

# Barriers to Social Innovation and Ways of Overcoming Them in Latvia

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper presents the findings of research conducted to determine the main barriers to social innovation in Latvia and explore the ways they are overcome. The analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected while interviewing social innovation projects revealed eight barriers to social innovation. Lack of financing, passivity in the society and administrative and bureaucratic barriers are most frequently faced here. The qualitative content analysis disclosed nine means for overcoming the barriers to social innovation. Three of them: promotional activities, external financial support and external support are most common. Each barrier to social innovation was analyzed also in regard with the means utilized for overcoming it. It showed that there is no universal way to overcome a certain barrier. There could be different combinations of means and actions undertaken. However, the most powerful mean in overcoming barriers to social innovation in Latvia turned out to be promotional activities defined as a set of activities aimed to: educate the society, encourage stakeholders to participate in the project, raise awareness about the topicality of the problem and share information about solutions with the project's target group.

**Keywords:** social innovation, barriers to social innovation, overcoming barriers to social innovation, Latvia.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

It is argued that social innovation affects positively the quality of life and promotes sustainable development of any country [1, 2]. It has multidimensional impact on the society via: increasing its well-being and welfare [3; 4]; developing social capital, social cohesion, empowerment and democracy [5]; supporting in creation of better futures conditioned by the development of new ideas for improving life quality [1, 3, 6]; promoting social

development [7]; improving social quality [8]; causing positive changes in relationship [6, 9] and developing cross-sectoral partnership [10]. Despite the important role of social innovation, there is lack of sustained and systematic analysis, which is holding back the practice of social innovation [11]. The concept of social innovation is still relatively new in Latvia; it is to be studied and comprehended by the society. To overcome this gap, social innovation is gradually becoming a key topic for researchers and practitioners here. This research was conducted as part of the National Research Program (NRP) EKOSOC-LV within the project "Involvement of the society in social innovation for providing sustainable development of Latvia" headed by Karine Oganisjana, assoc. professor of Riga Technical University. One of the main barriers to social innovation in Latvia is the absence of public policy, that is - a legal basis for social innovation. Along with this obstacle, the paper analyses also other barriers to social innovation and the ways they are overcome by social innovation projects.

The research questions:

1. What are the main barriers to social innovation in Latvia?
2. How are the barriers to social innovation overcome?

## **The Research Methods**

Data collection was realized via pre-constructed interviews of 115 social innovation projects which were or are being realized in Latgale, Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Zemgale (the four regions of Latvia) and in Riga (the capital of Latvia) within 15 years. The interview questionnaire was elaborated by the research project team and piloted with three social innovation projects in May-August, 2016. The interview aimed to explore different aspects of social innovation related to: the ways the social problems were identified; the barriers faced and ways they were overcome; collaboration of stakeholders in the co-creation of solutions to social problems and their implementation in the real life; the level of involvement of different stakeholders in social innovation processes; the impact of these social innovation

projects on the society; their financial sustainability, etc. This paper focuses on the barriers to social innovations and the ways they are overcome. The interviews were conducted from November 2016 to May 2017 by two teams of researchers:

- the interdisciplinary team of NRP EKOSOC-LV project "Involvement of the society in social innovation for providing sustainable development of Latvia" consisting of researchers from four state universities of Latvia: Riga Technical University (RTU), University of Latvia (UL), Latvia University of Agriculture (LUA) and Riga Stradiņš University (RSU);
- the team of Riga Technical University master's students who were to conduct interview and analyse the qualitative and quantitative data within the practical part of the study course "Modern Research Methods: Theory and Practice" held and delivered by Karine Ogasijana.

The master's students were involved into the research activities not only for assisting the research project but also for getting the opportunity to learn research by conducting real research by passing through all the phases of research, analysing the results and writing reports on them. The illustration of the feasibility of such an involvement of Master's students into serious research is this paper: four authors - Yuliya Eremina, Salome Gvatua, Benjamin Ngongo Kabwende and Ozoemena Joseph Chukwu are International Mater's students of the Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management of Riga Technical University.

The interviewees represented public institutions, municipalities, enterprises, NGOs, educational institutions, European Union institutions or just individuals involved in social innovation. The scope of the sectors covered by the social innovation projects interviewed encompasses healthcare, sport, education, environment, agriculture, manufacturing, IT & communication technologies, tourism, entertainment, leisure, services, labor market, social policy and others.

Data analysis consisted of:

- quantitative analysis of closed-ended questions on the barriers which hinder social innovation processes;
- qualitative content analysis of the interview texts with open coding according to Philip Mayring's "Step model of inductive category development" [12] for determining and defining the means which were utilized in different ways of overcoming the barriers to social innovation;
- analysis of frequency table which shows which of the means were more common and frequently used clearing the barriers to social innovation;
- comparative "barrier-to-means" analysis for getting an insight into approaches used to overcome each barrier.

## 2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theories on barriers to social innovation are characterized by lack of a common platform and the existence of broad variety of approaches which can be explained by the complex nature of these barriers. This multiplicity causes difficulties in their systemization. Researchers lay diverse emphases on specific aspects of barriers to social innovation considering them from different perspectives [13, 14].

### Barriers to Social Innovation

Barriers to social innovation can be detected at different structural levels; these barriers are barely formalized or interconnected.

It is challenging to understand barriers to social innovation as they may:

- have formal and informal character;
- be at individual and societal level.

These dualities bring to four combinations: 1) formal barriers to individuals (lack of competencies, lack of networking opportunities and conflict of interests); 2) formal barriers to the society (legislation, public-sector silos, lack of financing opportunities and conflict of interests), 3) informal barriers to individuals (avoiding risk taking and lack of trust) and 4) informal barriers to the society (lack of measurement instruments, definitional uncertainties, organizational cultures and societal culture) [14].

The "TEPSIE" project which was realised under the European Commission's 7th Framework Program, systemized the barriers to social innovation into two groups:

- structural barriers which include those ones that correspond to the characteristics of social, political, economic, technologic, etc. context within which social innovators operate;
- agency barriers which include the ones that correspond to the characteristics and actions of individuals or organizations involved in social innovation processes and interactions among them [15].

In another approach, the key barriers to social innovation are categorized into the following four themes:

- access to finance;
- scaling models;
- skills and formation;
- networks and intermediaries [16].

The Bureau of European Policy Advisers of the European Commission considers the barriers and the challenges to social innovation from the perspectives of:

- social demand approach (financing and scaling up, governance and coordination, legal and cultural recognition, skill and training and the lack of data and measurement);
- the societal challenges approach (measurement, financing, governance, education);
- the systemic change approach [17].

The barriers to social innovation can also be systemized as internal and external in relation to an individual or a group of individuals [13]. The main internal barriers are people's:

- minds [13, 18, 19];
- resistance to change [19] and lack of openness [13];
- poorly developed skills [20];
- conservative and short-view thinking [13];
- lack of positive experience [13].

The external barriers are conditioned to more complex challenges such as:

- too many bureaucratic rules, delivery pressures administrative and legal framework [21, 22; 13];
- absence of capacity for organisational learning at all levels [20, 21];
- insufficient independent source of money and funding [20, 23].

Despite the broad range of varieties of systemization, the traditionally recognized sets of barriers to social innovation are concerned with dynamic networks and intermediaries, skills and formation, scaling models and access to finance. Thus, the lack of legal, fiscal and institutional framework are those barriers related to which social innovators have lowest level of awareness [22, 24].

It is argued that many ideas related to social innovation are unsuccessful not because of the fundamental flaws related to them, but because of the lack of adequate mechanism to promote them, adapt them, and then scale them up [19].

### Overcoming Barriers to Social Innovation

Understanding the means for overcoming the barriers to social innovation is still a big challenge as the barriers themselves can be very specific for different types of organizations, sectors, or geographic regions. Hence, the means and measures which are undertaken to overcome these barriers vary having different political, financial and organizational character. However, these means can be applicable to most social innovation projects as a whole despite the verities of contexts.

A number of policies were adopted to overcome barriers to social innovation in Europe under the study of the European Union and The Young Foundation. These policies include: creation of new legal frameworks; rendering financial support to external projects, programs and institutions; developing financial devices that support innovation; establishment of social innovation agencies; enhancing collaborations and developing formal tools that enable groups and agencies, regions, or localities to innovate together [16].

In its proposal for the European Social Innovation Act the European Citizen Action Service suggests overcoming barriers to social innovation at two levels, including:

- 1) European Union level - adapting the structure of the future budget to stimulate and support social innovation; facilitating discussion among member states on social innovation and risks related to its realization; facilitating access to finance for social entrepreneurs and civil society, adopting scoreboard and innovative evaluation systems to assess the impact of social innovation.
- 2) State level - facilitating access to finance for social entrepreneurs and civil society; promoting networks and exchange boards; increasing awareness [24].

The improvement of policy instruments, understanding social innovation related issues, provision of more statistical information and research on social innovation are revealed to be important means for overcoming barriers to social innovation, provided that a) the challenges are first defined and opportunities are explored, b) projects for overcoming the barriers are elaborated and implemented and c) the projects are sustained at micro, meso and macro levels [25].

Along with political, financial and organizational means for overcoming barriers to social innovation, also education contributes considerably to the promotion of social innovation playing a triple role as a source of: 1) issues to be solved, 2) human resources to be employed in social innovation; and 3) new opportunities and perspective to be identified [26]. Education can help to overcome: lack of society's openness to novelty, underdeveloped sense of consciousness and responsibility, conservative thinking, passivity and lack of proactive thinking which make the internal human related factors that hinder social innovation processes in the society [13].

This research explores not only the barriers faced by social innovation projects in Latvia and the ways they are overcome taken as a whole, but also provides "barrier-to-means" analysis for giving more insight into the means which are utilized for overcoming each barrier separately.

### 3. THE EMPIRICAL PART OF THE RESEARCH

Data collection was organized both in face-to-face and electronic modes. Our practice showed once again that the response rate to electronic questionnaires is not very high even though the research group had preliminary phone conversation with the representatives of the social innovation projects. Therefore, it was decided to use the "Crowdfunding principle", that is to mobilize the efforts of the NRP EKOSOC-LV project "Involvement of the society in social innovation for providing sustainable development of Latvia" team and students for creating the data base for the joint use. Each Master's student had to provide at least one high quality interview. In order to ensure high validity and reliability of research, data analysis was trained gradually combining individual and group work of different levels of complexity linking theory and practice as well as analyzing and understanding research logic based on different papers published in scientific journals. The part of research reflected in this paper is an integrate product of the authors' joint work. The interviews were conducted in two languages: in Latvian by the students from Latvia and in English – by the international students. This caused additional difficulties both at the stage of interviewing of the Latvian social innovation projects in English by international students and conducting the qualitative content analysis, since the entire interview material had to be translated into English.

#### What are the Main Barriers to Social Innovation in Latvia?

The interviews exposed the main barriers faced by social innovation projects. Interviewees were offered a choice of eight barriers listed based on the theoretical analysis. They could indicate more than one of the barriers given. Besides, the interviewees could share experience of some other barriers not included in the list which they had had in their social innovation projects. For the convenience of the analysis the barriers (B) are assigned codes:

- B1 - Absence of legal framework;
- B2 - Administrative and bureaucratic barriers;
- B3 - Lack of access to information needed;
- B4 - Passivity in the society;
- B5 - Lack of openness of the society to other people's experience and collaboration;
- B6 - Lack of financing;
- B7 - Passivity and low level of support from stakeholders;
- B8 - Lack of experience in realizing the project.

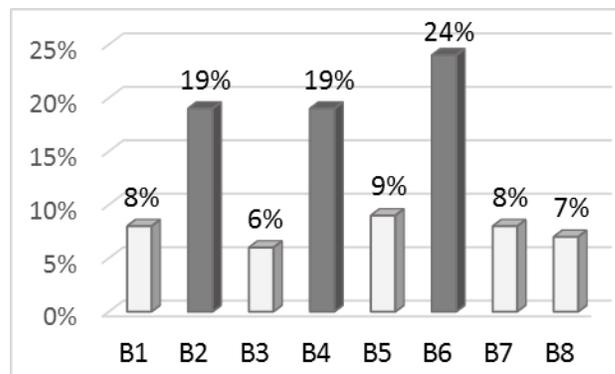


Figure 1. Distribution of the weights of the barriers to social innovation in Latvia

The weight of each barrier was determined based on the frequency of its occurrence in the responses. In order to

compare which barriers are more typical and painful for social innovation projects in Latvia, the distribution of the weights of the barriers were depicted in the diagram (see Figure 1). It reveals two explicit groups of barriers, which have close weights within each group.

Lack of financing (B6, 24%), passivity in the society (B4, 19%) and administrative and bureaucratic barriers (B2, 19%) are obviously the most serious barriers to social innovation in Latvia. As to the second group of the five barriers, they also have similar weights within their group (from 6 % to 9 %). This speaks for similar negative roles which lack of openness of the society to other people's experience and collaboration (B5, 9%), absence of legal framework (B1, 8%), passivity and low level of support from stakeholders (B7, 8%), lack of experience in realizing the project (B8, 7%) and lack of access to information needed (B3, 6%) play in the life of social innovation projects.

As interviewees were offered to describe also some other obstructions, which they had experienced in their projects, special attention of the authors was focused on these responses. However, from the analysis of the texts, new categories which could be generalized into complementary barriers typical to social innovation in Latvia, didn't emerge. Instead, different obstacles scattered over different spheres were mentioned. In some cases, part of them were related to the pre-given barriers but the respondents didn't always realize that connectedness. For instance, the fragment "school's disbelief that the bank just wants to educate young people, but not to sell their services" is causally linked to the barrier "Lack of openness of the society to other people's experience and collaboration". But by the respondent it was given as some other barrier out of the list.

### How are the Barriers to Social Innovation Overcome in Latvia?

In the course of the qualitative content analysis of the texts of the responses, nine categories were developed; they show the means which have been utilized by social innovation projects in Latvia to overcome the main barriers (see Figure 2). For the sake of convenience, these means (M) were assigned codes:

- M1 - External financial support;
- M2 - Promotional activities;
- M3 - External source of information;
- M4 - Project modification;
- M5 - External support;
- M6 - Communication with stakeholders;
- M7 - Own funds;
- M8 - Efforts to improve legal framework;
- M9 - Competencies of the project team.

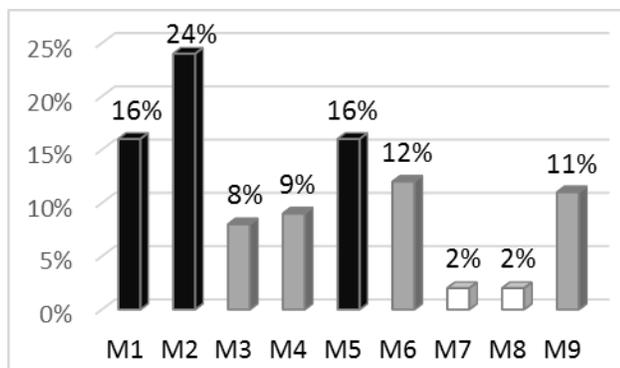


Figure 2. Distribution of frequencies of the means which are utilized to overcome barriers to social innovation in Latvia

Figure 2 shows that promotional activities (M2, 24%) were mentioned most often by the social innovation projects in order to surmount the existing barriers. Promotional activities (M2) are defined by the research group as a set of activities aimed to educate the society, encourage stakeholders to participate in the project, raise awareness about the topicality of the problem and share information about solutions with the target group. The main tools used by the interviewees were: media, charity events, word of mouth, presentations and meetings. As stated by the interviewees: "project activities were organized within the framework of informative workshops" or "a lot of resources are invested in order to explain the project's mission and vision".

A key role in the overcoming of the barriers faced by social innovation projects was played by external financial support (M1, 16%), consisting in: attracting funds for the project from individual sponsors, financial/commercial organizations, governmental authorities and public donations. The respondents mentioned: "we are looking for sponsors and supporters" or "we attracted co-financing from the local government". External support (M5, 16%), including help of stakeholders, donations of physical assets, organizational assistance from authorities and various institutions, has the same level of importance as financial support while dealing with the obstructions. The external support (M5) was spoken about in many different ways: "people worked voluntarily"; "we were able to find people and businesses who believed in us and ...", "they gave advice and encouragement, donated colored textiles", etc.

Communication with stakeholders (M6, 12%) also plays a rather important role in hurdling the barriers; it represents the process of engaging with the society by enlisting their ideas on the issues and problem solution.

Competencies of the project team (M9, 11%) are essential human related means for coping with the obstructions. This category unifies individual ideas, skills, problem solving capacities, utilized resources and initiatives by the project managers and workers.

In several cases the projects had to carry out modifications in order to surmount the obstacles. Project modification (M4, 9%), can be explained as internal changes and improvements of the project in pursuance of compulsory standards, existing legal requirements and rules.

Relevant information carries power; hence, it was logical that external source of information (M3, 8%) emerged to play a crucial role in overcoming the hindrances. Respondents have received information consulting with peers and colleagues, experts and professionals in the local environment or abroad; they participate in learning courses, in conducting surveys and analyzing online sources of information.

Despite the fact that the two categories: the efforts to improve the legal framework (M8, 2%) and own funds (M7, 2%) were mentioned less frequently, some projects still did overcome the obstacles owing to them.

Efforts to improve the legal framework (M8) combine the procedures of taking part in the elaboration and improvement of the legislative basis for social innovation.

Category - own funds (M7) is understood as monetary contributions made by the primary project team to solve hiccups encountered during the project or to develop the project.

### "Barrier-to-Means" Analysis

In the last phase of the research, the barriers spoken about in each of the 115 interviews were reanalyzed in regard with the means, which were used to overcome them. This analysis ended

with the matrix in Table 1. The horizontal rows with BM combinations show accordingly the code of a barrier and the code of corresponding means mentioned by the interviewees. The frequencies of each combination were summed up and located in the rows under the corresponding BM code. For example:

- B1M1 presenting barrier B1 - absence of legal framework, overcome by the mean M1 - external financial support, was spoken about 5 times throughout all the interviews;
- B4M2 which stands for barrier B4 - passivity in the society, overcome by mean M2 - promotional activities, was pointed out 26 times, etc.

Table 1. The matrix of “Barrier-to-means” analysis

B1M1	B1M2	B1M3	B1M4	B1M5	B1M6	B1M7	B1M8	B1M9
5	8	3	4	3	3	0	4	1
B2M1	B2M2	B2M3	B2M4	B2M5	B2M6	B2M7	B2M8	B2M9
6	8	7	6	12	7	3	2	10
B3M1	B3M2	B3M3	B3M4	B3M5	B3M6	B3M7	B3M8	B3M9
3	8	4	1	1	3	1	0	1
B4M1	B4M2	B4M3	B4M4	B4M5	B4M6	B4M7	B4M8	B4M9
11	26	3	3	6	8	3	1	4
B5M1	B5M2	B5M3	B5M4	B5M5	B5M6	B5M7	B5M8	B5M9
5	9	3	2	3	3	1	0	3
B6M1	B6M2	B6M3	B6M4	B6M5	B6M6	B6M7	B6M8	B6M9
25	19	6	6	14	5	3	1	8
B7M1	B7M2	B7M3	B7M4	B7M5	B7M6	B7M7	B7M8	B7M9
4	7	2	1	5	6	1	1	4
B8M1	B8M2	B8M3	B8M4	B8M5	B8M6	B8M7	B8M8	B8M9
1	0	6	1	3	0	0	0	3

The matrix shows that one barrier to social innovation was overcome by different means. It shows that there is not one universal approach for overcoming each of them. Hence, mainly a set of measures can result in overcoming barriers faced by social innovation projects. For instance, in respect to B2 - administrative and bureaucratic barriers, one of the interviewees said: “I raised money (M1 - External financial support), took responsibility to carry out things using what I could do (M9 - Competencies of the project team), used wide range of networks (M2 - Promotional activities) and devoted my personal resources (M7 - Own funds)”. These different means (M1, M9, M2 & M7) were utilized to overcome one barrier (B2). However, some means were indicated more often than others to overcome certain barriers (see Figure 3).

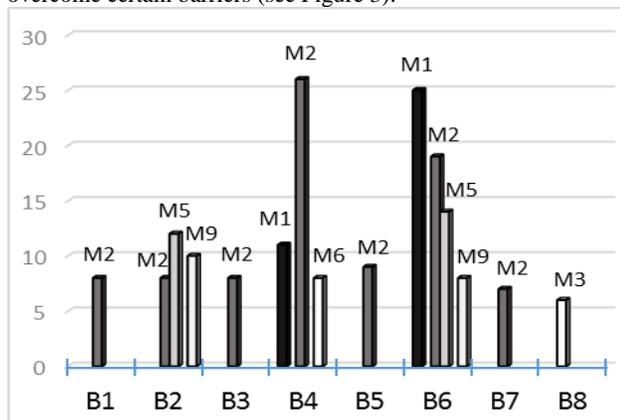


Figure 3. Most frequent ways of overcoming each barrier to social innovation

Promotional activities (M2) played most crucial role for overcoming almost all the barriers (B1M2, 8; B2M2, 8; B3M2, 8; B4M2, 26; B5M2, 9; B6M2, 19; B7M2, 7) except B8 - lack of experience in realizing the project (B8M2, 0).

In combination with promotional activities (M2):

- administrative and bureaucratic barriers (B2) were mainly surmounted owing to external support (B2M5, 12) and the competencies of the project team (B2M9, 10);
- passivity in the society (B4) was compensated also by external financial support (B4M1, 11) and communication with stakeholders (B4M6, 8); still the most powerful mean here was promotional activities mentioned by 26 interviewees;
- lack of financing (B6) was overcome by external financial support (B6M1, 25), external support (B6M5, 14) and competences of the project team (B6M9, 8).

The barrier B8 - lack of experience in realizing the project was mainly surmounted by - external source of information (B8M3, 6).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The research showed that social innovation projects in Latvia most frequently face lack of financing, passivity in the society and administrative and bureaucratic barriers.

However, also lack of openness of the society to other people’s experience and collaboration; absence of legal framework; passivity and low level of support from stakeholders; lack of experience in realizing the project; and lack of access to information needed, create hindrances in the realization of social innovation.

The most frequent means for overcoming these barriers utilized by the interviewees were: promotional activities, external financial support and external support.

Nevertheless, seven more means: external source of information; project modification; communication with stakeholders; own funds; efforts to improve legal framework and competencies of the project team; were revealed to be significant in overcoming the barriers faced.

When each barrier was analyzed in regard with the means, which were used to overcome it, it was inferred that there is no universal way to overcome a certain barrier. There could be different combination of means and actions undertaken.

The most powerful mean in overcoming barriers to social innovation in Latvia turned out to be promotional activities defined as a set of activities aimed to: educate the society, encourage stakeholders to participate in the project, raise awareness about the topicality of the problem and share information about solutions with the target group. The main tools used by the interviewees were the following: media, charity events, word of mouth, presentations and meetings.

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