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IMPLEMENTATION OF INNOVATIVE SOCIAL INVESTMENTS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. CASE STUDY

WDRAŻANIE INNOWACYJNYCH INWESTYCJI SPOŁECZNYCH NA POZIOMIE LOKALNYM. STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

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Summary: The article presents the results of research on the implementation of innovative social investments at the local level based on the case study *Assistance from A to Z – Professional activation of homeless people from Wrocław Circle St. Brother Albert Aid Society*. The aim is to analyse the possibilities of applying innovative and investment solutions in the area of social and professional activation of people threatened by social exclusion, especially the homeless. The author uses the case study method and the method of desk research, in which the analysis of the strategy documents, source materials and acts was carried out. The analysis of the Assistance from A to Z project showed that applied in the project forms of support brought satisfactory results in the field of social and professional activation of the homeless, brought social and economic benefits and thus the project can be seen as a social investment.

Keywords: social innovation, social investments, social activation, professional activation, homelessness, accompaniment method.

Streszczenie: Artykuł prezentuje wyniki badań nad wdrażaniem innowacyjnych inwestycji społecznych na szczeblu lokalnym w oparciu o studium przypadku *Wsparcie od A do Z – Aktywizacja zawodowa osób bezdomnych z Wrocławskiego Koła Towarzystwa Pomocy im. św. Brata Alberta*. Celem jest analiza możliwości zastosowania innowacyjnych i inwestycyjnych rozwiązań w obszarze aktywizacji społecznej i zawodowej osób zagrożonych wykluczeniem społecznym, zwłaszcza bezdomnych. W artykule wykorzystano metodę studium przypadku oraz metodę *desk research*, w ramach której przeprowadzono analizę dokumentów strategicznych, materiałów źródłowych i aktów prawnych. Analiza projektu *Wsparcie od A do Z* pozwoliła na wykazanie że zastosowane formy wsparcia przyniosły zadowalające rezultaty w dziedzinie aktywizacji społecznej i zawodowej osób bezdomnych, przyniosły korzyści społeczne i ekonomiczne, a zatem projekt można uznać za inwestycję społeczną.

Słowa kluczowe: innowacje społeczne, inwestycje społeczne, aktywizacja społeczna, aktywizacja zawodowa, bezdomność, metoda towarzyszenia.

1. Introduction

The investment approach in social policy is a new paradigm, a new approach to public policy, which traditionally – in the perspective of the welfare state – was seen as a cost to the economic system justified by citizens' social rights [Hemerijck 2013]. The paradigm of investment social policy draws attention to productivity, investment that brings a return – in both social and economic areas [Morel, Palier, Palme (eds.) 2012]. Particular attention is paid to educational policy, labour market policy, active inclusion policy and policy in the area of work and family life balance.

Policies in the fields of social inclusion and active inclusion are important areas of Polish social policy, conducted as part of national actions as well as regional and local ones, including the support of the European Union. The ideas of social exclusion, social inclusion and active inclusion – meaning social integration defined primarily in the context of the objectives of employment – in Polish social policy are linked with the accession to the European Union (2004) and the implementation of EU social policy in the field of poverty reduction and active inclusion. This area is also an important field in the paradigm of investment social policy, because active inclusion and employment of people at risk of social exclusion can in the future bring profits for the on individuals, as well as for the society and the state.

In this context extremely important is an innovation and to search for new solutions that will bring social benefits, more effectively meet the needs and help to solve problems better than traditional practices. Innovation is one of the success factors of social investment, especially thanks to better response to social needs and more effective support people in need. This is particularly important in case of meeting these needs and solving problems in which current actions have not been sufficiently effective and efficient.

The article presents the results of research on the implementation of innovative social investments at the local level based on the case study *Assistance from "A" to "Z" – Professional activation of homeless people from Wrocław Circle St. Brother Albert Aid Society* (hereinafter referred to as *Assistance from A to Z*). The aim is to analyse the implementation of innovative and investment solutions in the area of social and professional activation of people threatened by social exclusion, especially the homeless, based on a case study.

For the purpose of research, the following research questions were asked: 1. What was the specificity of the project? 2. What innovative solutions were used in the project? 3. Did innovations contribute to better solving problems and satisfying the needs of the beneficiaries? 4. Why can a project be considered a social investment? Answers to the research questions are included in the following sections of the article.

The author used the case study method and the method of desk research, in which the analysis of the strategy documents, source materials and acts were carried out. The results of study were subjected to critical analysis, using the achievements of literature in the field of social investment, social innovation and social inclusion

policy. The article is the result of partial studies carried out in the framework of the research project *Innovative Social Investment: Strengthening communities in Europe (InnoSI)*, financed by the EU Research and Innovation Programme Horizon 2020. As a part of the InnoSI project, detailed evaluation of case studies of innovative social investments implemented at the local level was carried out. The evaluation was carried out a needs assessment, theories of change, process evaluation, impact evaluation and economic evaluation were carried out. This allowed for demonstration of innovation and investment within the undertaken activities. One of the 20 case studies was the *Assistance from A to Z* project presented in the article by A. Wiktorska-Świącka and D. Moroń [2016]. In the expert evaluation of this project within *InnoSI*, the results of the internal evaluation of the project based on data analysis and tests of project participants were used. An analysis of secondary data, project documentation, organisation documentation and semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries and persons involved in the project implementation, were carried out.

2. Innovative social investments – theoretical framework

The investment approach is a completely new glance to social policy, which traditionally – in the perspective of the welfare state – was seen as a cost to the economic system justified by citizens' social rights [Hemerijck 2013]. It emerged gradually as a social policy perspective in the 1990s in response to fundamental changes in modern societies. It was to respond to challenges related to the modernization of the welfare state towards a better response to new needs and threats and ensuring the financial and political sustainability of the welfare state [Vandenbroucke, Hemerijck, Palier 2011, p. 5]. The investment paradigm draws attention to productivity, investment that brings a return – in both social and economic areas [Morel, Palier, Palme (eds.) 2012]. It puts emphasis on these policies which invest in human capital, allows its use, prevents its wastage and promotes development and economic growth. Therefore, investing concerns labour market policy, combating poverty and social exclusion, early childhood education and care, combining work and family life, education and higher education policy, and the seniors' activation.

In the scientific literature, a multitude of approaches and definitions of social investments can be identified [Wiktorska-Świącka, Moroń, Klimowicz 2015]. The *InnoSI* project adopted the definition of social investments proposed by the European Commission, hence such understanding of social investments was adopted for the case study analysis. The European Commission indicates that “The social investment approach stresses the case for considering certain parts of employment and social policies – and possibly other policy areas, such as education – as entailing investments improving prospects for future employment and social participation, together with more social cohesion and stability [...] thus stressing the life course dimension of social policies and their long-term benefits for society” [European Commission 2013, p. 3].

One of perspectives related to the concept of social investment includes relations between this approach and social innovation. The *InnoSI* project's team decided that social innovations can be defined as "the generation and implementation of new ideas about how people should organise interpersonal activities or social interactions to meet one or more common goals" [Mumford 2002]. Social innovation may refer to the development of new products and services that address social needs and also to new sets of social relations to deliver products and services (new partnerships across sectors, flattening of hierarchies, coproduction and personalisation) [Kania, Kramer 2011; Leadbeater 2004, 2007; Jacobsen, Jostmeier 2010]. Social innovations can take the form of specific ideas, actions, frames, models, systems, processes, services, rules and regulations as well as new organisational forms.

Social investments and social innovations have some common points. They take into account not only economic but also social and ecological constraints and objectives. They put emphasis on providing goods and services to address social need more effectively and efficiently.

Social investment approach searches for more effective ways to address growing societal and economic challenges. In this regard, traditional investment solutions are not sufficient anymore and have to be supplemented with new/or innovative ones. In this context, we refer to innovative social investments [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń, Klimowicz 2015].

3. Assistance from A to Z project

Assistance from A to Z project concerns the socio-professional activation of people at risk of social exclusion, hence it is a part of social inclusion of people at risk of social exclusion policy. It applies to a specific group of people at risk of exclusion – the homeless. The project is part of the European and Polish social inclusion policies which determine the objectives and the source of financing for the project – project was realised under the Operational Programme Human Capital, the regional component, priority VII: Promotion of social integration (measure 7.2 Counteracting exclusion and strengthening the social economy sector; sub-measure 7.2.1 Social and vocational activation of persons threatened by social exclusion).

The project was implemented in the period 30.09.2012–30.10.2015 in Wrocław by Wrocław Circle St. Brother Albert Aid Society. The project involved the socio-professional activation of 105 people: homeless, jobless, at risk of social exclusion, in three annual editions, 35 people in each cycle. In fact, the support was directed to 136 homeless people. 120 people accomplished the participation in the project, so 88% of the participants, which in the case of such a specific target category is a great achievement.

Needs assessment, which is the basis for the design of social activities, emphasized the co-existence of various problems of the homeless. It was pointed out that homelessness is most often the result of the many social problems coexistence,

including addiction, unemployment, housing problems, family conflicts, conflicts with the law, stay in prison, debt (including alimony), etc. Homelessness is also the cause of other problems (psychological, with health, etc.). It makes difficult to take up employment and causes exclusion from social life.

The most important identified needs of homeless people included:

- the need for social activation;
- the need to supplement the professional qualifications, the professional experience, the skills needed for functioning on the labour market, support in looking for a job;
- the need for housing support towards housing independence and leaving the institutions for the homeless;
- the need for motivational support in the whole process of social and professional activation;
- the need for support in solving health problems and obtaining a disability certificate;
- the need for psychological support, support in the fight against addiction and maintenance in abstinence, support the renewal of contacts with the family;
- the need for support in solving legal problems related to debt, especially alimony;
- the economic and living needs [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń 2016].

Thus, the project included the multi-faceted activities, leading to solve the problems and meet the needs of homeless people. The main objective of the project was acquired the skills and competencies of socio-professional by the homeless. The objectives included: reduction or limitation of the negative social impact of homelessness, acquisition of competences enabling navigate the labour market, acquisition or improvement of professional skills and acquisition of professional experience. Adopted goals resulted from the Operational Programme Human Capital's objective and Wrocław Circle St. Brother Albert Aid Society was aware of the other needs of the homeless (e.g. housing needs), which could not be directly implemented under the project.

Key activities implemented within the project included:

- social integration: sports, art and social competencies classes;
- professional activation: establish individual career path, supplement the skills needed for functioning on the labour market, including the preparation of application documents, for conversations with employers etc., meetings with mentors and coaches, it trainings, vocational trainings, vocational internships, support in contacts with employers;
- motivational support in the whole process of social and professional activation and support in solving important problems: psychologist's support, accompanists' support, legal aid;
- economic support: grants, food, tickets for public transport, accommodation in night shelter, shelter or house for homeless persons [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń 2016].

Among the 136 homeless people involved in the project were 110 men and 26 women, 90 economically inactive persons and 46 unemployed, 54 disabled persons (including 8 women and 46 men), 7 young people –aged 15–24 and 51 elderly participants (55–64) [Wrocław Circle... 2015].

The evaluation has shown that the project achieved its stated objectives. 40 people, 33% of those who participated in the project, has taken the employment. 21 people, 18%, came from the homelessness – who left shelter or night shelter for the homeless and living in a dwelling. All people who overcame homelessness (left institutions for homeless) became self-dependent, although they did not always take up employment. Some of them maintained non-profit benefits, e.g. pensions associated with age or disability or were dependent on the family. Conducted tests and interviews have shown that project participants have increased their self-reliance, social competence, have created social bonds, have improved social functioning, have raised competencies related to looking for a job, have acquired new skills and professional qualifications and supplemented their professional experience [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń 2016].

4. Innovative solutions in the project

The key innovative element of the *Assistance from A to Z* project was the use of the accompaniment method. Its aim is to restore subjectivity and dignity of an individual and to equip it with specific competencies and skills necessary to be a part of society, particularly in the labour market.

The accompaniment method is a form of working with people who are in crisis and are threatened by many social problems. Its essence is the individual approach to the beneficiaries' situation and the complex nature of the aid, aimed at supporting the development of the beneficiary. This is a customer-focused help strategy where support and advice are tailored to the client's needs. The accompaniment is an emotional aid aimed at reducing stress and activating individual coping with stress strategy. It is also valuable help by giving the other person a sense of acceptance and security, restoring faith in one's own abilities, providing assistance on partnership terms. The association method is focused on the individual needs and expectations of the beneficiary [Kot 2008].

This solution was invented and implemented in France by Caritas France as a support for the activation of the unemployed [Vigneau-Cazalaa 2008a, b] and was introduced to the Polish conditions in 2004–2008, when it was tested for the first time within the framework of the project *Back on track* [Kot 2008; Słowik 2008]. In Poland this method has been used so far in working with the unemployed and the homeless by Caritas Poland and St. Brother Albert Aid Society [Wiktorska-Święcka 2015; Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń, Klimowicz 2015; Czochara 2012/2013; Słowik 2008; Wilczek 2008; Kot 2008]. Each time there were solutions implemented tailored to the local specifics, but the general rule is that the accompaniment method combines into a single coherent strategy three types of support: income-oriented, pro-employment and

service for excluded people, which is consistent with the concept of active inclusion [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń 2016].

The accompaniment method applies to process (accompaniment), product (support model), actors (beneficiaries, accompanists, institutions), management (participation, multi-sectoral partnership), orientation to the common good (equal opportunities) and public values (solidarity).

A model of help based on the accompaniment method consists of the following steps:

- first contact: building a climate of trust, creation of the best conditions that will encourage to interact and build mutual understanding, initial diagnosis, emotional support, offering help;
- active listening: the aim of the accompanist is to learn the needs of the beneficiary, allowing him to share his feelings, talking about personal matters, propose solutions;
- planning: social, psychological and professional diagnosis, formulate objectives and developing a strategy and action plan;
- support: setting goals in a shorter and a longer period of time, strengthening motivation, change of beneficiary' attitude, empowerment [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń 2016; Kot 2008].

The accompaniment method was used in several projects and has not been regulated in Polish law as a method of social work yet.

In Polish conditions, innovation is also the combined use of a wide range of support, especially combining social and professional support with psychological, motivational and legal assistance. Public institutions usually limit the support, which prevents the active inclusion of homeless people who require a comprehensive approach. Extremely important was also the flexibility of the offered forms of support.

The *Assistance from A to Z* project used new ideas for providing services to better achieve the goal of social inclusion of homeless people. It proposed a new service on the Polish market (accompaniment), a new organization of activities by combining various forms of support and personalizing activities. These solutions meet the criteria of social innovation.

5. The impact of innovative solutions on the results of the project

The evaluation of the *Assistance from A to Z* project carried out as part of the *Innovative Social Investment: Strengthening communities in Europe (InnoSI)* project's research allowed for demonstrating the impact of the innovative solutions on the results of the project.

An impact evaluation indicates the impact of innovation in achieving positive changes which are produced by an intervention. The key role of the accompanist has been demonstrated in qualitative research – in semi-structured interviews with project manager, representatives of project staff (project manager assistant and specialist

for assistance), representatives of accompanists in the project and representatives of beneficiaries [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń 2016].

When asked about the role of an accompanist, respondents-beneficiaries generally positively evaluated the support given to them by persons performing this role. It was considered that the aid of the accompanist was needed, and beneficiaries expected that an accompanist will help them “solve personal problems in finding employment”, “solve personal problems”, “rebuild ties with the family”, “find a job”, “find an apartment”, “solve legal problems”, “solve health problems”, “organize everything”. Definitely they followed recommendations of the accompanist, the more that during the meetings with the accompanist in their opinion, they were the atmosphere which was conducive to good communication and cooperation. The accompanist clearly provides information about the current state of the project, and during individual meetings he/she provided took care for conditions to conduct talks in an atmosphere of trust. Respondents appreciated highly their professional preparation [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń 2016].

Beneficiaries highly evaluated accompanists’ role, their involvement in motivating beneficiaries to remain in the project, to push them to complete various stages and to use acquired competences in practice. Only a small part of the respondents assessed that the involvement wasn’t supportive for beneficiaries to continue its participation in the project. At the same time, they stressed that the accompanist is a key person in the project due to the fact that he/she supported participants both in solving individual problems as well as in playing an important role in the team tasks (“no one in the Municipal Social Assistance Centre helped me so far”, “the accompanist had time to really be interested in me”) [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń 2016].

While conducting semi-structured interviews, beneficiaries referred to the association method, whereby it should be noted that they do not associate the term with the implementation of the project and its various stages. They associated rather the accompanists’ method with activities in which they participated through the prism of “accompanist”, that is advisor and mentor who supported them at the stage of individual development.

Also the project manager and representatives of project staff in semi-structured interviews considered the accompaniment method to be key success factors of the project. They pointed out that the most important element of this method implementation is the accompanist, the person who uses it in practice. Involvement of the accompanist in the implementation of tasks, his approach to the beneficiary, his personality traits determined the success of the beneficiaries. Project staff emphasized that many accompanists spent more time to work with the beneficiaries than was anticipated in the project. Thanks to that they got very good results – their beneficiaries not only got a job, but also left the shelters or night shelters for the homeless and self-empowerment [Wiktorska-Święcka, Moroń 2016].

The study also allowed the author to show great importance of wide range of support offered in the project. Taking a job and self-empowerment have become

possible not only through social and professional activation, but by combining it with psychological support, legal aid and support in solving health problems.

6. Assistance from A to Z project as a social investment

The *Assistance from A to Z* project is an example of social investment in social policy. Why? It responds to contemporary challenges of supporting people at risk of social exclusion, especially homeless people. The implementation of the project requires financial inputs, but it generates social and economic benefits not only for the direct beneficiaries, but also for other stakeholders.

Key project stakeholders include homeless people (beneficiaries of the project), Wrocław Circle St. Brother Albert Aid Society (organization implementing the project), the Municipality of Wrocław (the Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Wrocław, the District Labour Office in Wrocław – institutions responsible for supporting the homeless), Lower Silesia Region (regional authority – entity supporting measures for social inclusion) and the state. As additional shareholders of the project may also be mentioned: closest family members of beneficiaries (wife/husband, children), downstream family members of beneficiaries, friends of the project beneficiaries, *Assistance from A to Z* project staff, Wrocław Circle St. Brother Albert Aid Society staff, members and volunteers, entities cooperating with Wrocław Circle St. Brother Albert Aid Society, including the project area, members of the local community and taxpayers. Some stakeholders contribute to the implementation of the project, but it should be emphasized that the project is also profitable.

The evaluation of the project made it possible to show that the project had a positive impact on the quality of life of the target group. It enabled the social and professional reintegration of homeless people who are at risk of social exclusion. Thanks to the project homeless people have raised their social competences, increased their self-reliance, created new social bonds (including those who do not belong to the homeless group, which allowed them to enter new communities). The project also increased the skills of homeless people connected with the functioning of the labour market and helped to solve their problems: legal problems, health and psychological problems. Some homeless people took up work and came out of homelessness. Implementation of the project has also contributed to reducing the negative social effects of homelessness for the families of homeless and the local community.

The implementation of the project was also of great importance from the perspective of the non-governmental organization implementing it. Wrocław Circle St. Brother Albert Aid Society was able to better support its beneficiaries, test new solutions, professionalize activities and create new forms of cooperation with public institutions and businesses. We do not have, in this case, formal cooperation with the public sector. Although public institutions, such as the Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Wrocław and the District Labour Office in Wrocław, perform tasks of social and professional activation of the homeless, including Wrocław Circle St. Brother

Albert Aid Society beneficiaries, they did not participate in this project, however these institutions supported its implementation unofficially. The project on a small scale was supported by employers representing public and private sector, who offered directional advice and internships for beneficiaries. In the case of the project we have multi-sectoral solution, due to the involvement of the entity representing the non-profit sector, public financing and support from public and business institutions. These activities allow for building relationships and establishing future collaboration for better implementation of tasks.

Analyses indicate that *Assistance from A to Z* project brings economic benefits exceeding expenditure for the project, which makes the activation of the homeless also economically viable. The economic analysis of the project was carried out using Social Return on Investment analysis (SROI). Selecting the SROI analysis is connected with the fact that it combines the advantages of cost-benefit analysis with the social audit. What makes it unique is the monetary presentation of all relevant investments and the effects of the activity, therefore simple conversion of social influence into money. SROI analysis focuses on the impacts and long-term impact, which in the case of target group of the Assistance from A to Z project is of great importance. SROI taking into account the financial costs of the project confront us with its effects, which are often overlooked. What is important is the fact that the SROI takes into account the perspective of the stakeholders, which promotes objectivity [Moroń, Klimowicz 2016].

Conducting economic evaluation of the *Assistance from A to Z* project calculation SROI method allowed for the identification of the true cost of the project, the inputs, activities, outputs and impact of the project.

Total Inputs for project amount to PLN 3,229,371.71 and the costs have been borne by the public sector from the European Social Fund. Wrocław Circle St. Brother Albert Aid Society suffered only expenditures related to the preparation of the project (specialists' working time). After taking into account effects: deadweight (6%), displacement (0%), attribution (5%), drop-off (15%) and discount rate (3.5%) we can show that Total Present Value (PV) amounted to PLN 3,859,770.28 and Net Present Value to PLN 630,398.57. SROI ratio is 1.20, meaning that for every PLN 1.00 invested in the Assistance from A to Z project we obtain PLN 1.20 refund. So for every PLN 1.00 invested we get PLN 0.20 profits in 5 years [Wiktorska-Świąćka, Moroń 2016].

The main economic benefits of the project were achieved by its beneficiaries, however, the public sector (the state and the Municipality of Wrocław) also achieved some economic benefits from the project associated with smaller expenses to homeless assistance, as well as, higher tax revenues and insurance contributions.

Assistance from A to Z project through activities for social and professional activation of the homeless improve prospects for future employment and social participation, ensure more social cohesion and stability. It brings long-term benefits – both social and economic – to the beneficiaries and the whole society. This indicates that the project is a social investment.

7. Conclusions

The analysis of the Assistance from A to Z project showed that the forms of support applied in the project brought satisfactory results in the field of social and professional activation of the homeless, as well as social and economic benefits, especially thanks to the use of innovative solutions, and thus the project can be seen as an innovative social investment.

The project results were in line with expectations, they indicate that social and vocational activation of homeless people is possible, and so is coming out of homelessness. The main success factors were: firstly, the usage of innovative method of accompaniment, secondly, the usage of various forms of impacts (a variety of classes and activities in the field of vocational and social activation, psychological support, support in solving legal problems) adapted to the needs of beneficiaries.

The experiences of the project show that it is necessary to conduct individualized impacts, adapted to the needs and capabilities of homeless people (including health, age, skills, and needs of the homeless). It is very important to help in solving legal problems, as well as psychological support. The usage of the method of accompaniment brought very good results, and the accompanist proved to be essential to supporting homeless people and their activation.

The project brings benefits to the homeless, but also to other stakeholders – for activities supporting the homeless should look for an investment that brings a return in the future, thanks to the activation and empowerment of the beneficiaries. The analyses indicate that such actions bring benefits exceeding expenditure for the project, which makes the activation of the homeless also economically viable.

The presented project therefore fits in the paradigm of social investments, and thanks to the innovative solutions used, it is an innovative social investment worth dissemination in practice.

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