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## THE STRUGGLES OF SHAPING SOCIAL INNOVATION ENVIRONMENT IN CROATIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper provides a qualitative review of social innovations environment in Croatia. The analysis was based on results of two qualitative research; one undertaken within FP7 project Welfare innovations at the Local Level in favour of Cohesion and the other related to the impact of third sector social innovations to the socio-economic development of Croatia as well as barriers towards their development. Potential of social innovations as modernization tool for social and public policies as well as structural barriers to their development in the Croatian context are discussed with some recommendations for the development of more enabling environment in conclusion.*

**Keywords:** social innovations, social innovation environment, qualitative review, third sector, public policies

## LA LOTTA DELLA FORMAZIONE DELL'AMBIENTE DI INNOVAZIONE SOCIALE IN CROAZIA

### SINTESI

*Questo saggio fornisce una revisione qualitativa dell'ambiente delle innovazioni sociali in Croazia. L'analisi si basa sui risultati di due ricerche qualitative; una intrapresa nell'ambito del progetto FP7 – "Le innovazioni in materia di welfare a livello locale a favore della coesione" e l'altra riguardavano l'impatto delle innovazioni sociali del terzo settore sullo sviluppo socioeconomico della Croazia e gli ostacoli al loro sviluppo. Il potenziale delle innovazioni sociali come strumento di modernizzazione per le politiche sociali e pubbliche, e inoltre le barriere strutturali al loro sviluppo nel contesto croato sono discussi con alcune raccomandazioni per lo sviluppo di un ambiente più favorevole in conclusione.*

**Parole chiave:** innovazioni sociali, ambiente di innovazione sociale, revisione qualitativa, terzo settore, politiche pubbliche

## INTRODUCTION

The welfare state in the 21st century is facing the challenges of achieving social cohesion in a society marked by deep transformations and the emergence of new social risks. The notion of social innovation is particularly appealing in light of the difficulties facing traditional welfare systems (especially in post-socialist countries as Croatia) and, more broadly, a development model based essentially on only two actors (the market and the state) that struggles to meet the growing and diversified needs of society (Borzaga & Bodini, 2014).

The goal of this paper will be to qualitatively assess social innovations environment in Croatia. The environment will be related to institutional, cultural, political and socio-economic aspects that operate in various combinations to support or restrict social innovation activity. This approach calls for understanding social innovation from a multi-sectoral perspective. First, social innovations will be briefly defined as well as how they are understood in Croatia and what is the preliminary state of its environment. An analysis would be enriched by empirical part of the paper that will rely on the results of FP7 project *Welfare innovations at the local level in favor of Cohesion* which analysed the ecosystem of the local welfare system and openness towards social innovations. Also, part of the results will refer to qualitative research in which third sector social innovations impact and barriers towards their development are explored.

After presenting the results, in the discussion and conclusion, the potential of social innovations as modernization tool for social and public policies as well as structural barriers to their development in the Croatian context will be reviewed. A framework of the analysis would constitute of the context of state, private and the third sector capacities and openness to social innovations. In that, we will try to answer the research question do we have enabling social innovation environment in Croatia?

## SOCIAL INNOVATION-BRIEF CONCEPTUALIZATION

The concept of social innovation is not new,<sup>1</sup> as the writings of both Durkheim and Weber stressed the importance of social innovation in the creation of social order, especially in the context of social and technological change, but it has become “fashion-

able” relatively recently. Some analysts consider social innovation to be no more than a buzzword or passing fad that is too imprecise to be usefully applied to academic scholarship. It should be noted that social innovations are viewed as a quasi-concept (European Commission, 2013; BEPA, 2014; Anheier et al., 2014) which is considered to be relevant for empirical analysis and thereby deploying scientific methods, but simultaneously having an indeterminate quality, making it adaptable to a variety of situations and flexible enough to follow the twists and turns of policy.<sup>2</sup>

There have been numerous attempts to define social innovation, and we stress some that show most relevance.<sup>3</sup> Social innovations can be defined as new ideas (products, services, and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words, they are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance society’s capacity to act (BEPA, 2010). They are some ideas, turned into practical approaches that are new in the context where they appear. Stanford Social Innovation Review (Phills et al., 2008, 38) defines social innovation as “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable or just than current solutions, and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals”. Social innovation can be a product, production process, or technology (much like innovation in general), but it can also be a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, trends in governance, a social movement, intervention, or some combination of them.

Some core elements are highlighted (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012; BEPA, 2010; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010; Mulgan, 2007; Baturina & Bežovan, 2015). The first is a novelty. A social innovation needs to be new in some way (either new to the field, sector, region, market or user), or to be applied in a new way. A step from ideas to implementation must be taken, and therefore we make a distinction between promising ideas (which may or may not become social innovations) and social innovations.

Secondly, social innovation meets a social need and is explicitly designed for these purposes. The main goal is to find solutions to social problems: identifying and providing new services that improve the quality of life of individuals and communities, identifying and implementing the integration process in the labour

1 More on historical development of notion of social innovation in Godin, 2012 and Moulaert et al., 2017.

2 As such it is far from stabilized theoretical understanding. A variety of approaches to social innovation research are articulated in Moulaert et al. (2017). They see a diversity of theoretical approaches and definitions of social innovations as desirable – a reflection of the fields strong interdisciplinary. Field is also articulating methodological approaches to research. Wittmayer et al. (2017) edited special number of European Public & Social Innovation Review which highlights Methodological Challenges in Social Innovation Research and adopts methodologically pluralistic stance. Also, its methods are diverse, not restricted to standard science and include “open innovation, user participation, cafés, ethnography, action research”, etc. (Murray et al., 2010; Godin, 2012).

3 More on history of defining of social innovation in Edwards-Schachter & Wallace, 2017.

market, new skills, new jobs and new forms of participation, as well as various elements that contribute to improving the situation of individuals (Pol & Ville, 2009, 880). Social innovation should be effective, at least more so than the existing solutions.

In the end, it enhances society's capacity to act by empowering beneficiaries, creating new roles and relationships, developing assets and capabilities and/or better using of assets and resources. They leave behind compelling new social relationships between previously separate individuals and groups which matter greatly to the people involved (Mulgan, 2007).

However, given the high hopes that the area attracted, it must be stated that social innovation is not a panacea for resolving social problems, but if encouraged and valued it can bring immediate solutions to the pressing social issues which many citizens are confronted with.<sup>4</sup>

#### SOCIAL INNOVATIONS ENVIRONMENT IN CROATIA – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

From Croatian experience and understanding of the development of social innovations (Bežovan et al., 2014a, 2014b) it can be seen that social innovation is a neglected topic, the concept unknown in the creation and implementation of public policy.<sup>5</sup>

The concept arose more prominently from the academic community and it is relatively unknown to key stakeholders in designing social or other programs or policies (Bežovan et al., 2016a). Social innovation definition was not established among different stakeholders<sup>6</sup> that only have a vague idea about how to define it.<sup>7</sup> Encouraged by research projects<sup>8</sup> and with excessive confidence in translations or direct links to EU relevant documents, it can be plainly stated that the modest share of stakeholders in the field of social innovations somehow defines them in “downloading perspective” following notion of Murray (2010) and BEPA (2010) definition of social innovations.

Therefore, the concept is still open for a more local definition, but for now, there are no bigger interests expressed for that kind of action.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding strategic documents, the concept was slowly introduced in the policy area but it became part of some documents, especially related to the third sector. In the *Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development 2012–2016* (Government of Republic of Croatia, 2012),<sup>10</sup> social innovation and social entrepreneurship emerge as concepts described as one of the ways in which civil society organizations can contribute to social and economic development. New Strategy (for the period 2017–2021) which is currently in the final phase of development defines social innovations in similarity to above stated stakeholder's definition. It also dedicates one measure to tenders for the development of new models of socio-economic development through social innovations. *Strategy for development of Social entrepreneurship 2015–2020* (Government of Republic of Croatia, 2015) mentions the concept in the sphere of stimulating the financial mechanisms for social innovation, the development of educational programs for social entrepreneurship and social innovation in the field of public goods. But although it is mentioned in more measures and activities, it is unclear what their notion of social innovations includes.<sup>11</sup>

There are a couple of Institutional actors that have shown interest in the topic of social innovations. Among them are Ministry for work and pension system, Ministry for demography, family youth and social policy, Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Crafts, and Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds. They made social innovations (in wider notion) eligible for financing in different tenders. National Foundation for civil society development promoted the concept and organized Social innovation award (in the period 2012–2014). Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs advocates the concept and promotes it in strategic documents. Croatian Chamber

4 To see more detail social innovation conceptualization consult Baturina & Bežovan, 2015.

5 On the other hand, taking about innovations generally analysis that looked at Croatian innovation system suggests that values like statism, paternalism and traditionalism make innovation system weak and inefficient (Švarc, 2006; Švarc et al., 2011; Švarc, 2017). Innovation policy had a status of unwanted child among policymakers which means that was poorly understood, not a priority and mainly discussed within narrow circle of experts (Švarc & Lažnjak, 2017).

6 Respondents in the mapping exercise (Jelinčić, et al., 2016) were familiar with the term ‘social innovations’ (86% of them heard about the term but only 53% know about it in more depth, which would be necessary for defining it). The results are only suggestive as sampling was purposive with previously detected respondents working in public, private or civil sectors; some of them have already been known as those creating/promoting social innovations or entrepreneurship. General stakeholders or citizens would certainly be less familiar.

7 One of the rare opportunities to discuss topic was the round table “What are social innovations and how are they implemented in Croatia?” in year 2012. That year was also given Social innovation award by National Foundation for Civil Society Development.

8 FP7 Projects WILCO and SI Drive, which had Croatian partners.

9 Academic publications and media articles discussing social innovations as topic are also very rare.

10 The first national *Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development* (2006–2011) (Government of Republic of Croatia, 2011) did not mention social innovations but introduced the term social economy and non-profit entrepreneurship which was innovative policy orientation in Croatia context.

11 There were some other relevant policy documents in the last few years. The *Strategy for Innovation Encouragement of the Republic of Croatia 2014–2020* in one section sets a priority of tackling social challenges through the application of socially useful innovations. Croatia's Smart Specialisation (S3) Strategy for period 2016–2020 in its glossary states socially useful innovations.



of Economy is also becoming increasingly involved with social entrepreneurship (and social innovations) as a theme.

International stakeholders had their influence as well. EU funds were an important source of financing social innovations in different spheres.<sup>12</sup> But besides that, they had relevance for introducing the concept and its meaning through various strategic, policy documents and communications that promote social innovations. OECD South East Europe Regional Programme organizes OECD Triple Helix Competitions and has published Social Innovation Policy Framework for Croatia. NESST work was important for introduction and development of social enterprises and initiatives.<sup>13</sup> To a minor extent, work of some other international stakeholders was present in social innovation field.

Funding for social innovations is sporadic. It usually goes through rare tenders, competition, and awards. On the other hand, in tenders in social policy area and also some other topics as democratization or advocacy of civil society (social) innovativeness is often (becoming) requirement/criteria that is valued in projects' evaluations. Some initiatives have been financed by private foundations (e.g. UniCredit Foundation) and CSR-type schemes (e.g. Adris Group) (OECD, 2016) but most rely on above mentioned tenders and are project based. International programs are also available for CSOs and research community, but they are rarely participating. Innovative financial instruments for financing social impact are not developed (Kadunc et al., 2014). Cooperative for ethical financing is in process of establishment of Ebanka which could be the potential significant step in developing and scaling social innovations in Croatia.

Regarding education and training, few faculties teach topics related to social innovations. To mention more prominent, University of Applied sciences in Vrnjačka Banja has established course social entrepreneurship and social innovation. The Zagreb School of Economics and Management had covered some topics close to social innovations, and Department for the Social policy of Study centre for social work at Faculty of Law Zagreb teaches social innovations on a different subject of graduate and postgraduate studies. Resource organizations Impact HUB, ACT group, and Cluster for eco-social innovation (CEDRA) Social Innovation Lab,

Centre for development of non-profit organizations (CERANEO), Sustainable Community Development (ODRAZ) provide different workshop related to the topic and are the resource and support organizations. Besides that, few small local organizations are trying to promote the concept in their local or county area via tenders and awards.

## METHODOLOGY NOTE AND RESEARCH RESULTS

### Methodology note

In the next section of the paper, main research finding of FP7 project WILCO (*Welfare innovations at the local level in favor of Cohesion*) will be stated as an introduction to findings about third sector social innovations. The results of WILCO project stem from the analysis of a total of seven case studies, i.e., social innovations in two cities: Zagreb and Varaždin. Case studies were conducted throughout the year 2012. Organizations were selected by intensive sampling (Patton, 2002, 234), which consists of cases that are rich in information about the phenomenon we are interested in, in this case, local social innovations by definition of the project. Criteria for identification of innovation were innovativeness in a particular (local) context, the duration of innovation for at least a year, and that innovations reflect "mix" approach "bottom" and "top-down initiatives" to analyse the dynamics of these interrelationships. For each case study semi-structured interviews with social innovations key stakeholders were conducted as well as gathering of all secondary data about innovation (from secondary sources and public media). Case studies were analysed along three basic themes 1) types of services and ways of addressing users; 2) internal organisation and modes of working and 3) embeddedness of the project in the local welfare system. The case studies were preceded by an analysis of the features of local social programs and values and discourses in the background of these programs, to explore the characteristics of socio-political environments.<sup>14</sup>

The main part of the results will refer to qualitative research which looked into perceptions of key stakeholders on the impact of social innovations to the socio-economic development<sup>15</sup> of Croatia and barriers towards their development. It was a qualitative

12 Especially through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF). The Efficient Human Resources Operational Programme 2014–2020 which gives priorities and activities to be funded by the ESF gives space for social entrepreneurship and social innovation.

13 Croatian social innovations are eligible for a number of regional and beyond competitions. The Erste Foundation from 2008 has launched tenders for innovative and engaging regional projects in the field of social integration. Also, some of the Croatia competitors participated in SozialMarie which is the oldest prize for social innovation in Europe started in 2005. European Social Innovation Competition is also been interesting for some Croatia projects.

14 More on the methodology and results of this research in Bežovan et al., 2016a.

15 The impact of the third sector in Croatia was, besides social innovation as one of the dimensions in the wider perspective of PhD thesis, analysed in other selected dimensions: well-being and quality of life; civic engagement, empowerment, advocacy, and community building; economic dimension and the dimension of impact on human resources.

research in which semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the third sector (16)<sup>16</sup> and case studies (6)<sup>17</sup> were used as research methods. Interviews were conducted in March and April of the year 2016 and their results would be explored in details. The obtained data from interviews were analysed using framework analysis. The framework analysis has developed in the context of research of public (social, health and other) applied policies to obtain specific information that will enable certain insights and recommendations in a shorter period of time (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The primary goal is to describe and interpret what concerns specific social issues in specific environments. Participants' statements were analysed so that the units of analysis were coded based on content similarity and thus categories were defined within a predefined theme of social innovation impacts. Research satisfied all ethical requirements and got permission from the faculty ethics committee.

Secondary material for analysis of the impact of third sector social innovations and barriers towards their development included laws, strategies and other relevant documents which are related to the status and development of the third sector as well for outlining the strategic framework and regulatory environment.

### Research results

In the Croatian context, the WILCO research attempted to establish a limited typology on the basis of innovation sources and tried to look at the characteristics of the types through empirical insights. Social innovation found in that research would be briefly described.

First, there were social innovations from the public sector which have often developed with the support of experts from outside the sector. In public sector, social innovations analysis suggests problems of professional (non) abilities crucial to further their development and sustainability. Also, employees in the public sector have a lack of incentives and opportunities for independent action that would open up space for innovation.

Social innovations that come from abroad were second. They are often resulting from international financial opportunities related to specific projects.

Problems of sustainability and embeddedness were recognized as those social innovations after the end of the project, and the end of the financial support was unsustainable. Part of it is "old story" of the foreign organization in Croatian civil society and social policy (Bežovan, 2008, 2019) in which the topics, priorities, and direction of the action are often dependent on financing and assistance from abroad.

Social innovations coming from civil society was the third type. Research has shown that they, in some cases, develop social capital needed to produce visible positive social change. They appear in civil society as a result of unmet social needs as state lags with response to new social risks and the needs of vulnerable groups. Distrust towards civil society was recognized as the factor that hinders new initiatives. Respondents in the mapping exercise (Jelinčić, et al., 2016) also saw that the greatest number of innovations comes from the civil sector (57% of all initiatives)<sup>18</sup>, as well as OECD Social Innovation Competition (OECD, 2016).

Civil society and third sector are the main sources of Croatian social innovations. Therefore, in further section we will outline part of the results of research from Ph.D. dissertation *The impact of the third sector in the social and economic development of Croatia*. Key stakeholders'/respondents' perceptions on third sector social innovation impact and barriers to their development would be analysed later, in more detail, as they are relevant to framing social innovation environment.

### Third sector social innovations impact

In the second research, from empirical material, there were several categories in which interviewed participants statements suggest potential impact within social innovation impact dimension/theme. We have recognized five different categories: modalities of action, social services, local community, social entrepreneurship and (social) governance. We will elaborate on them with some illustrative statements in the next section.<sup>19</sup>

Participants recognized that third sector social innovations impact arises in different modalities of work and finance. Organizations in the sector are trying to

16 The sampling strategy for interview participants was based on a deliberate sample of stakeholders according to the "best informant" criterion. They are selected on the criterion of competence and experience in the third sector: They were stakeholders from public and third sector that had insights into the impact and barriers third sector organizations, or worked and contacted a wide circle of organizations, and many of them were part of implementing bodies were continuously involved in evaluating and monitoring a large number of organizations' projects and programs. Code names for interviews were KS1 for key stakeholder 1, and following the same logic to KS16 for Key Stakeholder 16.

17 Case studies the had goal to explore how particular organizations produce impact and would not be referenced in this paper.

18 They are followed by the public sector innovations (29%), and private sector (14%). Research was mapping exercise and had already stated methodological limitations.

19 Due to limited space, this part of the research results in general form in which we will outline areas and characteristics of third sector social innovations. More detail elaboration in Baturina, 2016. Results related to barriers, as are more relevant to social innovation environment would be shown in more details.

develop new forms of action, work methods that are specific and derived from the characteristics of the sector.<sup>20</sup> As another aspect of social innovation impact, respondents point out ways of providing social services. Organizations in third sector are perceived as more flexible, closer to users, and with greater freedom to create services that would be of better quality or provide services in ways that the system did not anticipate before. They test new services and try to get them into the system.<sup>21</sup> The local community is seen by the respondents as a domain for innovative action as it is the one in which organizations are closer to the needs of citizens and where the impact can be more immediate. One part of them, sees the very situation of severe financial viability, the lack of funding and legal uncertainty as “drives” for innovative action.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, social entrepreneurship is seen as a new space for social and economic impact. With regard to the recognisability of social entrepreneurship in Croatia context, the mere act of creating entrepreneurial activities for the realization and support of a social mission can in part be regarded as innovative in such an environment.<sup>23</sup> In the sphere of innovation in the governance and modes of regulation, respondents perceive little space and activities that are the carriers of such innovations. They perceive obstacles rather than incentives. In that sense, even minor shifts towards cooperation are considered innovative in the context that does not nurture openness and which is not focused on innovation.<sup>24</sup>

Respondents also highlighted barriers to third sector social innovation impact.<sup>25</sup> One part of the respondents sees the responsibility of the state that exerts administrative criteria in the judgment of innovation and lacks understanding for stimulating innovation.

*KS3: So I mean, again, until it is mainstream, those who start (social innovations) are struggling... So innovative ideas are brought by the third sector but their “birth” is prolonged, they need*

*a long time to break through until there would be some critical mass of support from people and from the state are some ideas are difficult to implement.*

*KS3: We have applied once for one such tender, I do not remember what it was but it was looking for innovations. But we got rejected with statement that what we had planned had never been implemented before and therefore we could not guarantee what the results would will be. So much about innovations. I mean it was that one case but I think it’s actually indicative.*

In some ways according to the respondents’ opinion, to ensure their sustainability, organizations are more focused on replication and proven models than by experimenting with innovative solutions.

*KS11: Unfortunately, the projects proclaim innovation, but also from my experience and the people I talk about, when it comes to innovation, then it is discriminated against in project evaluations because it is declared unclear, not in line with the tender propositions, difficult to follow, something that does belong in that tender, insufficiently explained, which means it is not really recognized.*

*KS12: “To a lesser extent, they are innovative, so it is most often the case that an association implements one project for few years, and a few changes happen, maybe they make changes. One project is good, it shows some good results, and then this project is applied to other users maybe and that is fine. However, we each year somehow look for some innovations. Now, there is a problem that they should educate themselves, go and see, have some new knowledge, and that is actually happening to a lesser extent. Somehow it goes*

20 KS2: “I would not say that they are well developed but I think there are examples of good practice, I would say what can be considered socially innovative [...] And that is linking different work methodologies, connecting different resources, using different resources means interconnection, the construction of some models, I do not know, the practical part-theoretical part [...] So, these are, to me, some models and methodologies and mechanisms of cooperation in different sectors that I would call social innovations. Which I would not say is common in the state system. Those are social innovations to me. There are a lot of them. I mean, there are many examples of good practice”.

21 KS10: “But surely the civil sector has a better outlook, a better manoeuvring space for social innovation, because by default it is, or should be much more flexible in responding to the recognized need, it can bring in a relatively short time a greater number of stakeholders in some processes of planning, creating, animating the community, mobilizing the community, much easier than the state can do”.

22 KS10: “Absolutely because they are (social innovative). You have much fewer resources available and then creativity is your key resource. And social capital is significantly more pronounced in local environments. This is our experience, rather than in larger centres”.

23 KS9: “I think you are, look, everyone who has entered some kind of entrepreneurial endeavour, anyone who has founded or started an initiative for a cooperative, association and some sort of joint movement, is certainly innovative. Because in some ways it has to have some sort of goal that it wants to achieve and then it’s thinking, it constantly ponders how will I improve my service, how to become better, how to attract more users, and by that think in a different way and innovate”.

24 KS6: “I think it requires cooperation with the public sector, we have tried something, that are slow experiments, the systems of work are different [...] But it is not the case that there’s no ideas, something has come to fruition, but our system does not recognize and supports innovations. This is seen in the public sector”.

25 Besides that, there are general barriers towards third sector development regarding institutional framework, work of organizations and general values and modernization capacities in society (discussed in Bežovan, et al., 2016b; Baturina, 2016).

by inertia. We have small number of associations that have some great innovations, really suggest something, apply something completely new, and to a greater extent what, maybe I would say, 70% of the associations are working their projects through inertia, as they are already established.

KS7: *“Despite the fact that we are witnessing a number of innovations every year, still there is an impression that what is missing the most in the programs and projects that associations are sending to public funding tenders are new ideas, new solutions. And somehow it’s getting harder to deal with these professional projects writers (from consulting agencies) that have been writing and preparing project formats to perfection.*

There are possible expectations that, under certain external pressures such as EU funds tender demands, innovativeness would begin to emphasize as the principle of action and expectations of projects and organizations.

KS7: *There will now be even more emphasis through European Social Fund on innovations, on finding new models for existing social problems and this will be from tenders that will be established.*

KS15: *Now yes, because if any organization is to fund its programs and projects from a tender, and nowadays it would be less and fewer tenders, then they have to be really good, interesting, and especially today, a lot of tenders value innovativeness, creativity.*

## DISCUSSION

Examples of case studies from both researches showed us that certain social innovations from all sectors have an impact on socio-economic development of Croatia (more in Bežovan et al., 2016a; Baturina, 2016). Findings of mapping exercise (Jelinčić et al., 2016) showed that majority (51%) of respondents see a high potential of social innovations’ contribution to the society, therefore reinforcing these results. Social innovations environment will be assessed through the lenses of how public, private, and third sector contribute (or not) and are they creating enabling social innovation environment.

One of the barriers is that there are still expectations that state organizes and delivers social, health-care, cultural and other services (Bežovan et al., 2016b), which is not creating space for innovation. The monopoly over the provision of social services in the institutions of social policy is under the “tight grip” of the state. Welfare institutions and centres for social care do not show capacity for cooperation and development of new solutions. Civil society, on the other hand, has certainly built capacities but cannot build the expected partnership with the state. The public sector in perceptions of stakeholders is rather inflexible and puts more than needed administrative burden on innovative organization (Bežovan et al., 2016b; Baturina, 2016). Administrative burdens towards day to day operations, often referred as general “bureaucratization”, is generally recognized as a problem.<sup>26</sup> Also, there is a lack of institutional capacities to recognize not only social innovation as the concept but also innovative initiatives. Social intrapreneurs are not the usual phenomenon in Croatia as public officials are not “entitled” to produce social innovations (Bežovan et al., 2016a). They behave in a rather bureaucratic way with designated tasks in institutions in which hierarchical style of management prevails.<sup>27</sup> Also, there are significant fluctuations in the workforce, especially in state managerial positions related to election changes of political structures, which does not encourage the principles of expertise and openness to other sectors. At the policy level, there is a lack of horizontal coordination between the sectors and the ability to monitor but also to recognize modernization trends, which is particularly evident in the areas of social innovation and social entrepreneurship (Bežovan et al., 2016b; Baturina, 2016). Europeanization capacities in this regard are modest. The weakness of public administration is constantly cited by the European Commission as a challenge in Croatia (European Commission, 2016; European Commission, 2017a), and the same is perceived by citizens as well<sup>28</sup>. In the last decade, there are constant announcements of public administration reforms but no concrete reform attempts are made. Interestingly, Strategy for Public Administration Development for the period from 2015 to 2020 does not mention social innovations.

Croatia is a society with low levels of trust (Šalaj, 2011; Nikodem & Črpić, 2014), which contributes to the low level of active citizenship (Matančević & Bežovan, 2013; Bežovan & Zrinčak, 2007). Generally, but also regarding private sector possibilities, rather

26 For example, third sector organizations in frame of Third sector Impact project Increasing bureaucracy” was considered by 88.24% of organizations as very serious or serious problem (although the sample was not representative. An online survey was answered by 170 organizations, which was return rate of 21.7%).

27 Also, for example Strategy for the Development of Public Administration for the period from 2015 to 2020 does not recognize or mention social innovations.

28 In the research of the IPA project Strengthening Citizens’ Role in Improving the Quality of Public Administration Services conducted in 2016 on a representative sample, citizens rated 2.9 (out of 5 possible).



a passive mentality prevails in which there is lack of incentives to civil commitment and strengthening personal initiative which is the prerequisite for the development of social innovations in all sectors. That kind of environment is also limiting factor. Croatia besides that ranks among the EU economies with the lowest perception of entrepreneurial opportunities, but the highest perception of entrepreneurial capabilities – and indeed, entrepreneurial intention by the research of Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (Singer et al., 2015). Despite the government's constant pledges to improving business infrastructure the circumstances for the development of entrepreneurship are still far from favorable.<sup>29</sup> New social risks are creating opportunities for the private sector, mainly through private welfare institutions (Matančević, 2014), to become involved in social innovation and provide new services or products in Croatia.

Regarding innovation itself, Croatia is lagging behind EU countries<sup>30</sup> measured by European Innovation Scoreboard<sup>31</sup> The dimension Innovation friendly environment is particularly low scored. Especially worrying for social innovation environment that thrives from collaboration and cross-sector partnerships is that Linkages sub-dimension<sup>32</sup> in years 2010–2016 has fallen from score 86.3 to 50.8.<sup>33</sup> The Strategy for Innovation Encouragement of the Republic of Croatia 2014–2020 (Government of Republic of Croatia, 2014) states as crucial problem nonexistence of systemic innovation policy which is more than relevant conclusion for social innovation field.

The third sector is therefore seen as the primary driver of social innovations (Jelinčić et al., 2016; Bežovan et al., 2016a). The research results from key third sector stakeholder's interviews argue the potential impact of third sector social innovation in several different aspects. Social innovations in the third sector could be seen as a result of unmet demand for public goods, which are unable to satisfy through the market and the state. The market does not have a social logic of functioning, so civil society opens up room for action-social entrepreneurship and solidarity economy innovations (Bežovan et al., 2016a). In different dimensions, it's shown that new social relationships between various individuals and groups are more created by engagement of the third sector (Baturina, 2016) than other stakeholders, but changes in that field are slow. Volunteer work, trust, and commitment to co-operation are the source of Croatian

social innovations (Bežovan et al., 2016a). Parts of third sector organizations in the ecology field, following progressive tendencies towards sustainable development, are starting to develop social innovations. Regarding other parts of the third sector we can see new developments in the sector of cultural creative industry as a space for hybrid organizations and fostering social innovations thinking. ICT has big intersectoral capacity to develop new social solutions,<sup>34</sup> and it is stated as potent sector in several strategic documents. The educational sector is just discovering service learning and is starting some third sector private initiatives, especially oriented towards marginalized groups. But for now, there is a slow progress. All four third sector subsectors have not sufficiently recognized potentials for social innovative actions and are just strengthening their capacities for those kinds of initiatives.

Social policy is the most prominent area to develop social innovations. Advantages of social innovations seen in research (Jelinčić et al., 2016), are that they mostly fit to fill the gap in the market and satisfy social needs. But, studies on the welfare mix have shown that there is a lack of cooperation between the various stakeholders in the social field (Bežovan, 2007; Matančević, 2014). There is no incentive in Croatia for the significant development of a welfare mix. It would be based on the processes of system hybridization, the principles of co-governance and co-production of services, civility and the intermediary role of non-profit organizations (Matančević, 2014; Bežovan et al., 2016b) which could be the significant incentive for the development of social innovations. Co-governance (Pestoff & Brandsen, 2008), which reflects the pluralization and hybridization of service providers, and implies the cooperation of the third sector and the state in providing services is not developed but third sector is showing capacities for positive changes in that regard (Bežovan & Matančević, 2017; Baturina, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Social innovations are a marginal theme in Croatia. They are poorly recognized as the driver of change among stakeholders. A relatively underdeveloped environment is characterized by few stakeholders and no conceptual understanding. Articulation of space for social innovations is for now seen as sporadic support, with "empty" policy recognition.

29 The combination of social norms inherited from socialism and the values and norms established by the transition processes (clientelistic bonds, situational reaction) present by some authors (Švarc, 2017) a cultural matrix that supports crony capitalism and suppresses both innovation culture and its precursors: individualism, competition, self-initiative and responsibility.

30 With Innovation Index score of 54. For example, the EU average is 102, and the best placed Switzerland has score 164.6 (European Commission, 2017b).

31 Global Innovation Index 2017 places Croatia on 41st place from 127 observed economies (Jamrisko & Lu, 2018).

32 It consists of Innovative SMEs collaborating with others, Public-private co-publications and Private co-funding of public R&D expenditure indicators.

33 On other innovation index's Croatia also perform poorly. For example, it is a 41st country on 2018 Bloomberg Innovation Index.

34 Interesting potentials have organizations like Code for Croatia.

Research results show that the third sector is prone to social innovation. Organizations in the sector are trying to develop new forms of action, work methods that are specific and derive from the characteristics of the third sector. It is seen as a significant area for the development of new social services, innovation in the field of social integration and social entrepreneurship, especially at local levels. But the environment gives a limited incentive and is more of a barrier to the development of social innovations. We can say that social innovations in Croatia are struggling and advancing by “baby steps” forward through limited development and involvement of various strategies and tenders. Over the last few years, resource organizations have been started to shyly develop and there is an increase of teaching about the subject at universities.

For the strengthening enabling environment we can mention a few necessary developments that can be noted as recommendations.

Further promotion of social innovation is needed. This may require increased management or marketing skills of people involved in social innovation projects but also the inclusion of social innovations in education programs, especially at the university level. There is also space for the involvement of the private sector that is for now unrecognized. There are scarce private-public partnerships; social entrepreneurship is just developing and business sector in the midst of introducing social goals as the legitimate course of business activities. Also, so far underdeveloped, corporate philanthropy could be a polygon for the financing of innovative approaches. The private sector could also provide parts of supporting environment via collaborative spaces and incubators, for example.

We expect that framework for thinking new initiatives would be further fostered by support, primarily financial, from the EU. Besides overreliance on EU, state and private sector should develop financial instruments for social innovations. Without the public sector that would provide systematic support, this is not enough. The public sector is too bureaucratized and has not shown the capacity to be a place of support or promotion of innovative solutions or changes in production. For example, public procurement should open more space for social enterprises and “green” procurement principles.

Croatia is still far from the horizon in which social innovations would be recognized as the factor of employment, quality of life, social inclusion, and the development of new relationships in the state and society. Hence, the more significant focus on innovation-driven governance (Brandsen et al., 2016), which is characterized by the general orientation to innovation, is the

**Table 1: Third sector social innovation enabling factors vs. public sector challenges and limitations – brief recapitalization.**

Third sector – enabling factors	Public sector – challenges and limitations
Volunteer work and capacity to build social trust	Clientelism and fluctuations of human resources
EU and national project-based expertise	Need for knowledge on social innovations
Flexibility, close connection with social needs	Rigid structures, lack of coordination
New modalities of work, open to innovations	Monopoly over the provision of social services, lack of social intrapreneurs
Social impact from bottom level	Birocratization and administrative requirements

search for synergy between economic and social policies is needed. Social innovations are cross-organizational, cross-sector, and cross disciplines. The question is how to foster border crossing in rigid public administration (and general mentality) and to open the space for innovations that go beyond single, unconnected projects. Sustainability of social innovations can be guaranteed by new relationships that come into force, mediated by socio-economic factors in which sectors are increasingly referred to co-operation, changing how things are done, encouraged, above all, by initiatives from the third sector (Baturina, 2016). Obstacles and resistance to social innovation are primarily coming from the conflict between the culture of the context and the new culture that social innovations bring with (Terstriep et al., 2015). That can be contrasted by the programs, pilot schemes, and evaluations that would allow their organization to fail and “fail better”. Grassroots social innovations in the form of creating bottom-up changes could be a possible focus of third sector action in that area. That practice would allow learning to all the stakeholders in practice and politics, which is, in that kind, for now, unknown in the Croatian context (Bežovan et al., 2016), should, therefore, be fostered. For sustainability of the field, the culture of public policy needs to be changed to include the opening space for policy experimentation and evaluation/impact measurement. Appropriate space trying something different is the key.

## PRIZADEVANJA ZA OBLIKOVANJE DRUŽBENO INOVACIJSKEGA OKOLJA NA HRVAŠKEM

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### POVZETEK

*Pričujoči prispevek ponuja kvalitativni pregled družbeno-inovacijskega okolja na Hrvaškem. Analiza temelji na rezultatih dveh kvalitativnih raziskav – prve izvedene v sklopu projekta FP7 »Socialne inovacije na lokalni ravni v korist integracije« in druge, ki se ukvarja z učinkom družbenih inovacij znotraj tretjega sektorja na družbeno-ekonomski napredek Hrvaške, kot tudi z ovirami za njihov razvoj. Rezultati raziskav kažejo, da je družbeno inovativno okolje relativno nerazvito, z majhnim številom zainteresiranih strani in splošnim pomankanjem razumevanja koncepta. Tretji sektor je prepoznan kot bolj naklonjen družbenim inovacijam. Organizacije tretjega sektorja poskušajo razviti nove oblike delovanja, delovne metodologije, ki so specifične in izhajajo iz značilnosti tretjega sektorja. Vsekakor okolje daje omejeno spodbudo in predstavlja oviro za razvoj družbenih inovacij.*

**Ključne besede:** družbene inovacije, družbeno inovacijsko okolje, kvalitativni pregled, tretji sektor, javne politike

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