innovation is an initiative, a product, a process or a program, which changes the established routines, resources or the influence of authorities functioning in every social system. The social innovations that have been carried out accurately appear as a permanent and fast influence on the functioning of a society<sup>16</sup>.

According to the Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Foundations for Building Social Innovation in Europe (TEPSIE) programme, which was financed within the Seventh Framework Programme, social innovations are defined as "new solutions (that refer to

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<sup>13</sup> Olejniczuk-Merta A.: Innowacje społeczne. „Konsumpcja i rozwój”, nr 1, 2013, s. 24.

<sup>14</sup> European Commission: Guide to social innovation. Brussels 2013, p. 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> NCBiR: Program innowacje społeczne. Warszawa 2012, s. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Westley F.: The social innovation dynamic. Social Innovation Generation, University of Waterloo 2008, p. 1.

products, services, models, markets and processes) that simultaneously satisfy a social need and lead to new or improved functions and relations, as well as a better use of resources. Social innovations have to be beneficial for the society, they are also to increase the society's ability to act"<sup>17</sup>.

According to OCDE's opinion, social innovations differ from the economic ones, as they do not refer to introducing new kinds of production or using a new market to make profit, but they focus on fulfilling new needs, which entails a satisfying way of activating the population and makes it possible to create new workplaces for individuals, changing their role in the production process. The aim of social innovations is to create an opportunity to improve the living conditions of the members of the society. Thanks to the process, novel solutions to both the already existing and new social problems are searched for through identifying and providing new services, which improve the quality of life<sup>18</sup>.

While analyzing the issue of social innovation, it should be emphasized that it constitutes a component of social change. Social innovations are most frequently perceived as process changes, during which various social and professional groups take part in their creation, introduction and dissemination. Another crucial criterion concerning social innovations is the scope of changes they induce. Two types of change range can be distinguished here: narrow and wide. The former refers to changes that take place at the level of an organization activities, as well as a society, being a response to the market processes dynamics and the knowledge and demand of the society. The latter, on the other hand, refers only to product and technological changes.

One of the most significant criteria characterizing social innovation is the duration of change criterion, which may be understood in its broad meaning, and then social innovations mean the new, but also the already existing and reliable solutions, whereas in its narrow meaning, social innovations focus mostly on new introduction of an innovational change. In practice, social innovations are very often based on not only the first use of a solution, but also on the following solutions.

Another criterion describing social innovation is the effects of the transformations, which present the results of actions; their forms are the results of human-induced activities within social innovation processes. Basically, they refer to the intentional and non-accidental changes in the social structures, being created customarily by the society or with a contribution of the society. In the context of the effects of the transformations, social innovations may be divided into soft and hard. The former serve to increase the quality of life, e.g. in a workplace, whereas the latter include technical and technological innovations<sup>19</sup>.

Social innovations primarily refer to the enterprises aiming to improve the financial conditions and the quality of life. They concern the social protection and services, social

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<sup>17</sup> Caulier-Grice J., Davies A., Partick R., Norman W.: *Defining social innovation*, Part 1. 2012.

<sup>18</sup> OCDE: *Fostering innovation to address social challenges*. Paris 2011, s. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Olejniczuk-Merta A.: *op. cit.* s. 27-29.

assistance, the improvement of working conditions, the crackdown on social exclusion or the reduction of unemployment. Social innovations are also related to the actions concerning solving the educational and environmental problems, the financial problems relating to retirement pensions, as well as medical care, the crackdown on crime and social conflicts<sup>20</sup>.

"Social innovation is something, which goes beyond the traditional philanthropy and responds to social needs; it is a new set of business models, procedures, products and services, which constitute new social cooperation. The business on its own will not solve all of the world's problems, neither will any other sector. The cooperation of business, the government and the civic society may contribute to innovation and social development. What counts is not only the short-term effects, but also the long-term results. In order to survive, business has to act in a balanced way"<sup>21</sup>.

The institutions which were the first to focus on the issue of social innovation were founded in the 80's and 90's of the 20th century. What should be mentioned is „Centre de Recherche sur les Innovations Sociales”<sup>22</sup> (Social Innovation Research Center) founded in Montreal in 1986, and „Zentrum für Soziale Innovation”<sup>23</sup> (Social Innovation Research Center) founded in Vienna in 1990. The number of institutions dealing with social innovation has increased with the passing of years. In 2010 in the USA, the president called „Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation”<sup>24</sup> and "Social Innovation Fund"<sup>25</sup> into being, as entities whose job was to support social innovations. Analogically, in the policy of the UE it can be observed that social innovations have left their mark on constructing the strategy of the member countries development. Social Innovations have become an indispensable element of a number of European Commission's initiatives. Supporting the development of social innovations can be visible in such programmes as Poverty and Social Exclusion Alleviation Programme, Innovations for Social Enterprise, Innovation Union, and many other programmes.

#### 4. Summary

The issue of innovation have been present in scholarly discourses for many years, it was not until the beginning of the 20th century, however, that the phenomenon became a real subject of scholars' interest. The first considerations concerning innovation focused on the

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<sup>20</sup> Duraj J., Papiernik-Wojdera M.: *Przedsiębiorczość i innowacyjność*. Wydawnictwo Difin, Warszawa 2010, s. 69.

<sup>21</sup> Panek-Owsiańska M.: *Innowacje społeczne*, [w:] Ćwik N. (red.): *Wspólna odpowiedzialność. Rola innowacji*. Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, Warszawa 2013, s. 42.

<sup>22</sup> <http://crises.uqam.ca/> (dostęp: 15.07.2014 r.).

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.zsi.at/> (dostęp: 15.07.2014 r.).

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.whitehous.gov/administration/eop/sicp> (dostęp: 15.07.2014 r.).

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/social-innovation-fund> (dostęp: 15.07.2014 r.).



economic aspects of the notion. Therefore, the issue have evolved from its very narrow meaning to its perception from a much broader perspective. In the course of time, the question of innovation has aroused interest of scholars representing many different areas of study. Thus, the issue has evolved from defining it in a narrow meaning to its broader sense. Recently, scholars and researchers have started to take a greater interest in one particular type of innovation, i.e. the social innovations, which have become extremely popular. While analyzing social innovations, it should be emphasized that their main objective is to improve the quality of life. Social innovations refer to every sphere of human activity that is improvable.

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## Omówienie

Z innowacjami mamy do czynienia od początku istnienia cywilizacji. Jednakże dopiero w XX wieku stały się one przedmiotem dogłębnych analiz wielu naukowców zajmujących się różnymi dziedzinami nauki. Początkowo definiowanie innowacji skupiało się przeważnie na wprowadzaniu nowego produktu lub usługi, która ma przynieść zysk przedsiębiorstwu, które tę innowację wprowadza. Z biegiem czasu rozważania dotyczące innowacji ewoluowały i zauważano, iż zagadnienie to jest bardzo szerokie i należy je rozpatrywać pod wieloma kątami. Jednym z rodzajów innowacji są innowacje społeczne, które ostatnio stały się przedmiotem analizy wielu naukowców. Innowacje społeczne stały się nieodzownym elementem polityki dzisiejszego świata. Analizując innowacje społeczne, należy podkreślić, iż mają one za zadanie podnosić jakość życia społeczeństwa.