

SOCIAL PROJECTS IN POLAND: DECISION-MAKING ANALYSIS AND THEIR ROLE IN ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Social projects are becoming an increasingly important tool in creating positive social change and supporting the development of local communities. At the same time, entrepreneurship plays a key role in driving the economy and creating innovative solutions for communities. Understanding the decision-making process of social projects and their impact on the development of entrepreneurship is becoming, therefore, essential for the effective promotion of sustainable social and economic development.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the decision-making process of social projects and examine their role as a form of entrepreneurial development in Poland. Through the analysis of statistical data and our own experience, aspects of the key decisions made at various stages of social projects and the assessment of their impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives will be presented.

The study focuses on practical conclusions and implications of the analysis results for future social and business projects in Poland. In addition, the situation of Poland's neighboring countries was analyzed in terms of their level of involvement in such activities. It can be concluded that they do not remain passive.

Therefore, raising the question of how such projects are carried out and what are the benefits of participation in them will allow a better understanding of the topic and will provide a basis for further discussion without completely exhausting such a vast topic as social projects in terms of decision-making and business development.

Key words: social projects, entrepreneurship, young people, future.

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1. Introduction

Modern Poland, like many other countries, increasingly relies on social projects as a key element of social and economic transformation. These initiatives not only solve local social problems, but also become a platform to foster innovation and entrepreneurial development. This paper focuses on analyzing the decision-making process of social projects in Poland and their impact on the development of entrepreneurship. In addition, examples of social projects implemented outside Poland will be presented to show the diversity of approaches and their impact on local communities and economies. This is an important topic, because in the age of social media, the power of the message and the ability to reach such a huge number of people from other countries and even continents is astounding. Young people, thanks to the implementation of social projects, can change not only the environment in which they rotate, but also, with a domino effect, encourage more people to take an active role in the area they feel comfortable.

To understand the topic at hand, it is necessary to refer to the definition of entrepreneurship and social projects themselves. Entrepreneurship does not have an explicitly given definition, which may reflect a very broad understanding of it. According to Grffin (2002), entrepreneurship is the process of organizing and running a business and taking the associated risks. A minimalist approach to this is taken by Glinka (2013), whose view is that entrepreneurship can be described as a business or professional activity that is related to a way of reasoning, actions that are directed towards the search for emerging opportunities. These two definitions above focus on the issue of economic activity. However, it does not always have to be a business to address the topic of entrepreneurship. Drucker (2002) wrote that entrepreneurship is a way of behaving as an entrepreneur and an enterprise, which consists of the willingness and ability to undertake and to innovatively solve new problems. According to him, it is also the ability to take advantage of emerging opportunities and threats and to adapt flexibly to changing conditions. In this definition, despite the fact that the word company appears, it is still possible to look at it in a broader sense. Entrepreneurship is something that can be worked on, it is a state in which a person finds himself at a particular place and at a particular time. A person in the course of his life makes a lot of decisions, those more conscious or those less conscious. An entrepreneur or, in the context of the article, a leader of a social project makes a number of decisions and must do so consciously and take responsibility for it, despite the risks. Such opportunities and risks or problem solving causes the team to constantly strive for a specific goal to become an innovative project or simply one that will have an impact on the environment. This is because the implementation of social projects is not just the execution of individual activities disposed by the team leader, rather it is a process involving four stages.

The stage of initiation, planning, implementation and completion. During these individual stages, it is necessary, for example, to collect money from sponsors and distribute it wisely. It is also necessary to properly manage the skills of individual people, who together should form a harmonious team and this will certainly translate into much better results in further stages of project implementation, whether in the number of beneficiaries or the size of the reach of a given project. Thus, entrepreneurship based on the theme of work is a kind of skillful adaptation to the environment in search of problems that can be overcome jointly by changing them permanently for the better and looking for new solutions.

A social project is the type of project that is characterized primarily by the fact that its goal is to make a concrete change in the environment. Social projects are carried out with people and for people, they assume cooperation and involvement. It is also presented in the literature as a project aimed at meeting social needs, mobilizing society, managing private and social resources and implementing necessary action (Saari, Adibayeva, 2020). This is a very simple definition that overlaps significantly in the literature, which is why only the two previously mentioned definitions have been mentioned. In the context of the nationwide Olympiad, within the framework of which young people and others can implement social projects, which will be discussed later in the article, these definitions of a social project as much as possible are correct and coincide with the mission of the *Zwolnieni z Teorii* foundation.

The statistics presented in this article come directly from the *Zwolnieni z Teorii* foundation staff or from the official website of the National *Zwolnieni z Teorii* Olympiad. In addition, in order to maintain the format of this article as a kind of case study, and to show how important the topic discussed in this article is, examples of projects from Poland's neighboring countries, namely Ukraine, Germany and Lithuania, are presented.

2. Decision-making in social projects

The decision-making process in community projects plays a key role in their success. Each stage of such an initiative requires thoughtful choices that can determine the effectiveness and long-term impact on the community and entrepreneurship. Analyzing this using the example of projects carried out as part of the National Exempt from Theory Olympiad, there are four basic stages of decision-making. As previously mentioned, projects consist of four stages: Initiation, Planning, Implementation and Completion.

The Initiation stage involves assembling a team and then identifying a social problem. It is necessary to understand what the problem is in the near or distant environment and how it can be counteracted in the implementation of the social project. Once the problem of the project and the scale of its occurrence have

been selected, it is necessary to think about its relevance to the community. This is how to analyze the future beneficiaries of the project, but not only. It is important to come up with what kind of company or what kind of entrepreneur can be a future partner or sponsor of the project in the first stage. It is not mandatory to have financial resources to complete the project, but in the battle for prizes additional points are awarded for this. It is still important at the Initiation stage to assess the needs and expectations of future beneficiaries through even a simple conversation with peers or by means of a distributed anonymous online survey.

Planning is the second stage of the project. During the second stage, Olympiad participants need to establish goals and what their expected results are. It is important that they be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound, thus following the SMART rule. They also need to use the SWOT method, as what they will implement may carry risks, but also opportunities. They need to understand what their strengths and weaknesses are. This will certainly help them create a schedule of tasks for the whole team, but also for individual team members. Such scheduling of activities over time and the definition of milestones and deadlines for the various stages of the project should be included in the form on the website of the National Exempt from Theory Olympiad for verification by the so-called Community Leaders. In addition, it should be mentioned that before this goes into the form it is the team members with the help of sticky notes that create such a map, which primarily helps the leader to manage the team. Developing the budget, which is also done during the second stage, includes discerning how much the team members need for all the costs associated with the project, and if there are any, they must find a way to obtain them.

The key stage is Project Implementation. During this stage, all or, at least, most of the assumptions that emerged in the earlier Planning stage are implemented. It is important that at this stage the team leader skillfully monitors the team's progress and manages his project team. Such regular monitoring of whether a specific task on schedule has been completed will effectively verify whether activities are being carried out as planned or whether the course of action possibly needs to be changed. At this stage, various kinds of quarrels and disagreements often arise, then the role of the leader is to solve them on an ongoing basis so that further work on the project is carried out in a pleasant atmosphere. Project participants learn to listen to each other and communicate even if they have different opinions. This is also what the art of negotiation is all about, which is welcomed in the employer's future. Communication does not only occur within the team, but also between the team and potential beneficiaries. Effective communication and promotion is one of the keys to success in today's world, and this is what team members learn. Having a social media presence will allow them to get more community involvement and possibly receive additional support from future sponsors or project partners.

However, it is important to remember that there is a risk that something may go wrong and then the team must react quickly. Identifying the risk is the halfway point, because in order to minimize the negative impact of the problems in question on the project, they need to solve these problems with a developed strategy. Such situations are sometimes troublesome, but they allow one to learn many things, for example, how to work under time pressure or how to successfully turn the situation to the advantage of the team and in the future maybe to the advantage of the company.

And finally, Project Completion. The last stage is not the easiest stage, because the team is faced with submitting the entire project implemented by them for evaluation. This final evaluation allows each team member to subjectively assess each stage of the project and individual tasks. Analysis of the achieved results and comparison with the set goals is one of the elements of the form, which is later verified by the Community Leaders. It would be good if the team together assesses whether their project was effective and whether it actually had an impact on the target group they chose or whether they reached other still community groups. After this analysis, the team should easily draw conclusions and possible recommendations for future editions of their project if they want to continue it in future editions.

Certainly, decision-making in community projects is a complex process, requiring thoughtful choices at each stage of the project. Key decisions involve problem identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. The analysis of specific cases, i.e. the thoughts of participants in the National Zwołnieni z Teorii Olympiad, allows us to identify the most important decisions and their consequences, which can be a valuable source of knowledge for future social and business initiatives. In addition, thanks to such projects, participants learn step by step how decision-making processes should look like acquiring the competencies of an entrepreneurial person, which can translate into concrete actions in companies and this, in turn, into the development of entrepreneurship in the country.

3. The role of social projects in entrepreneurship development

Social projects play an important role as a catalyst for entrepreneurship development. It is worth supporting local initiatives, building entrepreneurial capacity and promoting innovative solutions, as they contribute to economic and social growth. In fact, it is mainly through social projects that young people break down barriers and want to put their own ideas into practice, which often address local problems and needs. As a result, these projects have a direct impact on improving the quality of life in local communities. Analysing the effects of these projects makes it possible to assess their impact on the environment,

but also to conclude that there is an increase in entrepreneurship among young people.

In Poland, one of the most important programmes supporting the development of entrepreneurship through social projects is the National Zwolnieni z Teorii Olympiad. From 2013 to 2024, a total of almost 29,000 Finalists took part in it, reaching a group of 30617732 beneficiaries during the implementation of more than 5,800 social projects. From 2014 to 2022, the number of new participants varies between 792 and 5376 people, as can be seen in Figure 1.

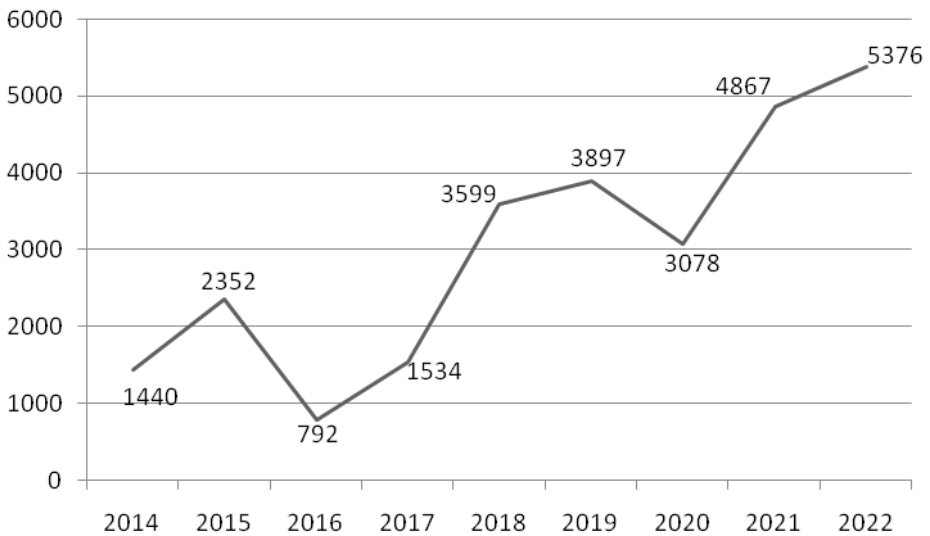


Figure 1. Number of new participants in the National Zwolnieni z Teorii Olympiad between 2014 and 2022

Source: own compilation based on statistics from the Zwolnieni z Teorii Foundation.

Social projects are created by people for people, so in order to do them, it is best to feel good about them and do them with passion, which is why, as part of the National Zwolnieni z Teorii Olympiad, participants have a choice of one of four categories: technology project, social advertising, public event or charity collection. The number of participants per category varies from year to year, as each group is a separate individual and pursues a project within its own idea. In terms of the number of people, the most popular form of project is the public event (Table 1.) due to the fact that it can be a class run for children in the younger grades or a workshop on a chosen topic.

Table 1. Number of participants in the National Zwołnieni z Teorii Olimpiad between 2015 and 2022 by type of project

Type of project	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Technology project	66	10	38	113	121	146	180	204
Social advertising	650	209	369	678	1102	1716	2084	1686
Public event	1530	523	970	2459	2245	887	2055	2964
Charity collection	10	50	157	349	429	329	548	522

Source: own compilation based on statistics from the Zwołnieni z Teorii Foundation.

There are more than 5,800 projects, but such examples include:

- Project "Pomocna dłoń"

As part of the National Zwołnieni z Teorii Olimpiad, a group of students from the town of Bielsko-Biała carried out the "Helping Hand" project, the aim of which was to help raise money for specialist equipment for the father of a friend of these students. As part of their charity collection, the pupils not only organised can collections at churches and schools or on the Internet, but moreover organised a charity concert.

- Project "Między nami uczniami"

As part of carrying out community projects, entrepreneurial skills such as project management, teamwork or skilful communication and planning one's time can be developed. This was proved by the students of the 4th High School in Rzeszów, who conducted a series of classes for groups of different ages – from pre-schoolers to high school students. The topics of the classes were related to the interests of the people in the group: caring for the environment, addictions or taking care of oneself and a healthy lifestyle. At sixteen, they reached almost 1,000 beneficiaries by spending only PLN 19.

- Project "Wirtualne Społeczeństwo"

Innovation and new solutions in technological terms will also find their place. The students of a technical school in Kepno carried out an amazing technological project, which was awarded the best Zwołnionych z Teorii awards, i.e. the Golden, Silver and Bronze Wolf. In total, they raised more than PLN 13,000 and reached more than 1,000 beneficiaries by appearing 22 times in media shifts. The project aims to make cultural assets especially accessible to people with disabilities through digitisation. Increasing accessibility to public cultural institutions, and showcasing the beauty of our surroundings. Through virtual walks and film clips, they have shown what a place looks like to people who cannot see it with their own eyes, and people affected by phobias or

neurotic disorders have been able to prepare themselves more quickly for a visit by adapting to the locations in question, such as museums, exhibitions, parks and public buildings.

- Project "Eco Mode 2.0"

High school students in Poznań proved that, as part of the Olympiad, students can gain experience in creating social advertisements on a very timely topic, namely ecology. They aroused the interest of more than 39,000 people with their project, spending only PLN 3,000. The team was aware that the climate crisis is still an issue, which is why they carried out an environmental project for the second time. During the first edition of the project, they created a website to help people dispose of their rubbish correctly. In the second edition, they went out of their way to meet people's expectations and conducted lessons in schools and the first online course on ecology.

- Project "GRAŻYNA BIZNESU"

This project could not go without a word of praise. It has already had two editions. In the first gathering 49,000 beneficiaries with a budget of just PLN 1,500, while in the second edition they reached a group of almost 135,000 people thanks to almost PLN 4,000. The students achieved incredible success by implementing a campaign to raise economic awareness among young people. In their own words, their way to success was to explain seemingly difficult concepts in accessible language, of course with a large dose of humour, an eye-catching graphic design and a mini-series about the fate of Poland's most famous couple, Grażyna and Janusz.

The above examples are just some of the many projects that continue to inspire newcomers to the Olympics and the society in which these projects are carried out. Despite their young age, as the vast majority are secondary school students, they are already capable of managing social projects and working effectively in a team. This is how future CEOs are born and their ideas from their secondary school education could certainly be used in future initiatives both in Poland and abroad.

4. Social projects abroad

As in Poland, social projects implemented abroad play a key role in creating positive social change and supporting local communities. Presenting these projects allows for a better understanding of the diversity of approaches and their effectiveness in building sustainable communities and economies.

- Project "Moloda Hromada", Ukraine

"Moloda Hromada" is a Ukrainian community project that was established in 2004 with the aim of uniting people around local issues and providing citizens with a platform to address the challenges and priorities they consider most

urgent. They have shown innovation in using technology to facilitate citizen participation and have gained national attention and support through their work in this area. They receive words of appreciation for the 'SOS Protocol' application, which at the moment is disabled for security reasons. It should be noted that they work with an extensive network of partners and volunteers and are thriving in the local civil society sector.

- Project "FLAT-EXCHANGE COORDINATION OFFICE", Germany

This project set up a housing exchange coordination office to address the limited housing market and provide both affordable and suitable housing for residents. The motivation for this project was the housing market in Potsdam, which is one of the most problematic in Germany, with a vacancy rate of less than 1% and the possibility of moving almost impossible. To solve this problem, the Koordinierungsstelle Wohnungstausch (KSWT) organises housing exchanges.

- Project "GLOBAL LITHUANIA – STATE AND DIASPORA COOPERATION", Lithuania

As described by the creators of this project, this project encourages the development of organised social activities abroad, involves the diaspora in a coherent dialogue and provides funding for selected initiatives that promote the Lithuanian language, identity, culture, as well as business and tourism. The project proves that Lithuanians living abroad act as informal ambassadors. They have the greatest interest and affinity with Lithuania. By funding selected projects and organising various events, training seminars and conferences, the Global Lithuania Programme seeks to harness these resources by involving the diaspora in professional and social activities.

5. Conclusions

Social projects play a key role in Poland's social and economic transformation, providing an ideal ground for promoting innovation, strengthening local communities and supporting entrepreneurial development. The analysis of project decision-making shows that thoughtful and strategic choices at each stage of an initiative are crucial to its success and sustainability. This is not a simple topic as the breadth of the research may surprise many researchers. Nevertheless, it is comforting to know that Polish citizens and especially young people are contributing to this development.

Examples of projects carried out as part of the "Zwolnieni z Teorii" competition certainly illustrate how young people can effectively contribute to positive social change while developing their management and entrepreneurial skills. According to the author, these projects are very rewarding and addictive to do good for others. Once someone becomes a Finalist in the Olympiad they

want to come back for more, because it is not only the projects that count there, but also the community. There is a reason why the logo of the awards presented at the end of the competition features a wolf. Wolves live in a pack and in a pack they are the strongest. In the same way, the members of all the teams compete with each other for prizes and fight to change their surroundings for the better, but deep down they become one big family that exchanges their experiences every year at the Grand Final and celebrates success together. There are also social projects abroad that leave no doubt that Poland's neighbours are also socially active. Supporting local social initiatives is a universal tool for building more sustainable and innovative communities, and the examples mentioned in this article prove this.

There is certainly a need to invest further in social projects as a tool to promote sustainable social and economic development, both in Poland and worldwide. Through conscious decision-making and the promotion of entrepreneurship, social projects can contribute to creating positive changes in society. In the opinion of the author of this article, everything is on the right track, it is just enough to make young people aware that wanting is being able to.

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