

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP OF THE NEW GENERATION IN THE NEW ECONOMY

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Purpose: The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the knowledge and approach of young people to the issue of social entrepreneurship as an area of activity important for shaping key competences in the New Economy. The additional aim of the paper is to describe the feeling of readiness of young people to act as an agent, both in relation to society and this economy.

Design/methodology/approach: To achieve this goal, a diagnostic study was carried out (based on the so-called task catalogue) with a group of over 500 students studying at vocational schools, high schools and technical colleges in Greater Poland, as well as 3 workshops with students representing particular types of schools.

Findings: The research established that students are aware of the possibility of participation in the social world through the broadly understood social entrepreneurship and activity in the third sector. It was also established that they are very aware of the possibilities and the need for agency in this area. The discussed resources of students translate into competences necessary in the New Economy.

Research limitations/implications: Contemporary research with adolescents requires taking into account a number of factors that may affect their course. In more extensive research, these issues will certainly be worth considering already at the stage of conceptualization of the research and construction of research tools.

Practical implications: Social entrepreneurship of young people is constantly transforming and although its subject is changing (from activities related to shared management to activities related to social solidarity and civic attitudes), it invariably refers to joint activities on the border of economic and social reality. The approach of young people to the implementation of socially useful tasks is also changing. Young people see them as an opportunity both to solve social problems and to meet the challenges related to changes in the postmodern world.

Social implications: The competences gained by young people make them more aware and engaged citizens, but also more aware and responsible future participants of the New Economy.

Originality/value: The paper reconstructs the resources, approach and attitudes of young people towards the possibilities of agency offered by social entrepreneurship. The collected knowledge was analysed on the basis of the competence challenges posed by the New Economy for the New Generation project.

Keywords: social economy, Economy 4.0, social entrepreneurship, non-profit sector, student cooperatives.

Category of the paper: research paper, case study.

1. Introduction

Common opinions about contemporary youth can be unfair. People who will soon become adults are accused of, among other things, a lack of interest in socially important issues. It is also said that young people are insufficiently actively involved in activities related to the broadly understood social entrepreneurship. An additional factor influencing the withdrawal of young people from the traditionally and "non-virtually understood" social world are the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, consisting in the temporary transfer of school activity almost entirely to computer screens.

The results of research on social entrepreneurship of young people are slightly more optimistic. They indicate, inter alia, the growing social sensitivity or the need for multi-directional development and action, although not necessarily within the assumptions of the education system functioning in Poland.

Young people are aware of the relationship between economic activity and the social world and that they must prepare for responsible participation in this reality. The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the knowledge and approach of young people to the issue of social entrepreneurship as an area of activity important for shaping key competences in the New Economy. The additional aim of the paper is to describe the feeling of readiness of young people to act as an agent, both in relation to society and this economy.

2. Literature review

Social entrepreneurship of young people is not a new phenomenon, although in relation to Polish conditions it has gone through various periods of intensity and had various emanations (Frączak, 2006; Leś, 2008). The issue of "new economies" also returns cyclically, both in relation to socio-political changes and newly emerging technical solutions. The history of economics has recorded many such concepts. With regard to modern concepts, it is possible to mention, for example, the sharing economy, the economy of the common good or the circular economy (Augustyński, 2018).

2.1. Social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is understood here as "types of organized economic practices, also going beyond the legal framework applicable to the social economy, positively valorized in relation to social symbolic values and meeting the requirement of economic rationality" (Waligóra, 2016). Therefore, it includes both profitable and non-profit types of activities leading to the multiplication of the broadly understood common good. Therefore, social

entrepreneurship is implemented by a social cooperative or a labor cooperative operating within the social economy (Praszkier & Nowak, 2012), as well as a foundation or association whose activity is often, in simplified terms, treated as non-profit¹ (Wronka-Pośpiech, 2017).

Social entrepreneurship went through various periods – from post-partition freedom to the times of disappearance or total regulation in the socialist economy. There is no doubt, however, that as an emanation of a specific "civic wisdom", it has not ceased to exist and evolve (Ciepielewska-Kowalik, Pielniński, Starnawska & Szymańska, 2015). Currently, it is difficult to define the framework for social entrepreneurship. Its boundaries in Poland are outlined by the constantly discussed act (Draft Act on Social Entrepreneurship, 2011; Draft Act on Social Economy, 2021). The scope is, however, determined by people looking for ever new solutions to the issue of solving social problems (Moore, 2000) and their own employment.

2.2. The place (for) the New Generation in the social economy system

One of the oldest forms of social enterprise dedicated to young people in the social economy system are student cooperatives. They were supposed to teach economy, management, but also how to function in a world where economic relations are indispensable (Nosal & Waligóra, 2017). Not every student cooperative meant the establishment of the so-called a school shop (Prus, 2021), but each one (including one devoted to, inter alia, artistic activity) meant establishing relationships with an out-of-school, usually business partner. Some of the cooperatives allowed themselves to find out about the specificity of professions, e.g. dairy or agriculture; some benefited from the patronage of enterprises such as Food Cooperatives Społem (KRS, 2022).

Considering the current conditions of Polish law, the student cooperative movement is in the decline. However, this does not change the fact that social entrepreneurship, understood as the involvement of young people in profit-making and non-profit activities, is doing well. This is favoured by the functioning of third sector organizations and the awareness of how to join these entities and how to establish them (Foundation for the Development of Student Cooperatives/Fundacja Rozwoju Spółdzielczości Uczniowskiej, 2022).

2.3. New Economy (Economy 4.0)

A New Economy functioning in relation to a capitalist economy above all respects its realities. However, it requires more from its participants – the skills important in the economy of the twentieth century are joined by highly developed digital competences, the ability to use new technologies and the ability to achieve goals in diverse, dispersed teams (Wiktorowicz

¹ Although activity in the third sector is most often motivated by social reasons and does not fit into the assumptions of the functioning of economic entities within the capitalist economy, it is clear that financial resources are necessary for the operation of this type of entities. Market-based employment is carried out within the framework of foundations and associations. The analysed entities are subject to law, taxes (under special rules) and competition, for example with regard to obtaining various types of grants.

et al., 2016). Despite the fact that Economy 4.0 operates thanks to developed and constantly developing technology, it expects from its current and future employees a developed social sensitivity and intuition, which translates into, among others, ethical and civic competences, self-organization of work, creativity and the ability to effectively teamwork. The sum of these competences can be called something more than interpersonal competences – an important actor mediating in participation in Economy 4.0 are new technologies and the ability to use them in humanistic way².

2.4. Competences of young people preparing them to work in Economy 4.0

Concern for the ability of young people to participate in Economy 4.0 is becoming an important topic of discussion related to the future of education (Sijko, 2013; Grenčíková, Kordoš & Navickas, 2021). In various realities (e.g. scientific and educational), we wonder to what extent young people are ready to participate in a technologically mediated economy (Lase, 2019). On the one hand, the answer is obvious. No previous generation, like the present young generation, was prepared for the technological changes we are currently experiencing (CBOS, 2020). However, the preservation, development and effective use of broadly understood social competences remain a challenge.

Research shows that young people are well versed in the social world and its economic and non-economic dependencies. Current high school students know various types of social mechanisms and are well versed in their operation, even if they do not fully understand the dependencies that govern them.

2.5. Social entrepreneurship of the New Generation in the New Economy

Social entrepreneurship seems to be an important criterion for assessing the preparation of young people to participate in the New Economy. This applies both to the awareness of the possibility of engaging in social activity – an apparently unprofitable "undertaking" for social change, and to the actual activity in this area. Considering the weakening of the role of student cooperatives in the process of preparing young people for participation in the economy, it is worth paying attention to the possibilities of activity offered to students by activities implemented through non-governmental organizations.

Taking into account the circumstances of recent years (the time of social isolation caused by COVID-19), the awareness of young people about social activity should be particularly appreciated. Engaging in activities that, by definition, do not bring economic benefits, but constitute a field of satisfactory (because they solve pressing social problems) activity, is something that goes beyond what is established in contemporary Polish education.

² An interesting issue in relation to this issue is, for example, machine learning which requires a deep understanding of technological potential in relation to human potential.

3. Methodology

As part of the project "New Generation in the New Economy", an online diagnostic study (based on the so-called catalogue of tasks) was carried out with a group of over 500 students³ studying at vocational schools, high schools and technical secondary schools in Greater Poland region, as well as 3 workshops with students representing various types of schools.

The studied population were high school students from the Wielkopolskie voivodship. The research unit is the student, and for sampling purposes, the class was used as the selection unit. The key features in the selection of the sample were the type of locality, the type of secondary school and the quality of education at school. For the first two key traits, the desired numbers reflecting the population structure were established.

In order to select classes reflecting the differentiation of the quality of teaching within the structure of the class adopted for the key features, the classes were selected on the basis of the ranking of schools. Individual types of schools in the Wielkopolskie voivodship were ranked according to the points adopted in the Perspektywy ranking and schools covering the full spectrum of teaching quality were selected in a systematic manner (the best schools, good schools, average schools, weaker schools, the weakest schools).

Therefore, a mixed method of non-random selection was used. The method includes elements of team, quota and systematic selection. The full list of schools is organized by school type and performance, and quotas have been allocated based on the structure of the school type. Then the sampling frames were divided into sections and the required number of schools was selected from each section (systematic quasi-selection). The adopted method allowed for the reflection of the structure of schools and a proportional representation of the quality of teaching.

The study covered 26 classes, including:

- 8 classes of professional schools,
- 9 classes of technicians,
- 9 high school classes⁴.

The research aim was to measure and describe the following competences: (1) mathematical literacy competences (analytical competency), (2) ethical and civic competences, (3) communication, (4) creativity, (5) self-organization of work, (6) creating digital content and the ability to search for information with the use of IT, (7) learning new issues. The workshop analysed the possession of competences (8) – teamwork.

³ The number of students completing each task slightly fluctuated. Some students missed some of the tasks.

⁴ Detailed information on the selection of the sample can be found in: Krzyminiewska, G., Białowąs, S., Gołata, K., Olejnik, I., Shelest-Szumilas, O., Waligóra, A., Zboron, H. (2022). *The New Generation in the New Economy. Report*. Poznań: University of Economics.

The results collected as part of individual studies were analysed in terms of the students' willingness to implement the assumptions of social entrepreneurship and participation in its initiatives. The results of ethical and civic competences, self-organization of work, creativity and teamwork were analysed in detail, because it was precisely in these tasks of the diagnostic study that the state of knowledge and the approach of young people to social entrepreneurship as an area of activity important for shaping key competences in the New Economy.

The most important aspect of the research is its qualitative dimension – in the analysis, students' statements and graphic materials prepared by them were used⁵. The entire study should be treated as a mixed study, because research triangulation was used in the conducted research analyses – the results of qualitative studies were included in the quantitative analyses.

4. Results

The research project analysing the competences of young people to participate in the Economy 4.0 is a collective effort of the research team. Prof. Halina Zboroń was responsible for examining ethical and civic competences; Prof. Grażyna Krzyminiewska was responsible for studying the self-organization of work. For researching creativity and teamwork, the author of this paper. The full results of the research were presented in the project research report (Krzyminiewska et al. 2022).

4.1. Ethical and civic competences

As part of the task aimed at checking the indicated competence, students of secondary schools in Greater Poland region assessed, among others, attitudes towards situations (including business situations) in which there is a conflict of moral and economic values. Young people answered, inter alia, the question regarding the compliance with the terms of the contract in the face of the possibility of abandoning the current obligation in favor of a more lucrative contract and the question regarding the equal employment of people from Poland and foreigners. As Halina Zboroń writes, *The results of the entire study of ethical and civic competences of youth from secondary schools show its high level. There were differences between representatives of individual types of schools, although they are not significantly high. Summarizing the research results, the author recommends their cautious interpretation. However, it unequivocally indicates that the ability to correctly resolve moral dilemmas (by young people) is a good basis for appropriate behaviour in social life.*

⁵ As part of the workshop, students developed a poster representing their social organization.

4.2. Self-organization of work

As part of the study of the competences of self-organization of work, students were to individually plan the organization of a charity event. The time and budget have been set for the implementation of this task. The choice of the goal of the action was up to the students. The goals indicated by the students had a wide range. 39.5% (215 people) targeted animal welfare actions. 21.9%, i.e. 119 people carrying out the task, indicated the need to support children, including those who are sick or experiencing disabilities. 41 students (7.5%) indicated a specific beneficiary of the charity action. Slightly less, 37 people (6.8%) indicated the need to help people in a homeless crisis or other difficult life situation, e.g. caused by a fire.

In the course of carrying out the task, the students were also to demonstrate their knowledge of the collection organization mechanism. As Grażyna Krzyminiewska writes, 203 people participating in the study performed this element of the task fully, *pointing to all the necessary approvals of local authorities and institutions to be able to carry out such an action. Some of them (students) also quoted laws or other regulations, thus proving that they had read (have such knowledge) with the existing legal requirements.* The author also pointed out that, to a large extent, the students regarded the local environment as the context of the fundraising impact. As Grażyna Krzyminiewska claims, this may indicate both the awareness of local resources and the feeling of being able to use them. In the course of the study, the students were also to indicate potential partners of the charity campaign. Most of all, they suggested their colleagues as well as other personally known people. They could easily identify third sector entities operating locally: from scouting organizations to foundations and associations.

4.3. Creativity

As part of the task devoted to researching the level of creativity, the students had to imagine the situation of an interview for a job in a creative agency with an English-speaking supervisor. The students were to indicate their strengths and weaknesses, overcome communication barriers and demonstrate creativity in the field of communication without (possible) knowledge of the English language. Among other things, the results of the last element of the task indicated a declarative ease of communication. First of all, students are able to communicate in English, and if their competences would prove to be insufficient, they easily propose several solutions based on the support of other people or searching for solutions online or using internet applications. It is about imaginary resources (the interview as part of the diagnostic test did not take place), but as in the case of the task on self-organization of work, the result concerning the awareness of the range of resources that students can use to achieve their intentions seems particularly positive.

4.4. Teamwork

As part of the task related to the examination of teamwork competences, workshops were conducted aimed at introducing the idea and practice of the third sector in Poland. After participating in the discussion-theoretical part, students were to propose to set up a foundation or association working for a social goal important for students.

Students of the vocational school proposed to set up an organization promoting young photographers and graphic designers⁶, an organization that would connect animals living in shelters with people who would like to take them for walks, a sports organization that would enable the organized use of public sports infrastructure, and an organization aimed at popularizing studies in the field of emergency medical services.

High school students proposed the establishment of an organization that would "enliven" the way of functioning and the offer of activities for the local community centre, an organization dealing with the reconstruction of the green lungs of the city by planting trees and an organization preventing the broadly understood loneliness of young people by organizing social groups of people who want to take advantage of the local cultural or sports offer.

The students of the technical school suggested setting up an association dealing with the organization of a social Christmas Eve for people at risk of social exclusion, charity organizations working for children and a religious organization supporting people in the homelessness crisis.

The students made a decision about the purpose and shape of the organization on the basis of the prepared SWOT analysis, which also referred to the method of financing the proposed organization.

Table 1.

Summary of students' skills / resources identified on the basis of SWOT analyses

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ the ability to combine various types of resources, both available to students privately (e.g. having parents working in a specific company, the possibility of using the yard of the tenement house in which the students live) and generally available (e.g. the possibility of establishing cooperation with the school where the respondents study and with other institutions such as, for example, animal shelters), ✓ the ability to name long-term goals of the organization's functioning, such as pro-ecological activities or activities to improve the quality of animal life, ✓ the belief that the possible lack of skills necessary to run the organization can be made up for, i.e. learning new things, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ perceiving the possibilities of functioning of the organization in the context of financial challenges and calibrating the momentum of functioning to the available and potentially available resources, ✓ perceiving the need to "join forces" (e.g. with adults, school management, other organizations and institutions) in order to effectively achieve the goals set, ✓ awareness of the need for continuous learning to overcome "inexperience", ✓ awareness of the objective limitations of the proposed initiatives (e.g. bad weather conditions, lack of interest among potential recipients).

⁶ The vocational school where the task was carried out educates students in professions related to graphics and photography.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ awareness that there is a network of institutions, organizations and initiative groups in the students' environment which can be joined under the proposed initiatives. 	
<p>CHANCES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ the ability to see the long-term goals of the organization, such as pro-ecological activities or activities to improve the quality of animal life, ✓ the awareness of the lack of competition in the selected proposed initiative, proving an attempt to discern in the topic under consideration. 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ understanding the need to gain experience for the efficient operation of the organization (e.g. in the field of pre-performance rehearsals or in the field of planting trees in accordance with their development needs), ✓ understanding the issue of continuity of ensuring the functioning and financing of activities proposed by the created organization, ✓ understanding that a topic that is passionate about young people may not be interesting or noteworthy on a macrosocial scale.

Source: Waligóra, A., Group work/ teamwork in: Krzyminiewska et al. (2022) New Generation in the New Economy. Report

Most of the respondents were aware or in the course of discussions they reached the point that the proposed organizations must obtain funds for their activities, and preferably earn money, in order to be able to strengthen their sustainability. It was also obvious to the students that they would not operate in a social vacuum. As partners of the proposed organizations, they proposed peers, school, business and other social organizations. It should be mentioned that only the workshop in the vocational school was carried out in direct contact with students. Workshops in high school and technical high school were held online.

5. Research limitations

Contemporary research with adolescents requires taking into account a number of factors that may affect their course. First of all, we function from a rapidly changing reality conditioned not only by the influence of new technologies, but also diseases (e.g. COVID-19) that affect the organization of the social world. The young people who participated in this study were used to working online, however, it is easy to imagine a situation where online research will become a way to avoid reliable work. The methodology used in the project did not include a mechanism to test commitment to the responses provided. It should probably be an evaluation mechanism. Secondly, the region and country of residence of the respondents are not without significance here. It is a typical macrosocial factor relating, i. a., to the quality of life or the culture of using new technologies. In more extensive research, these issues will certainly be worth considering already at the stage of conceptualization of the research and construction of research tools.

6. Findings

Social entrepreneurship of young people is constantly transforming and although its subject is changing (from activities related to shared management to activities related to social solidarity and civic attitudes), it invariably refers to joint activities on the border of economic and social reality. The approach of young people to the implementation of socially useful tasks is also changing. Young people see it as an opportunity both to solve social problems and to meet the challenges related to changes in the postmodern world. The competences gained by young people make them more aware and engaged citizens, but also more aware and responsible future participants of the New Economy.

As part of the research, it was found that students are aware of the possibility of participating in the social world through broadly understood social entrepreneurship (as well as activity in and for the third sector). It was also established that they are very aware of the possibilities and the need for agency in this area. The discussed resources of students translate into competences necessary in the New Economy.

In summary, the paper reconstructs the resources, approach and attitudes of young people towards the possibilities of agency offered by social entrepreneurship. The collected knowledge was analysed on the basis of the competence challenges posed by the New Economy for the New Generation. Against the background of great and difficult social phenomena generated, for example, by a pandemic and the long-term distance learning resulting from it, the collected results and observations give us optimism.

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