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SOCIAL INNOVATION IN THE PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract. The paper analyses the results of a research conducted with the aim to study topical questions on social innovation attempting to disclose its role expressed via its mission and impact on the Latvian society in the context of sustainable development. The authors present the methodology, conduct and results of the qualitative content analysis of the texts of a focus group discussion with participants from the fields of entrepreneurship, education, communication, sport and charity. The empirical data were analysed with open coding using AQUAD 6 software for the registration of conceptual codes, data processing and creation of frequency tables of categories developed. Having summarised the main findings, it was concluded that social innovation may promote the development of both individuals and the entire society improving the quality of people's life. The research resulted in the revelation of five domains of social innovation impact including the development at the: intrapersonal, interpersonal interaction, societal growth, innovation, and work opportunity levels.

Keywords: social innovation, sustainable development, quality of life, contemporary society, mission, impact, qualitative content analysis, focus group discussion, Latvia

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1. Introduction

People have always been concerned with improving their living conditions, with social and economic progress, a better and predictable future with opportunities to fulfill their human potential (Ionescu 2015). These concepts make the basis of quality of life and well-being which are perceived as one of the facets of sustainable development (Ercsey 2012; Dudzevičiūtē 2012; Tvaronavičienē 2014). Therefore the task of promoting a country's sustainable development could be considered through the prism of the development of people's life quality. Recent researches have shown that both quality of life and sustainable development can be positively affected by social innovation and social entrepreneurship owing to which they have become outstanding topics for scholars, businesses, and public institutions to study (Sanzo-Perez, Álvarez-González & Rey-García 2015; Edwards-Schachter, Matti & Alcántara 2012; De Alencar, Almeida 2013; Laužikas, Dailydaitė 2013; Raudeliūnienė *et al.* 2015; Tvaronavičienė, Černevičiūtė 2015; Ignatavičius *et al.* 2015; Goyal, Sergi

2015). Being a relatively new concept, social innovation attracts the attention of researchers, policy makers, practitioners, governmental and nongovernmental organisations, entrepreneurs and individuals in Latvia as well. This paper presents the results of a research conducted in the project “Involvement of the society in social innovation for providing sustainable development of Latvia” which is carried out within the National Research Program 5.2. “Economic Transformation, Smart Growth, Governance and Legal Framework for the State and Society for Sustainable Development – a New Approach to the Creation of a Sustainable Learning Community (EKOSOC-LV)”.

The research aim: the study of topical questions on social innovation and its impact on the society at the level of individuals involved in social innovation processes and the society as a whole.

The objectives of the research:

- to conduct theoretical analysis of scientific literature, documents and other sources on the role of social innovation in the promotion of sustainable development of the society;
- to explore different aspects of social innovation and its impact on the society in the Latvian context based on the empirical data obtained in the course of focus group discussion;
- to interpret the results and make conclusions.

The research methods:

- In the theoretical part of the research: qualitative content analysis of scientific literature, documents and other sources and generalisation of the theoretical findings.
- In the empirical part of the research:
 - focus group discussion with eight invited specialists from the fields of entrepreneurship, communication, education, sport and charity;
 - qualitative content analysis of the text of the scripts made from the video records of the focus group discussion with open coding;
 - creation of tables for analysing frequencies of conceptual codes of categories using AQUAD 6 software; constructing of diagrams for comparing the distribution of frequencies of categories corresponding to different demographic codes.

2. Theoretical framework of the empirical part of the research

Scientific literature analysis shows the ambiguity of the essence of social innovation, the absence of a common platform of understanding of its matter, aims, objectives, sources, contexts, agents, sectors, processes, means, outcomes and impact on the society among different theoretical approaches.

2.1. The matter of social innovation

Social innovation is considered as new solutions reflected in products, services, models, markets, processes, etc. that simultaneously meet a social need more effectively than existing solutions and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources (The Young Foundation 2012; Krlev, Bund & Mildenerger 2014). This definition is elaborated within TEPSIE (Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Foundations for Social Innovation in Europe) project which unites researchers from Denmark, United Kingdom, Greece and Germany. They conclude that social innovation is good for society as it enhances society’s capacity to act.

The authors of this paper analysed and systemised the definitions of social innovation which emphasize: 1) sustainability (see Table 1) and 2) quality of life as one of the facets of sustainability (see Table 2).

Table 1. The definitions of social innovation with an emphasis on sustainability

Definition	Source
A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable , or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals.	Phills, Deiglmeier & Miller 2008, p. 39
Social innovation discourses see in social challenges opportunities to make societies more sustainable and cohesive through inclusive practices, coproduction and proactive grassroots initiatives.	Grimm <i>et al.</i> 2013, p. 436
As a concept, social innovation means developing original and sustainable ideas to the problems that ranging in a spectrum from working conditions to education, individual to societal development, monitoring health and environment to climate changes.	Bulut, Hakan & Duygu Seckin 2013, p. 122

Source: Tabled by the authors

Table 1 shows that the idea of sustainability conditioned by social innovation emerges directly from the texts of its definitions. But the causal interrelation between social innovation and sustainability can be followed indirectly in definitions of social innovation with an accent on its role in the improvement of quality of life and well-being as they make facets of sustainable development of society. Table 2 demonstrates that social innovation has a great potential for increasing quality of life at the level of both individuals and the society as a whole.

Table 2. The definitions of social innovation with an emphasis on increase of quality of life

Definition	Source
... an innovation is termed a social innovation if the implied new idea has the potential to improve either the quality or the quantity of life . The macro-quality of life can be characterized as the set of valuable options that a group of people has the opportunity to select. By and large, the determinants of the quality of life at the aggregate level include the following elements, not necessarily in order of importance: material well-being , education opportunities (including quality of teaching and learning practices), health domain, job security, family life, community life, environment (climate and geography), political freedom, political stability and security, and gender equality.	Pol & Ville 2009, p. 881-882
Social innovation can be broadly described as the development of new concepts, strategies and tools that support groups in achieving the objective of improved well-being .	Dawson & Daniel 2010, p. 10
Social innovation is a type of innovation that answers to social problems by identifying and delivering new services that improve the quality of life and welfare of individuals and communities , both as consumers and producers.	OECD 2010, p. 223
... a social innovation is a novel mechanism that increases the welfare of the individuals who adopt it compared with the status quo".	Young 2011, p. 21285
Social innovation can be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. It represents new responses to pressing social demands, which affect the process of social interactions. It is aimed at improving human well-being . Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means. They are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance individuals' capacity to act.	European Commission 2013, p. 6
... social innovation is a process of internalizing the intension of symmetries in the configuration of reality as a system, determined by social actions of learning, sensitizing, rallying and taking action, which lead to a social change in the sense of an improvement of the current situation and of increasing the quality of life for large groups of people, for society as a whole , and which has as effect the rejection of norms and/or existing social models, and adopting a new one.	Ionescu 2015, p. 60

Source: Tabled by the authors

The definitions of social innovation presented in Tables 1 and 2 are closely related to the mission and impact of social innovation on the sustainable development of society.

2.2. The mission and impact of social innovation

The role of social innovation in the promotion of sustainable development is connected with its mission, on the one hand, and its impact on the society, on the other hand. Mission is mainly considered in relation to the expectations from certain goals or objectives put forward; as for impact, it is understood as the influence of the realization of these expectations in life and achievement of these goals. While analyzing scientific literature, the authors of this paper faced the challenge of understanding the clear boundary between the mission and impact of social innovation, as these two concepts were often spoken about together in a mixed integrated manner through different contexts. Therefore the theoretical research presents the results on the mission and impact of social innovation in one section.

The mission and impact of social innovation are related to:

- support in creation of better futures via developing new ideas for improving quality of life (Bonifacio 2014; Edwards-Schachter, Matti & Alcántara 2012; Li, Sun & Lin 2012; OECD 2010; Pol & Ville 2009) or quantity of life (Pol & Ville 2009);
- increase of well-being and welfare (Bonifacio 2014; Edwards-Schachter, Matti & Alcántara 2012; European Commission 2013; Hubert *et al.* 2011; OECD 2010; Sanzo-Perez, Álvarez-González & Rey-García 2015; Young 2011);
- development of social capital, social cohesion, empowerment and democracy (Davies & Simon 2013);
- promotion of social development (Phillips *et al.* 2015) and improvement of social quality (Li, Sun & Lin 2012; Oeij, Dhondt & Korver 2011);
- achievement of sustainable social and economic impact (Nichols *et al.* 2013; Jiménez Escobar & Morales Gutiérrez 2011; Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan 2010; Ortega *et al.* 2014; Phillips *et al.* 2015);
- sustainable systemic change (Hubert *et al.* 2011), social change and societal transformation (Cajaiba-Santana 2013; OECD 2010; Westley *et al.* 2014);
- creation of social value (Bonifacio 2014; Le Ber & Branzei 2010);
- positive changes in relationship (Jensen, Phillips & Strand 2012; Klein *et al.* 2012; Klievink & Janssen 2014; Li, Sun & Lin 2012; Nichols *et al.* 2013; OECD 2010; Raišienė 2012);
- development of cross-sectoral partnership (Jiménez Escobar & Morales Gutiérrez 2011; Le Ber & Branzei 2010; Sanzo-Perez, Álvarez-González & Rey-García 2015);
- sustainable development of the society (European Commission 2012, 2013; Grimm *et al.* 2013; Hubert *et al.* 2011; Nichols *et al.* 2013; Phillips *et al.* 2015; Phills, Deiglmeier & Miller 2008; Raišienė 2012; Sanzo-Perez, Álvarez-González & Rey-García 2015).

Edwards-Schachter, Matti and Alcántara (2012) conducted a research aimed at the analysis of some common and distinctive characteristics of social innovation based on 109 documents. The systemization of the aims (including *improvement of quality of life and sustainable development*) and outcomes (including *improvements to well-being, sustainability, social inclusion, and quality of life*) of social innovation given by that group of researchers demonstrates once again that the mission and the impact of social innovation are causally interconnected (Edwards-Schachter, Matti & Alcántara 2012).

However, some scholars (Grimm *et al.* 2013) think that the mission of social innovation is overestimated and objectives put forward are extremely too ambitious. They consider that there is only limited proof of whether social innovation can or already has delivered on some of its promises. They emphasize that it is difficult to judge to what extent social innovation might help to develop sustainable answers to burning social questions of the twenty-first century (Grimm *et al.* 2013).

Social innovation is a new concept in Latvia. Therefore first of all it needs to be understood and researched in order to become aware of the expectations and potential good which social innovation can bring to the contemporary Latvian society. This is the focus of the empirical part of the research presented in this paper.

3. The methodology, conduct and results of the empirical part of the research

The empirical data were collected in the focus group discussion organised in Riga Technical University on 20 May, 2015 within the project “Involvement of the society in social innovation for providing sustainable development of Latvia” of the National Research Program 5.2. EKOSOC-LV. The eight invited experts represented the fields of entrepreneurship, education, communication, sport and charity. The questions discussed were related to: the understanding of the matter, examples and role of social innovation; factors which promote or hinder the development of social innovation in the Latvian society; the conditions which motivate governmental and non-governmental organisations, enterprises and individuals to participate in the solution of social problems; the changes which should be made in the system of education to develop students’ readiness and motivation to initiate and realize social innovation projects.

The scripts made from the video-records of the focus group discussion were prepared in 13 files each containing the text of the discussion on one question. The qualitative content analysis was conducted by the authors using AQUAD 6 software (Huber & Gürtler 2004). The demographic codes encompassed the gender: ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ and the field represented by the participants of the focus group discussion: ‘Education’, ‘Communication’, ‘Sport’, ‘Charity’ and ‘Entrepreneurship’. The qualitative content analysis with open coding resulted in fifteen metacodes which contain from three to twenty two conceptual codes. Conceptual codes were used for the convenience of the conducting of the qualitative content analysis as intermediate data for developing corresponding categories. Therefore, in the phase of the interpretation of the final results only categories will be considered. This paper presents the analysis of the categories which were included in the metacodes: ‘The mission of social innovation’ and ‘The impact of social innovation’.

3.1. The mission of social innovation

The metacode ‘The mission of social innovation’ consists of the four categories shown in Table 3. It can be seen that the participants of the focus group discussion consider that social innovation is to develop both individuals and the society as a whole, improve people’s life quality and give them the opportunity to live a more interesting life.

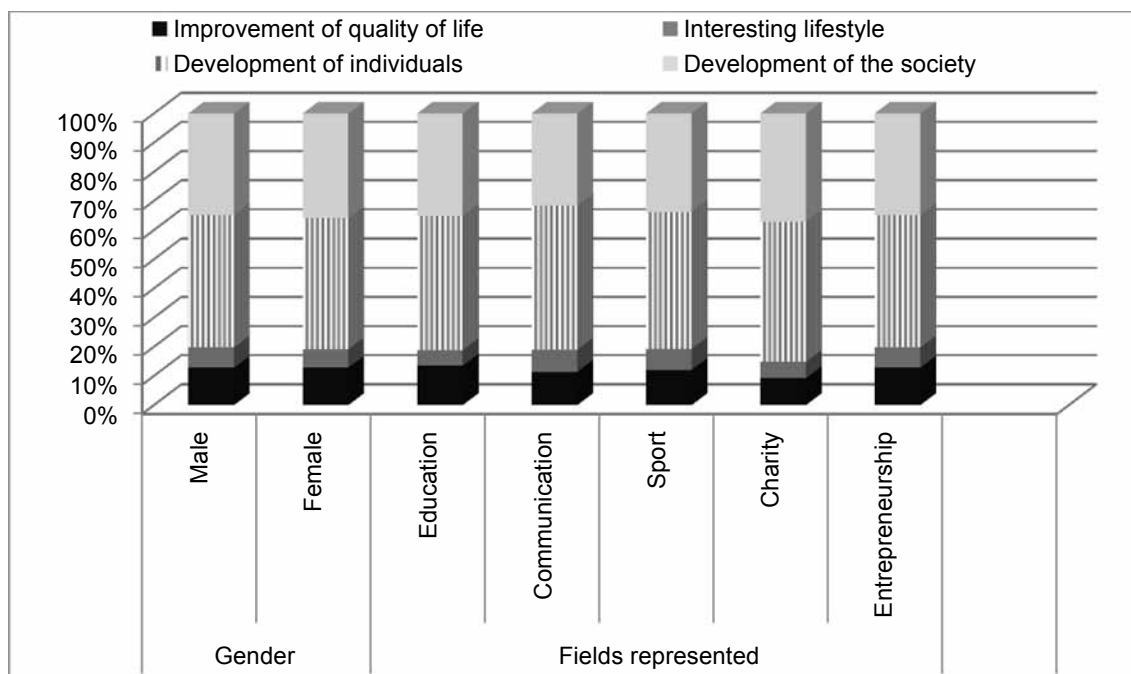
Table 3. The frequencies of the categories included in the metacode ‘The mission of social innovation’

Categories	Demographic codes						
	Gender		Fields represented				
	Male	Female	Education	Communication	Sport	Charity	Entrepreneurship
Improvement of quality of life	11	10	10	9	10	5	11
Interesting lifestyle	6	5	4	6	6	3	6
Development of individuals	39	35	34	39	39	26	39
Development of the society	30	28	26	25	28	20	30

Source: The authors

For understanding the extents to which the mission of social innovation is related to these four categories, the diagram of the distribution of their frequencies is constructed (see Figure 1) for seven scopes which represent the demographic codes (see Table 3). The diagram shows that regardless of the gender and the fields represented by the participants of the focus group discussion, the mission of social innovation is mainly connected to the development of individuals (about 45 %) and the society as a whole (about 40 %). Within this distribution only 10 % is related to the improvement of quality of life and about 5 % – to an interesting lifestyle.

Figure 1. The distribution of frequencies of the categories included in the metacode “The mission of social innovation”.



Source: The authors

The similar distribution of the frequencies of these four categories which were developed in the course of the qualitative content analysis speaks for the validity and reliability of the inference on the mission and developing function of social innovation both for individuals and the entire society.

3.2. The impact of social innovation

Since the question about the impact of social innovation was not discussed directly during the focus group discussion, the emergence of the categories which make the metacode ‘The impact of social innovation’ during the qualitative content analysis of the discussion text is especially important (see Table 4).

Table 4. The frequencies of the categories included in the metacode ‘The impact of social innovation’

No	Domains of social innovation impact	Categories	Demographic codes		Sum	Weight of each domain
			Male	Female		
			Frequencies of the categories			
1.	Intrapersonal development domain	Changes in attitudes	52	48	100	301
		Changes in thinking	51	49	100	
		Changes in performance	42	38	80	
		Achievement satisfaction	12	9	21	
2.	Interpersonal interaction development domain	Changes in problem solving	36	34	70	179
		Changes in relationships	34	30	64	
		Changes in communication	25	18	43	
		Socialization	1	1	2	
3.	Societal growth domain	Benefit for the society	22	19	41	164
		Improvement	28	25	53	
		New value system	25	20	45	
		Changes in education	6	5	11	
		Changes in politics	3	3	6	
		Development of infrastructure	4	4	8	

4.	Innovation development domain	Novelty	15	14	29	62
		New products	14	13	27	
		New technologies	4	2	6	
5.	Work opportunity development domain	Career growth	2	1	3	7
		New workplaces	1	1	2	
		Earning of money	1	1	2	

Source: The authors

Table 4 was constructed based on the frequencies of the categories spoken about by both genders and the sum of these frequencies for each category. The table summarizes all the judgements which are related to the broad range of consequences, results and influence of social innovation on various aspects and processes in the society from different perspectives of the development of individuals and the society. Based on the meaning of the categories they were grouped into five domains of social innovation impact (see Table 4). The last column was provided with the purpose to give insight into the weights of the five domains which were calculated as the total sum of frequencies of categories involved in each domain; the domains are characterized as follows:

Intrapersonal development domain. Changes in attitudes of individuals who participate in social innovation processes, changes in their ways of thinking and in their performance, as well as the getting of satisfaction from what they have achieved made the basis of this domain which focuses on the personality development. The participants of the focus group discussion mentioned the categories of this domain more frequently ($n = 301$) than the others which speaks of the huge impact of social innovation on the growth of personality.

Interpersonal interaction development domain. The categories included in this domain show that in the result of people's participation in social innovation processes, they change their way of solving problems and establish new types of relationship and communication getting new opportunities for socialization. The weight – that is the sum of the frequencies of the four categories of this domain, is in the second place ($n=179$).

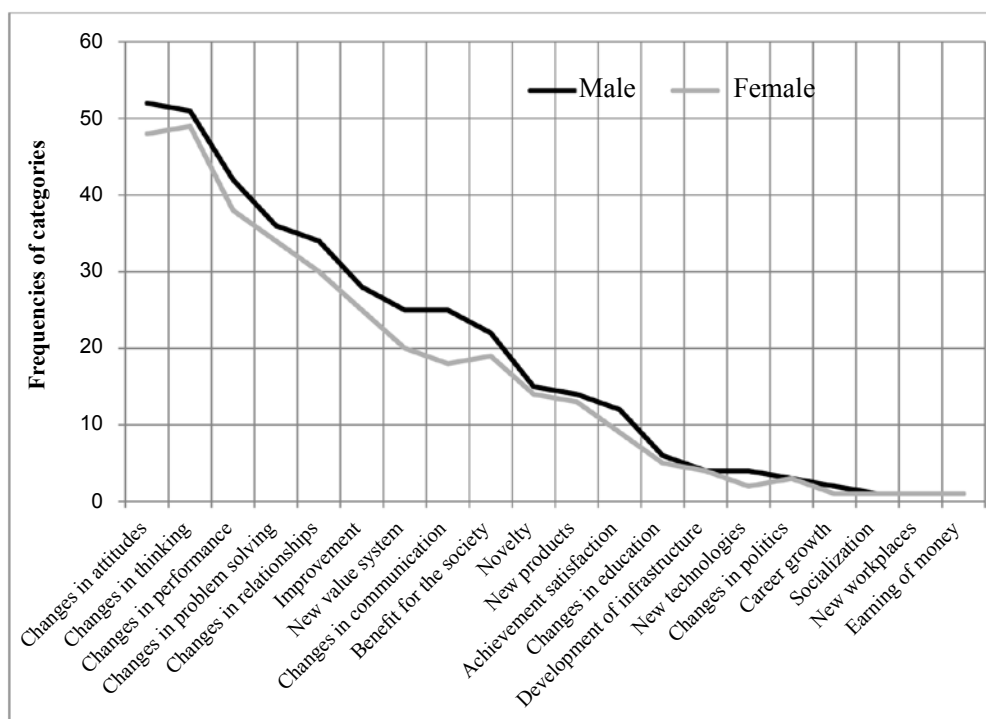
Societal growth domain. The qualitative content analysis showed that social innovation has a great impact on the society as a whole as it gives benefit and brings improvement in different fields, causing positive changes in politics and education. It may promote the development of infrastructure necessary for the realisation of various complex tasks. One of the most significant impacts of social innovation emerged to be the formation of new value system which is an evidence of deep changes which take place in the society in the course of the solution of social problems. Owing to its weight ($n=164$) the societal growth domain occupies the third place among the other domains of social innovation impact.

Innovation development domain. Solution of social problems which makes the heart of social innovation may give rise to the development of broader innovation as it may result in novelty, new products and new technologies. However the categories of this domain ($n=62$) were mentioned less frequently than the categories of the previous three domains; this can be conditioned by the professional fields represented by the participants of the focus group discussion.

Work opportunity development domain. The categories of this domain related to the creation of new workplaces, opportunities for earning money and career growth were pointed out least frequently ($n=7$); this may be conditioned by a similar reason explained for the case of the innovation development domain.

In order to compare the vision of the impact of social innovation expressed by the representatives of both genders ($n_{\text{male}}=4$, $n_{\text{female}}=4$), the diagram of the distribution of frequencies of categories was constructed (see Figure 2) based on the data taken from Table 4 for the demographic codes 'Male' and 'Female' organised in the decreasing order of frequencies of categories.

Figure 2. Comparative analysis of the distribution of frequencies of categories related to the effects of social innovation expressed by the representatives of both genders



Source: The authors

Figure 2 shows that the profiles of distribution of the frequencies of the categories related to the effects of social innovation expressed by the representatives of both genders are similar. This similarity speaks for the identical perception and understanding of the impact of social innovation on the society by both genders. However the men were more active than the women and they produced more ideas related to the issues discussed.

4. Conclusions

The research conducted shows that the representatives of the fields of communication, education, entrepreneurship, sport and charity consider that social innovation has significant potential for improving quality of people’s life and their interesting lifestyle in Latvia, at the same time developing both individuals who are involved in the processes of social innovation and the entire society.

They also think that social innovation has the power of serious impact on the sustainable development of the Latvian society as it causes many-sided positive changes at different levels encompassing the development of: personality, intrapersonal interaction, societal growth, innovation, and work opportunities.

Having summarized the results of the research it can be concluded that social innovation may play a considerable role in the promotion of the sustainable development of the contemporary Latvian society.

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