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# IMPORTANCE OF CROWDSOURCING IN SOCIAL INNOVATIONS: EVIDENCE FROM POLAND

## A crowdsourcing fontossága a társadalmi innovációk terén: lengyelországi tapasztalatok

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### Abstract

This article covers the problems connected with creating open social innovations using crowdsourcing. In this work the importance of crowdsourcing in the context of creating open social innovations, which serve the realisation and solving of social needs, was presented. This elaboration is divided into three parts. Following a short introduction, the essence of open social innovations, including the notion of innovation and social innovations, was presented. In the second part, the essence of crowdsourcing and its potential, were presented. The subject of the final, third part is showing the possibilities of using crowdsourcing to create open social innovations. Theoretical considerations were supported by three examples. Three examples from Poland were purposefully chosen. It is worth underlining that the obtained results confirm the demands made in the subject literature connected with the importance of crowdsourcing in creating open social innovations since this phenomenon contributes to obtain and generate new ideas and ways of solving problems including social ones.

**Keywords:** crowdsourcing, open social innovation, open innovation, innovation

**JEL code:** O35

### Összefoglaló

A cikk a nyitott társadalmi innovációk létrehozásának kérdését veti fel a crowdsourcing alkalmazása által. A tanulmány bemutatja a crowdsourcing jelentését, társadalmi igények megvalósítására és megoldására szolgáló nyitott társadalmi innovációk létrehozásának kontextusában. Az értekezés három részből áll. A rövid bevezetés után, az első részben a nyitott társadalmi innovációk lényege kerül bemutatásra, tekintettel az innováció és a társadalmi innováció fogalmára. A második részben a crowdsourcing lényege valamint annak potenciálja kerül bemutatásra. Az utolsó, harmadik rész tárgya a crowdsourcing alkalmazásának lehetőségének bemutatása, új nyitott társadalmi innovációk létrehozásában. Az elméleti feltevések három példával lettek alátámasztva. Szándékosan három lengyelországi példa lett kiválasztva. Érdemes kiemelni, hogy az elért eredmények alátámasztják a szakirodalomban a crowdsourcing jelentőségéről felállított feltevéseket a nyitott társadalmi innovációk kialakításában. Ez a jelenség hozzájárul az új ötletek kialakításához és generálásához, valamint problémák - köztük társadalmi problémák megoldásához is.

**Kulcsszavak:** crowdsourcing, nyílt társadalmi innováció, a nyitott innováció, innováció

### Introduction

Current social, economic, or environment challenges, necessity of transparency, responsibility, and efficiency of public and non-governmental organisations (HOLZER – KLOBY, 2005) – require remodelling of the way they function. In this respect the necessity to

create for the citizens possibilities of coparticipation in the process of creating new solutions, decision-making, codecision, co-determination, and interaction in favour of realising public tasks, appears (LISTER, 1998). It is key to involve all interested parties to continuously create new products, enhance and improve processes or create new solutions, particularly those which raise the society's quality of life. Therefore, one seeks ways and possibilities of realising the said demands: on the one hand openness to the interested parties' voices and on the other hand solving social problems.

In the subject literature it is pointed out that the tool that enables citizens' participation in problem solving and idea generation is crowdsourcing. Despite the fact that this issue constitutes a certain novum (first publication are dated 2006), however one observes a continuous increase of the number of publications (ALBORS – RAMOS – HERVAS, 2008; BRABHAM, 2008; KITTUR – CHI – SUH, 2008). This interest results above all from the benefits and its potential, among others: in the context of accessibility to knowledge resources, which are present in the crowd, in other words virtual societies, acquiring new ideas, data, ways of solving problems with lower financial outlay and in a short time (VUKOVIC, 2009).

Crowdsourcing is perceived as a phenomenon which enables inclusion in creating new solutions those social groups that are directly interested and which use new solutions. It is often pointed out that crowdsourcing may be useful in creating open social innovations. This is reinforced by the fact that crowdsourcing is a kind of participant on-line activity (BRABHAM, 2008), which enables establishing cooperation with involved entities and creating innovations and solutions to social problems (DAVIES – SIMON, 2013). Such are the premises which inspire this article.

The principal subject of considerations and at the same time the goal of this article is indicating the possibilities of applying crowdsourcing in creating open social innovations, which serve the realisation and solving social needs. The above considerations were based on an analysis of non-serial publications, mainly written in English. Theoretical considerations were supported by three examples. To this aim public, local governmental and non-governmental organisations from Poland were purposefully chosen. Justification for such choice is the fact that crowdsourcing is still used by few entities from the public and non-profit sectors.

This elaboration was divided into three parts. Following a short introduction, the essence of open social innovations, with particular inclusion of the notion of innovation and social innovations, were presented. In the second part, the essence of crowdsourcing and its potential, were presented. The subject of the final, third part is showing the possibilities of using crowdsourcing to create open social innovations.

### ***The notion and essence of open social innovations***

Innovation refers to a new - in the commercial and industrial sense - product, process, or manufacturing method. This notion was used for the first time by SCHUMPETER (1961). Therefore, innovation is: (1) launching production of new products or improvement of the already existing ones, (2) implementation of a new or improvement of a manufacturing method, (3) opening to new markets, (4) application of a new sales or purchase method, (5) application of new raw materials or unfinished products, (6) implementation of a new production organisation. Schumpeter understood innovations as creation of fundamental or

radical changes, including transformation of a new concept into a market product or process. Innovation is a unique and one-time change, every time. This definition shows the close bonds of innovation with innovativeness and the ability to organise for the innovation.

According to the *Oslo Manual* handbook, innovation means implementation of a new or significantly improved product, a new or significantly improved process, a new marketing method or a new organisational method in the scope of business practices, workplace organisation or relationship with the external environment (OSLO MANUAL, 2005). Hence, the products, services or processes are innovations if they are new or considerably improved, at least from the perspective of the implementing enterprise.

Another definition, included in the Green Paper developed in 1995 by the European Union, presents innovations as a transformation of a new concept into a product or service. It grasps the significance of the social context - innovations are generated in accordance with the social needs (GREEN PAPER ON INNOVATION, 1995).

Taking the above into consideration, it may be stated that innovations pose a purposeful and conscious change, which: (1) takes place in certain spatial and time conditions, (2) is expressed in a non- or material form, (3) is achieved thanks to non-routine actions, (4) is combined with additional effort and risk, and (5) is naturally referred to a human being and the society as the final addressee of the innovation.

Social innovation is a relatively young notion. The first attempts to define it are related to a necessity to change a situation, to take purposeful actions, where the undertaken resources contribute to delivery of social goods (CAJAIBA-SANTANA, 2013). A significant number of definitions emphasise that the innovations are of a social character, when they respond to social needs, unfulfilled traditionally by the market or the existing institutions, and directed to weaker social groups. It renders the organisation not wanting or not being able to develop new solutions. Stress is placed on the matters related to design and implementation of better manners of the social needs realisation (table 1).

Social innovations compared with various contexts. Emphasis is put on the role of a civil society in the process of social transformations, and role of the social economy and social entrepreneurs in the realisation of economic growth and social integration. Furthermore, the social innovation is related to development of business strategies that encompass changes in human, institutional, and social capital, which lead to the improvement of organisational fitness and competitiveness. The social innovations also cover the scope of development of new and innovative manners of facing social challenges, through involvement of the socially engaged entrepreneurs (WESTLEY, 2008). Here it is significant to provide public services and other means of re-distributions, in the direction of budgetary savings in the country of wealth (BATTISTI, 2012). Hence, position and skills of the social institutions become stronger, mutual relationships between various social entities are improved, skills, competences, social capital are enhanced among the social life actors involved in development and realisation of social and economic programs and strategies (NICHOLLS – MURDOCK, 2012; CAULIER-GRICE et al., 2013).

**Table 1. Selected definitions of social innovation**

Date	Author/ authors	Definition
2007	R. HEISCALA	changes in cultural, normative, or regulatory structures that drive the society, leading to improvement of economic and social effectiveness
2008	FLEW ET. AL.	application of a new concept, which contributes to a permanent social value
2008	J.A. PHILLS, K. DEIGLMEIER, D.T. MILLER	a new solution to a social problem, which is more efficient, effective, permanent, or fair than the existing methods, and the advantages brought by the innovation serve the society
2008	A. KESSELRING, M. LEITNER	an idea for solving a social problem is implemented
2008	J.A. PHILLS, K. DEIGLMEIER, D.T. MILLER	real creation of a certain social value
2009	M. HARRIS, D. ALBURY	a result of the influence of a public, private, or non-profit sector, as well as of the local society or single entities
2011	OECD	fulfilment of new needs, not provided by the market, or development of new, more satisfactory manners for society's activation
2013	COULIER-GRICE ET AL.	the new solution, which at the same time fulfils the social need and leads to new or improved realisation abilities of the society, as well as to better exploitation of the held resources
2013	EUROPEAN COMMISSION	social in the sense of both the process as well as social and society-oriented aims, which everyone would like to achieve

Source: own work

Open innovation constitutes a new paradigm, in opposition to the closed innovations. It is a notion that refers to precious ideas, which may come from the organisation's environment, or are developed in the organisation itself, with participation of the environment (CHESBROUGH, 2001, 2003). Great significance is adopted by a concept flowing to the organisation from its environment, its implementation in the process of innovation creation or sharing the idea with others (SELTZER, MAHMOUDI, 2013) (table 2).

**Table 2. A comparison between an open and a closed innovation**

Qualities	Closed innovation	Open innovations
Specialists	Employing the best experts in a given field	Cooperation with experts from outside the company
Creation of innovation	Creation, development in the organisation	Concepts and solutions from the outside
Priority	Each new idea should be presented as the first one on the market	No necessity to be the first
Competition	Only the company, which will launch the innovation first has an opportunity to become better than its competition	Development of a better business model is more important than primacy on the market
Participation	Control over the innovation process, so nobody can derive from its concepts	Benefiting from the open access to ideas and acquisition of solutions from others

Source: own work on the basis of: CHESBROUGH, 2001

A basic feature of open innovations is cooperation and involvement of various partners, who acquire concepts and resources from outside the organisation (CHESBROUGH, 2003). Three situations appear within this process: (1) acquisition of external knowledge, mainly from business partners; (2) innovations are generated inside an organisation, and they pose the

main source of profit - the basis is posed by purchased licenses; (3) innovations are developed together by the partners (ENKEL et al., 2009). Here, the basis is the knowledge, which may be acquired from various sources (CHALMERS, 2013). It is allowed by organisational cooperation within the innovation network, which improves the innovation effectiveness. Therefore, the knowledge may be useful and applied in various innovation processes (table 3).

**Table 3. Flow of knowledge and concepts in the open innovation**

<b>Direction of the process</b>	<b>Pecuniary Non-pecuniary</b>	<b>Pecuniary Non-pecuniary</b>
internal to the external environment	Companies market their inventions and technologies through licensing or sale	Companies reveal internal resources without financial rewards, instead of seeking indirect benefits
the external environment to internal	Companies acquire foreign expertise as sources of innovation	Companies use ideas available in the external environment as sources of innovation

Source: own work on the basis of: DAHLANDER – GANN, 2010

Open innovations employ external and internal sources of ideas. Hence, the organisations are oriented on seeking for manners to develop their products, with special emphasis put on maximising of profits for all of the cooperating entities. Thanks to cooperation with the broadly comprehended partners, the organisation is able to transform the business, from focus on production towards an organisation that serves the environment. In case of public organisations, the priority is posed by care over the community's interest (PHILIS et al., 2008) and its common good.

A condition for realisation of the open innovation is focused on voluntary interactions, i.e. not an automatic integration of partners. What is more, proper division of the utility must be guaranteed, as long-standing cooperation may develop only if the benefits for both parties are greater than the incurred costs.

In case of open social innovations, key meaning is ascribed to the social needs and inclusion of the society in their provision, as well as solution of social problems (NEUMEIER, 2012). Therefore, the main aim is not maximising of profit, but delivery of social goods of the highest level possible (Table 4). It requires exchange, partnership between social entities towards generation of ideas, resources, concepts and values (PHILIPS et al., 2008) - as a result of which, they become involved in co-creation of systemic transformations (MURRAY et al., 2010). This may lead to development of cooperation within a network (POL – VILLE, 2009).

**Table 4. Social innovation versus open innovation**

<b>Fields</b>	<b>Social innovation</b>	<b>Open innovation</b>
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• individuals (LETTICE, PAREKH, 2010)</li> <li>• policymakers, foundations, entrepreneurs, philanthropists, social organisations (MURRAY ET AL., 2010)</li> <li>• governments (POL, VILLE, 2009)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• private companies (HUIZINGH, 2011),</li> <li>• involving users of innovations (BALDWIN, VON HIPPEL, 2010)</li> </ul>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social change (CAJAIBA-SANTANA, 2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create technical articles that meet a social need (TAYLOR, 1970)</li> </ul>
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collective action (NEUMEIER, 2012)</li> <li>• intentional innovation by stakeholders (CAJAIBA-SANTANA, 2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collaborative (LOREN, 2011)</li> </ul>
Expected results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide benefits to society through products, processes or services that meet a social need (TAYLOR, 1970)</li> <li>• social changes that institutionalise a new social practice (HOWALDT ET AL., 2010)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new products, services, systems, and more effective models are developed in the context of more porous organisational structures that feature greater absorption capacity</li> <li>• involvement of various stakeholders in the innovation process (CHALMERS, 2013)</li> </ul>

Source: own work on the basis of ENKEL et al., 2009

Open social innovation, through cooperation may lead to development of new ideas, solutions and benefits for the common good as well as fulfilment of the social needs, which have not been fulfilled yet. These actions may lead to public involvement in the local issue, exchange between the citizens, improvement of social standards and community well-being. They pose a manner of stimulation and improvement of citizens' participation in initiation and realisation of the bottom-up projects, related to fulfilment of the previously unfulfilled and elaborate social needs, within the framework of the social inclusion and social cohesion policies. It happens without the need to incur any costs, and it may be transferred to various contexts (WESTLEY, 2008).

The main components of the social innovation process include: (1) identification of new, unfulfilled or insufficiently recognised social needs, (2) development of new solutions to those social needs, (evaluation of effectiveness of the new solutions, in terms of fulfilment of the social needs and (4) promotion of effective social innovations. Furthermore, the initiatives in favour of the social innovations are strictly connected with all measures in the scope of social investments, which are devoted to particular citizens, taking into account the average lifespan, and where crucial meaning is borne by prevention.

Initiators in the open social innovations are citizens, institutions, or governments, thus the entities that are interested in social issues, being driven by the desire for changes (CASSERLY, 2013). Later, there is lease or provision of access to appropriate software and platforms, which allow to record ideas on how to solve social problems. Afterwards, the publicity or community becomes mobilised to ask questions and express opinions on various matters. Through Internet platforms, the citizens are able to send their ideas, evaluate concepts presented by other users, and express their opinions on a given issue. Additionally,

the citizens may publish videos, while the ideas are promoted and awarded. The most interesting concepts solving social issues are entered into force. Such a solution renders an open approach to promotion of the social innovation.

### ***The notion and essence of crowdsourcing***

The term crowdsourcing was used for the first time in the beginning of 2006 by a journalist J. Howe (HOWE, 2006). This definition is related to the activity of an organisation, which consists in assigning certain functions and their outsourcing to a large group of people, which is not closely defined, in the form of an open invitation (HOWE, 2006). This peculiar neologism constitutes a contamination of the following notions: outsourcing, crowd, social Internet services (WHITLA, 2009). Therefore, it is a new, Internet based business model, in which a network of dispersed persons is used to create creative solutions. And so the principal building material is the crowd, which is considered to be the expert (JEPPESEN – LAKHANI, 2010; LEIMEISTER, 2010). These are usually virtual Internet communities and societies (TAPSCOTT – WILLIAMS, 2008).

Daren B. Brabham, continuator of J. Howe's concept, points out that crowdsourcing is a means of solving problems, in which, in order to develop solutions important for the organisation, one makes use of the common intelligence of Internet communities. At the same time, cooperation between the communities and organisations and creating of new products, seeking agreement in social issues are emphasised. In addition, crowdsourcing is: (1) discovering, creating, managing, gathering of knowledge present in different sources, (2) commissioning to the virtual community seeking a solution to a given problem, (3) partner production, creating new solutions by the virtual community, (4) analysis of a great volume of data by the crowd: experts and amateurs (BRABHAM, 2008).

In crowdsourcing information technologies, telecommunication networks, and software become significant, which are used for creating of a virtual outsourcing platform and inviting a dispersed circle of people, i.e. the crowd to carry out tasks. These technologies constitute a tool for communicating and exchanging opinions. Therefore, the crowd, on the basis of self-organisation, proposes new, innovative solutions, further on it evaluates the submitted ideas, and next chooses the best ones by means of voting. By the same, one may ascertain that crowdsourcing is a kind of participating on-line activity, in which the organisation invites the crowd to collaborate (PRPIĆ et. al., 2015). Simply speaking, we may speak of crowdsourcing in a situation when the organisation would like to hand over a task to be executed into the hands of the crowd and the crowd executes it in a voluntary way (GASSMANN, 2012), while the results of this work are beneficial to both parties.

Making use of outsourcing and the crowd in the crowdsourcing process enables the following: (1) building relations with virtual communities (YANG et. al., 2008), (2) acquiring their knowledge and wisdom (SUROWIECKI, 2004) to solve problems (VUKOVIC, 2009) at low costs, (3) acquiring and creating innovative solutions to various problems (SLOANE, 2011), (4) creating open innovations (CHESBROUGH, et al., 2008), and (4) building an organisation's capability to compete (GRUNDSTRÖM et al., 2011). In case of the crowd – the main benefits are: satisfaction, building prestige and position in a group, social recognition, realisation of personal ambitions, needs of self realisation, feeling of one's value, participating in creating innovations, new products and creative solutions, development of individual skills (ESTELLES-AROLAS – GONZÁLEZ-LADRÓN-DE GUEVARA, 2012). Moreover, crowdsourcing refers to innovative processes conducted by the crowd (LEIMEISTER – ZOGAJ, 2013).



### *Crowdsourcing and open social innovation – case study*

In previous parts of the article the issues of open social innovation and crowdsourcing were presented. Its use in the context of creating these innovations is presented below. In the subject literature it is pointed out that crowdsourcing, applied by public or non-governmental organisations enables generating new ideas, developing innovative solutions to problems, or increasing citizen participation in decision-making, especially related to legal, social, or ethical issues (BRABHAM, 2015). Three case studies, more precisely examples of practical application of crowdsourcing, are presented below. The first one concerns a non-governmental organization (Unit for Social Innovation and Research – Shipyard), the second one a public organisation (City of Lodz), whereas the last one a local government organisation (Pomeranian Science and Technology Park Gdynia).

The first example is the [www.naprawmyto.pl](http://www.naprawmyto.pl) portal, established by the Unit for Social Innovation and Research - Shipyard, following the example of the British FixMyStreet and SeeClickFix website, enabling its users to report problems observed in the closest social space. The portal assumes two possibilities of citizens' participation in solving social problems and creating new solutions. The first one is an anonymous application which will be moderated. When such application enters the system, the service administrator will have 72 hours to verify and transfer it for realization. The second type of application is an application from persons who create their account in the service. Its main idea is implementing solutions proposed by the virtual community and their immediate putting into effect. Highly varied problems may be reported: holes in roads, not-functioning traffic lights, uncleaned waste, no lights on the streets, no passageways for passers-by in crucial places. The project is operated in 14 communes in Poland.

Another example is Fundusz Inicjatyw Społecznych (Social Initiative Fund). It was established in Lodz by the initiative of the United Nations' Programme of the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations in Lodz and the Municipal Office of the City of Lodz. The Fund is composed in 60% of the City's resources and in 40% of resources guaranteed by the United Nations Development Programme. The city has allocated to this aim resources provided for subsidies within the Framework of competitions for non-governmental organisations. Its main aim is supporting innovative projects in the fields of: culture, education, participation, or social assistance. In addition it is oriented on, among others: efficient solving of local problems and satisfying important social needs, improving the city's social capital and social activation of the residents, making use of the city's cultural, historical, and creative potential, and aiming at long-term sustained development. In the context of open social innovations, the Fund supports such actions as: counteracting against social exclusion of children and youth up to 25 years of age, especially through the development of niche sport disciplines and other cultural and educational activity, promoting sex equality in the territory of Lodz, and initiatives counteracting against social exclusion. The best solutions are financed and put into effect.

Within the Fund framework, it is planned to support innovative initiatives and grant some creative projects. The innovations, as defined by the Fund, is a mold-breaking approach to settlement of the social problem, which is more effective, efficient, and permanent than those existing in a given place and at a given time, the results and value of which are essential for the whole community, not just for particular individuals. One of the awarded projects was the initiative undertaken by the "Power in Spirit" Association. Actions are directed at activation of youth deprived of pro-social patterns to follow, coming from environments, where a

demand attitude prevails. The undertaking assumes improvement of social competences and skills in the scope of cooperation in various organisational forms of young people, aged 12-25, coming from families that are threatened by social exclusion. Realisation of the project will comprise: integration workshops entitled "Power in friendship", organisation of an event celebrating Children's Day, together with adults, plays and activities in the summer, realisation of the projects developed by the youth, as well as constant cleaning help in the Recreational Room.

"Social Innovations" is a section of the Pomeranian Science and Technology Park Gdynia, where 100 workers of social institutions, non-governmental organisations and local activists are hired, who support development of innovative concepts in various manners. A task of the "Social Innovations" module, called by the local authorities of Gdynia, is to develop, support, and spread innovative social solutions, so that Gdynia's residents - regardless of their age, social origin, or place of residence - can live on a greater level. The main goals are: creating and realising of innovative strategies, models, and methods as well as project solutions in response to social challenges, designing social services, supporting community entrepreneurship, revitalising and animating processes organised in local communities.

Three selected examples of the possibilities of crowdsourcing application to create open social innovations were presented above. It is worth noting the diverse possibilities of making use of this tool. It is used in many areas: from life improvement, through new products or services, to improving the condition of the natural environment or the life of poor or excluded people.

### ***Discussion and propositions***

Open social innovations are an instrument for realisation of changes and social needs. They contribute to creation of new social practices. They pose a certain tool for fulfilment of social needs. The knowledge resources, which they remain at a hold of, become active then (HUIZINGH, 2011). The involvement reduces the risk that the innovations will be rejected by the society, and encourages to use it. Open innovations may find solutions to infrastructural problems, as well as those related to social space development, appearance of cities, approaching the persons in need with proper social and health care, adjustment of space to the needs of persons with disabilities, and many others.

From the point of view of crowdsourcing potential in the scope of creating and arising of open innovations, the possibilities of acquiring, but also generating new ideas, contents, or means of solving general social problems are undoubtedly pointed out. It also enables adapting the solutions to the needs of specific users. This results from the fact that many times they are the originators, but at the same time the users. Crowdsourcing enables it and it becomes a specific mediator. In addition it allows for co-participation, specific involvement in the creation of new ideas.

The selected examples of the possibilities of making use of crowdsourcing projects to create initiatives that involve virtual communities to create and initiate open social innovation, presented in this work, prove that it is becoming a tool, which improves and facilitates these actions. In any case, its implementation determines seeking new solutions, but also facilitates contact with potential beneficiaries. It is particularly necessary taking into account the specifics of arising social problems. It should be emphasised that the examples, selected intentionally, constitute only a picture of the possibilities of making use of crowdsourcing in creating open social innovations. It is not the author's intention to generalise.

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