



Ośrodek Wsparcia Ekonomii Społecznej
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What's the relationship between a given territory and social enterprises?

In Sopot and Gdańsk (Poland) took place a very special conference, organized by the Local Support Centre for Social Economy (OWES)¹ in collaboration with the ICSEM Project. Some 150 persons took part in the event. "Socially responsible territories", a concept developed by REVES (*Réseau Européen de Régions et Villes pour l'Economie Sociale*) and strongly put into practice in France (*Territoires Solidaires*) is also the leitmotiv of the OWES team, who are responsible for the development of the social economy in an area of 13 *poviats*, representing more than half of the most northern Polish region of Pomerania.

Poland had a long tradition of social economy before the communist era, and it is slowly reviving, as Henryk Wujec² said, due to the influence of activists coming from France.

The regional vice marshal Wiesław Byczkowski and the mayors of Gdańsk (Paweł Adamowicz) and Sopot (vicemayor Bartosz Piotrusiewicz) opened the conference, confirming their policies of support and development for the social economy.

Creating momentum in the development of the social economy requires a many-sided approach and OWES decided to confirm the development of social enterprises in specific territories, by coorganizing the conference with the EMES Network and Jacques Defourny, coordinator of the ICSEM worldwide analysis of social entrepreneurship. Expectations about this presentation were very high, as the nine basic aims of social enterprises, which were worked through by the EMES network many years ago, constitute the basis of thinking and official documents in Poland about social entrepreneurship.

It is interesting to note that the national strategy for the development of the social economy in Poland refers both to the EMES definition and to socially responsible territories.

¹ OWES Ośrodek Wsparcia Ekonomii Społecznej. A partnership composed of the Gdański Urban Area Association (49 local authorities and 3 companies), the Association of Pomeranian Employers, the Pomeranian Special Economic Zone, Caritas of the Gdańsk archdiocese and the Regional Foundation for the development of NGOs.

² Henryk Wujec, an opposition leader during the communist years, co-creator of KOR, the intelligencia support structure for workers, a member of Solidarność and presently advisor to the President of Poland.



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Professor J. Defourny's presentation (which is also available for download—in Polish—on the present webpage) was very important in comforting the sometimes very advanced thinking of certain local authorities and activists, put into a planetary perspective of what is being done in the social economy sphere in the world, and it gave many new ideas to the listeners, about what is perhaps a little less innovative (as it is done elsewhere) but very important in this day and age, when common values and quality need so much to dominate what is being done for the benefit of inhabitants, together, developing the ideas of wellbeing and satisfaction from life.

What appeared as the most important in Prof. Defourny's presentation are the different worlds which confront each other in the "Welfare Mix" slide (page 26 in the Power Point presentation in Polish).

The effect of the presentations of the two ICSEM experts was that the workshops about specific Polish models of development of social enterprises were very creative and successful (9 groups of about 15 persons who had nearly 2 hours to discuss their topics).

60 persons also took part in an evening meal, taking time to network and integrate.

During the next day (in the European Center of Solidarity), participants heard profound summaries of their work and could widely exchange with the regional authorities. 22 organisations signed a letter of intent for the creation of a social economy cluster, and discussed about the most important developments in the future.

The conference confirmed the strategy of the OWES center that the development of social entrepreneurship cannot take place in an isolated way. The reaction of the local territory, starting from the local authority, but including NGOs, the private sector and civil society is a key factor to success. It may be interesting to note that we have divided up the territory of half a region into 4 main sectors, which are animated by two persons, one specialized in institutions and partnerships, the other in relationships with individuals and initiative-taking groups. In each *powiat* we are working on the right local model of support for the social economy.

Piotr Wołkowinski, plenipotentiary for social economy of the Gdańsk Urban Area Association