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Uporaba pristopa socialnega podjetništva za ustvarjanje inovativnih eko-socialnih intervencij v kmetijstvu v Sloveniji: študijski primer, pilotna raziskava

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Izvleček

Slovenija se sooča z vrsto problemov: družbeni, demografski, okoljski, ekonomski, agronomski ... S sintezo praks, ki so nekoč že obstajale na našem ozemlju (medgeneracijsko sodelovanje, zadružništvo) in njihovo implementacijo časa in prostora primerno, rešujemo današnje probleme in omogočamo nove možnosti razvoja podeželja ter razvijamo nov gospodarski segment – socialno podjetništvo, ki dobiva danes vedno večji pomen.

V tem prispevku bomo predstavili lastno raziskavo z metodo akcijskega raziskovanja, učenja z delom, ki nam bo služila za ustanovitev socialnega podjetja na osnovah naše raziskave.

Raziskava je temelj za razvoj novih možnosti zaposlitev in razvoja podeželja, na prenosu znanja starejših generacij in implementaciji tega znanja v današnji čas. S pomočjo metode akcijske raziskave testiramo idejo za implementacijo in ustanovitev socialnega podjetja, ki bo opolnomočilo ljudi za sprejemanje lastnih odločitev in omogočila nove razvojne možnosti podeželskega območja.

Ključne besede: ekološko kmetijstvo, akcijska raziskava, socialno podjetje, medgeneracijsko sodelovanje, brezposelnost, trajnostni razvoj podeželja

Using the social entrepreneurship approach to generate innovative eco-social interventions in agriculture in Slovenia: a case study

Abstract

Slovenia is today facing a series of problems: social, demographic, environmental, economic, agronomic ... With the synthesis of practices that once existed in our territory (intergenerational cooperation, cooperatives) and their implementation time and environment appropriate we will solve today's problems and enable new possibilities for the development of rural areas and developing new economic segment - social entrepreneurship, which is today growing in importance.

In this paper, we present our own research using the method of participatory action research, learning by doing, which will serve us for the establishment of social enterprise start-up based on our research. The study will be the foundation for the development of new employment opportunities in rural areas. Research is based on the knowledge transfer from the older generations and implementation of this knowledge in today's situation. With the method of participatory action research we are testing our project idea for implementation and establishment of social enterprise which will empower people for their own decisions and enable new development opportunities of the rural area.

Key words: organic agriculture, action research, social enterprise, intergenerational participation, unemployment, sustainable rural development

1 Background

We are introducing a pilot eco-social project that unites people with a desire for locally produced organic food. Aim is to connect elderly owners of uncultivated agricultural land and unemployed people.

The project will not only increase local self-sufficiency and reduce supply chain, but also activate the unemployed, which will lead to easier entering the labour market or to self-employment in the field of local self-sufficiency.

Our organisation takes into account the environmental and social issues of the rural and remote areas of Slovenia.

Through restoration of traditional multipurpose organic agriculture we will restore traditional landscapes and their economic and ecological functions with ecosystem services which are foundation for organic agriculture. Through restoration of ecosystem services we will enable the existence of endangered flora and fauna species in these landscapes.

With the method of participatory action research and social innovation we will test the development of our idea in real time and the results will serve to establish a social enterprise.

1.1 Problem

First and most important is the social exclusion of people due to their low financial income and differences in these problems between countryside and towns.

Older people in the countryside possess agricultural land; because of their age they are unable to cultivate it alone. Consequently the land is not cultivated and they cannot get additional income which could improve their economic status.

Unemployed people in towns possess no arable land, but they are willing to work and would like to grow food to improve their economic status. They cannot afford to buy expensive organic food and food represents a significant expense for a family budget.

This situation leads to low self-sufficiency with local food, overgrowing of landscape and disappearance of traditional landscapes.

We are losing traditional landscapes and landscape elements that are important for provision of ecosystem services. Organic agriculture depends on these ecosystem services.

Demand for organic products is increasing in Slovenia and domestic farmers cannot grow as many organic products as demanded.

1.2 Solution

The solution is our pilot project which will connect the unemployed people from the towns with the elderly owners of farms in rural areas for the purpose of growing local organic food.

We will empower unemployed people for local production of organic food on derelict land or overgrown areas. Elderly owners of agricultural land will establish new social contacts, and transfer their knowledge of traditional farming practices to younger generations. With the establishment of an organized cooperative work in social enterprise we will enable new business opportunities in rural areas and improve economic and social status of participants.

This is a new approach on how to establish frame conditions for sustainable development in rural areas with new concepts for cooperation and a partnership including local people and it is in line with the emerging Green Economy concept supported by the EU policies.

Goals are not just solving economic and social problems but through restoration of traditional agriculture practices, which were present in these landscapes and are now abandoned, we will preserve functioning landscapes.

Present framework conditions in society are very suitable for implementation of this project economic and social situation make people more receptive for new ideas.

1.3 Research concept

Aim of the pilot project is to establish frame conditions of sustainable development in rural areas with intergenerational cooperation for the improvement of economic and social situation of participants.

With cooperative growing we want to restore multipurpose organic farming which took place in the past and transfer this knowledge from older generations, who actively participated in these farming practices, to younger generations.

In this process we will establish social enterprise with eco-social brand for production and marketing of regional organic food products, promote sustainable development of landscapes with introduction of eco-innovations and old farming practices.

With our model we will strengthen the local economy and rural development

2 Methods

2.1 Action research method

“If you want it done right, you may as well do it yourself.” (O’Brien, 1998)

Action research is “learning by doing” - a group of people identify a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, try again. It is used in real situations, rather than in contrived, experimental studies, since its primary focus is on

solving real problems (O'Brien, 1998). It seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it (Baum et al, 2006).

Action research projects are generally situational unique, but there are elements in the methods that can be used by other researchers in different circumstances (O'Brien, 1998). These included differences in perceptions of priorities between researchers and community members, dealing with community politics in the different communities involved in the study and resolving different ways in which researchers and communities might interpret new findings. (Baum et al, 2006).

2.1.1 Participatory action research (PAR)

It is a methodology that promotes researchers to create partnerships with communities in order to promote positive social change. The advantages of PAR are that it is applied collaborative research created through use of a committed community. Furthermore, the topic of research originates from the community itself (Allen et al, 2010).

The reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships. The process should be empowering and lead to people having increased control over their lives. (Baum et al, 2006). The PAR movement challenges the system of surveillance and knowledge control established through mainstream research. When communities seek control of research agendas, and seek to be active in research, they are establishing themselves as more powerful agents. (Baum et al, 2006).

It is often the case that those who apply this approach are practitioners who wish to improve understanding of their practice, social change activists trying to mount an action campaign, or, more likely, academics who have been invited into an organization (or other domain) by decision-makers aware of a problem requiring action research, but lacking the requisite methodological knowledge to deal with it (O'Brien, 1998).

Research in PAR typically goes through a cycle: Planning, Action, Reflection, Evaluation (Baum et al, 2006).

2.1.2 Social innovation

Social entrepreneurs have as their central goal, societal impact, with capital wealth creation a secondary consideration. Success for social entrepreneurs is measured in the ability to innovate, facilitate and sustain positive changes and growth for a defined social problem (Allen et al, 2010).

Social innovation is a powerful and valuable tool in the environmental sector. It involves social groups and communities creating, developing and diffusing ideas and solutions to address pressing social needs. More recently, social innovation has been gaining policy attention, providing a means to stimulate new ideas that address complex issues alongside ensuring citizen participation. Due to its participatory and creative nature, it is well positioned to address environmental challenges, which are multifaceted and often require societal or behavioural shifts towards more sustainable options (Science Communication Unit, 2014).

2.1.3 PAR and social innovation

As Allen et al (2010) said success of social entrepreneurs is measured in the ability to innovate. Before we will establish social enterprise we have to test our innovative project idea.

The concept of social entrepreneurship provides an additional framework for those engaging in applied research and provides a unique focus on innovation and adaptation, which is not necessarily stressed in PAR. Furthermore, social entrepreneurship follows a structured timeline, which includes amongst others, specific milestones indicative of project success. The presence of a timeline may be helpful when attempting to deal with one of the disadvantages of PAR (Allen et al, 2010).

3 Pilot project - PAR social innovation method

With PAR we will get the results and experiences which will help us in further development of idea towards social enterprise. Our PAR has timeline, which is growing season. Next season we will establish cooperative growing between participants, so we need the experience that we will gain from our PAR.

Our project has timeline, which is growing season of plants. Research is divided in two steps:

First step – first season

PAR carried out by team

Second step – next season

Intergenerational cooperative growing of food and later establishment of social enterprise with participants

3.1 Planning

Our plan is to establish cooperative growing by ourselves to see how implementation of the idea works. We want to identify the problems that arise: the relationship with the owner and how organic farming actually works in practice. The results of this research will serve us as a basis for establishing connection between participants. We want to get practical experience in relationship with the owners and in organic farming.

Aim is be team with practical experiences and being able to work on field. We want to help people in organic farming, especially when, due to the nature of the work, the participants will not be able to do all the work at the optimum time (planting, harvesting).

Experiences in cooperation with owner will also be of great importance for earning confidence of people and providing help by problems that could occur during their collective work.

Pilot project will show us all advantages and disadvantages of our theoretical idea. Through practical experiences in collective work with the owner we will get an insight into the relationship and into organic agriculture farming, so that we will get experiences for work with participants in future.

3.1.1 Team

In PAR team is important. We established a team of people from different academic spheres and with different working experiences.

Team members have different team roles according to Belbin's test of team roles. A team will perform better if it is aware of the different roles required to reach a specific goal and is able to include those roles within the team work.

Our team members are:

- Klemen Bizjak univ. dipl. inž. gozd. MSc
- Iztok Erjavec univ. dipl. biol.
- Andrej Firm univ. dipl. upr. org.
- Martina Gopurn prof. kem. in proiz.-teh. vzg.

3.1.2 Location

We are working in village Činžat a settlement in the Pohorje Hills in the Municipality of Lovrenc na Pohorju in north eastern Slovenia, west from town Maribor. Village lies on the altitude of 421,5 meters above sea level.

Vegetation period in the foothills of Pohorje lasts from five to six months (150-180 days) (Žiberna, 1996) it is a little shorter than on Drava field in Maribor (185 days) (Bezovšek, 2005). The Most important factor is the climate which is on this location alpine with influence of continental climate of Eastern Slovenia, (subpannonian climate) (Žiberna, 1996). Due to weather conditions vegetation period can be shorter or longer for about a month.

3.1.3 Action

We contacted the owner of a farm that used to have ecological agriculture but due to the owner's lack of time (working) and the fact that farm is too small to have a decent living from organic agriculture as full time job some parts of the land are not cultivated. This uncultivated land was given to our team to work on.

Aim of established cooperation is to learn about:

- how team work is functioning,
- the process of growing plants through all season,
- relations with owner and possible problems that may occur,
- problems in organic agriculture that may occur during growing season.

During the action process we are making a diary of our work about cooperation for reflection and evaluation of our pilot project.

3.1.4 Reflection

Establishing a friendship relation with owner is most important: especially trust between us. If we don't trust each other the collaboration will not work. Owner recognized our idea and it's potential. We have learned a lot from her about organic agriculture during our cooperation. She also borrows us tools for field work.

In agriculture harvest is dependent of nature. So we have to consider nature properties, especially climate where our pilot project was taking place and weather conditions. This year (2014) we have a lot of rain: it prevented us planting in the optimal time, we could not work on field in the optimal time for weed control and plants didn't grow or their growth was weak due to too much moisture. Harvest was not optimal as in normal weather condition.

Here comes another fact in consideration – organization of work. We had to take advantage of every opportunity to work on field, because the wet soil obstructed or prevented work. If we did not use this opportunities we had problems with weeds.

Important are practical results which we obtained during cooperation. Owner gave us a lot of advices that helped us by growing. Done by ourselves it has bigger value because we gain experiences. With owners help and her experiences our work was made easier and some problems were avoided. We got an insight into organic farming and first experiences in organic food growing.

Our budget has low income. We made our field work as cheap as possible Seeds and plants we didn't buy, instead we have asked people if they can donate us what they have and we planted our field with no financial income. This showed us that seeds and plants which are available in stores are not better quality that the one which were donated to us.

Current situation in Slovenia is also problematic; there is a lot of mistrust between people. So if we want to convince the people to cooperate in our project we must show them an example and the results.

4 Evaluation

Conclusion is that PAR method is, in our case of study, from our point of view, the right approach towards our goal. We have tried it by ourselves as O'Brien (1998) said. We defined the main condition that must be met for successful cooperation between people – this is good relationship between participants, especially trust. We are working in right direction.

The results that we obtained will served us for the next growing season for improvement of our work and helping participants by their work.

Organization of work on the field is the most important; we have to organize it better. We have seen the problem this year, because of the weather conditions (a lot of rain), we were forced to use every opportunity to work on field. We missed some and this resulted in weed growing, so there was more work to be done for its control.

At least once a week we must come to work on field to make all necessary arrangements in the field and to improve cooperation with owner. This means have conversation and from conversation we obtain a lot of information from organic agriculture, deepen our relationship and discuss about new idea from organic agriculture, what are our ideas and which are experiences form owner. This leads to insight in new possibilities for cooperative work on farm.

If you don't have money you can still obtain necessary plants and seeds that you need for the field.

Next season we have to improve organization of team members for work on field and making schedule of work for the proper cultivation and better harvest.

Overall results for evaluation are that the research has fulfilled our expectations. We gain experiences for future work with participants and insight in what has to be improved.

This research is just one step towards our goal. This step is important for organizing work in the future. We have shown what can be achieved and now we can show others. Promotion of results will serve as an example when approaching our potential partners in the cooperation. First step is done now there are new challenges before us.

5 Conclusion

With the method of PAR we showed that this model is working. We have done it by ourselves, gain experiences, knowledge and reflection of our work. Results are foundation for future work. We are more confident in our idea and we have results for promotion.

This is the first step toward establishment of social enterprise.

Our social innovation is new approach to existing problems in Slovenia. With simple cooperation between generations for common purpose we solve more problems simultaneously in a way that does not require large financial resources. This bottom up approach will enable new opportunities for rural development and can be implemented all over the world with the purpose for improvement of current situation of people and environment in which they live.

6 Literature

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