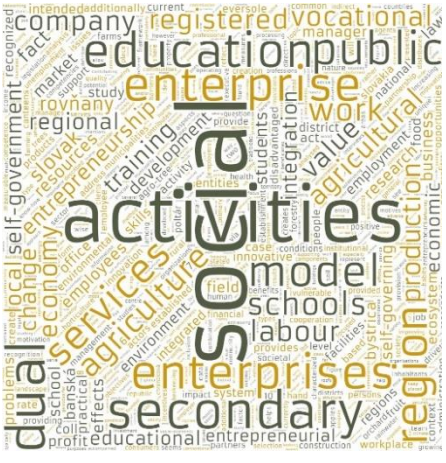
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MIXING UP APPLES AND PEARS CAN WORK – CASE STUDY OF AN INNOVATIVE MODEL OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE FROM SLOVAKIA

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Abstract: Social enterprises have the potential to address diverse issues, even when they fall off the radar of formal institutions e.g., by establishing partnerships that are new locally and nationally. The analysis offers a conceptual description of a model of social enterprise established by a regional self-government authority, that blends dual education and social economy and serves as an innovative agent of change. Case research was the approach used. The research revealed that the motivation behind the enterprise was social integration, increasing attractiveness of agriculture for young people and regional self-sufficiency. The partnership was recognized as the key element of the model design. The model brings social, economic and environmental change to employees and students but also to the whole environment. Such a model could be replicated and such collaboration could be put on the map of social enterprises.

Keywords: social enterprise, social agriculture, dual education, partnership, business model

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Abstrakt: Sociálne podniky majú potenciál riešiť rôznorodé problémy, a to aj tie, ktoré vypadli z hľadáčika formálnych inštitúcií, napr. vytvorením partnerstiev, ktoré sú nové pre lokálnu aj národnú úroveň. Príspevok obsahuje koncepčný opis modelu sociálneho podniku zriadeného regionálnou samosprávou, ktorý prepája duálne vzdelávanie a sociálnu ekonomiku a slúži ako inovatívny nositeľ zmeny. V príspevku bola použitá metóda prípadovej štúdie. Výskumom sa preukázalo, že motiváciou pre založenie podniku bola sociálna integrácia, zvyšovanie atraktivity poľnohospodárstva pre mladých ľudí a regionálna sebestačnosť. Kľúčovým prvkom modelu podniku je partnerstvo. Podnik prináša sociálne, ekonomické a environmentálne zmeny nielen zamestnancom a študentom, ale aj celému prostrediu. Takýto model možno replikovať a takáto spolupráca by sa mohla dostať na mapu sociálnych podnikov.

Kľúčové slová: sociálny podnik, sociálne poľnohospodárstvo, duálne vzdelávanie, partnerstvo, model podnikania

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Highlights

- Social enterprises (SEs) innovatively react to local needs.
- Model of SE set up by a self-government blending agriculture and dual education was analysed.
- The motivation, model and effects of the enterprise were identified as the best practice.

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1. Introduction

Social enterprises (SEs) have become widespread phenomenon that could be found in majority of economies all around the globe. Their essence lies in combining two seemingly contrasting aspects – business activities (producing goods and services) and contributing to the social change in a form of creating social and/or environmental value (Chell, 2007, Mair et al., 2012, Steiner & Teasdale, 2017). The social change is reached throughout stated social objectives, while the profit generated via the entrepreneurial activities is usually spent on contributing to these objectives (Chell, 2007, Wojciechowska-Solis et al., 2021). Thus, SEs are seen as businesses that trade for social purposes (Steiner & Teasdale, 2017), or as businesses that pursue socially beneficial activities with the help of economic tools (Nová, 2018).

Szijarto et al. (2017) identify 4 common features of social enterprises. Above-mentioned hybrid aims are accompanied by hybrid financing, as SEs are often funded by multiple sources. The independence of social enterprises from the external sources together with financial sustainability, however, are often stated as one of the SEs' goals (Luke et al., 2013). The remaining two characteristics include usage of business

methods and innovation identity. As stated by Anderson & Lent (2017), the combination of business logic and methods that is used to address welfare problems is spiced up with innovation, particularly social innovations.

One of the most popular definitions of social innovations describes them as 'new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations, which can happen in all sectors: public, private and non-profit' (Murray et al., 2010, p. 3). Social innovations are understood as a source of rural transformation or as new socio-economic and environmental solutions brought by rural communities, e.g., projects of social inclusion and integration (Hrivnák et al., 2020).

Regarding innovation, SEs are seen as agents that are looking for innovative solutions to social issues that are not covered by other private or public organizations. Nicholls (2009, p. 759) named this activity as *filling institutional voids*.

These uncovered social issues often belong to the category of public services and with this respect, Millar & Hall (2013) identify social enterprises as innovative ways for the public services delivery. Thus, there is a growing importance of SEs engaging in the provision of such services (Lyon, 2012). These services vary from satisfaction of fundamental human needs via the provision of goods such as agriculture, housing, water and sanitation to delivery of services that include education, energy, health and financial services (Martin, 2015).

Within this study, we would like to focus on two of the listed services – agriculture and education. SEs operating in agriculture are often referred to as social farms and they are characterised as fundamental and innovative entities that use entrepreneurial activities to keep social, economic and environmental cohesion in rural areas (Hudcová, 2016). Their existence stresses the interlinks between the community approaches with aspects such as the multifunctionality of agriculture, the construction of new welfare hypotheses, and the adoption of innovative tools for the provision of services capable of responding effectively to people's needs (Dessein & Bock, 2010). According to Hudcová et al. (2018, p. 393) *while the social enterprises are generating profits by selling goods and services and are integration employers, the social farms also offer educational and social services presented as services of general economic interest*. The effects of social farms are seemingly indisputable, especially in the spheres of health care, social care or education (see e.g., Haugan et al., 2006, Elings, 2011, Moruzzo et al., 2020) yet it must be said that in the Slovak conditions, that represent the arena for this research, this kind of social enterprises are not formally recognized and, therefore, omitted from the national discussion about their occurrence, effects and importance (Chreneková et al., 2021).

Services in education represent the second type of public services provided by social enterprises that we want to cover. They are considered a key factor in raising labour-force skills and promoting productivity growth (Martin, 2015). Within this study, we focus on dual education at the secondary school level which is described as a system, in which the students are trained for an occupation in organizations in accordance with the needs and requirements of the employer. The employers are in charge of organizing the work at the workplace and they are also involved in the curriculum development (Act No. 61/2015 Coll. on vocational education and training). The autonomy of schools enables them to adjust their activities to the environment and to the needs of enterprises with the objective to enhance the quality of the teaching process (Knecht et al., 2011). Among the main benefits of this education system is that the students acquire work habits directly during the real production process at the employers' site, using their technological equipment, working in the real environment and team. This results in a high probability of their future employability (Zmeková & Lukáčová, 2019).

Mentioned features of the dual education facilities are similar to those of work integration social enterprises (WISE) and this fact makes them suitable partners. WISE is oriented on integration of diverse disadvantaged groups back into the labour market and society through a productive activity. Several studies (see e.g., Duniam, Eversole, 2013, Defourny, Nyssens, 2021) recognize WISE as the most common form of social enterprises in global context, on the other hand, the studies and scientific findings on the activities of SEs in the field of education are rather scarce (Makgato, 2018) or referred to as badly

under-conceptualized (Kerr & Dyson, 2016). In the CEE countries, education appears in the studies related to social entrepreneurship, however, mostly as a minority issue. Examples can be found in Bulgaria where multi-service cooperatives are active in this sphere (Marinova, Yoneva, 2021). In Czechia, social cooperatives with activities in education can be found (Dohnalová et al., 2021). In Latvia, 23% of social enterprises reported activities in education (Kalkis et al., 2021) and in Poland, 6,7% of social cooperatives are active in education together with 15.4% of entrepreneurial non-profit organizations (Ciepielewska-Kowalik et al., 2021).

It is precisely this relationship between a social enterprise operating in agriculture and dual education facilities that is a matter of further investigation of this study. The reason for the topic selection is that they both are lacking systematic approach to the Slovak environment (see e.g., European Commission, 2020, Polačková, 2021).

Therefore, the ambition of this study is to present a working model of a social enterprise that is involved in agricultural practices and, at the same time, in the system of dual education (secondary school level). The study is supposed to initiate a discussion about this topic and to serve as a good practice for replication in other locations.

1.1 Social enterprises as agents of change in public (and educational) service delivery

One of the claimed objectives of social enterprises is to address social needs or even broader complex problems (Waddock & Post, 1991). Bringing positive change for marginalized population via a variety of social service delivery sectors seems to be among the most proclaimed ones (Shier & Van-Du, 2018). Such activities require changing an angle and looking at the problem from a new perspective via (re)interpreting and (re)defining it (Mair et al., 2012). At the same time, social enterprises need to put up with the problem of availability of resources, when new problems and challenges are occurring without newer or additional resources. Thus, social enterprises need to create workable solutions to social problems that are not effectively solved by existing organisations using traditional approaches (Kickul et al., 2018). From a societal point of view, the new solutions are more desirable than the traditional ones (Quandt et al., 2017).

State often secures public services but does not provide them, relying on for-profit and not-for-profit providers instead (Popoli, 2016). As stated by Hatcher (2015, p. 390) *delivering public services by social enterprises frees them from the constraints of state bureaucracy and stimulates innovation through a combination of market incentives and social entrepreneurship*. Governmental and other regional entities should conduct the creation of a culture of entrepreneurship based on local and endogenous resources and support them in several aspects (training, financial support, etc.) (Pato, 2020). Social enterprises are thus seen as architects and agents of change that leads to new or altered institutional arrangements (Battilana et al., 2009).

Additionally, public players use the attractiveness of the innovative approaches of social enterprises, understanding that social enterprises have the potential to address multiple social, economic and environmental objectives, and they bring direct effects for users, staff, local economies and local communities (Lyon, 2012, Eversole et al., 2014, Chreneková et al., 2021). According to Teasdale (2012), their entrepreneurial nature together with objective of delivering public benefits lead to innovation, wider choice and potentially higher quality of public services.

Tight links between SEs and public entities are existing on the SEs' landscape as recognized e.g., by Spear, Conforth & Aiken (2009) or Defourney & Nyssens (2017). The latter authors identified public sector social enterprises as one model of SEs that include so-called "public-sector spin-offs", when local public bodies set up enterprises for securing local development. Such approach is presented in Slovak environment, where SEs are often set up by local self-governments, especially municipalities (Polačková, 2021). Such procedure is, however, rather unique in CEE context, except for Bulgaria (Marinova & Yoneva, 2021). On the global scale, close cooperation between self-governments and SEs is also seen in Australia either in form of establishing, supporting or partnering up with SEs from the side of self-governments (Duniam, Eversole, 2013).

The research results of Mair et al. (2012) prove that the most recurrent activities of social enterprises include training, networking, educating, counselling and lending, while training often occurred in tandem with all the other mentioned activities. These activities are aimed at socially marginalized and disadvantaged populations, such as those experiencing poverty-related issues, social isolation, and those with labour market attachment difficulties (Vieta et al., 2015). The latest problem can be typically evident among the youth, who frequently lack the experience, skills and training necessary to gain formal employment (Makgato, 2018). Such a problem is also observed in the Slovak environment, where it is accompanied by the constant aging of the employment structure (Marišová & Mura, 2021). According to Gerbery (2016), improving the mismatch between skills supply and labour force demand would contribute greatly to building inclusive labour markets that reflect in improving quality of life, reducing poverty, increasing productivity and stimulating the resilience of rural social systems (Greser et al., 2021).

Changes in the education system, thus, seem to be a way how to address these issues and enhance the situation of individuals. Improving the quality of schools and educational systems became a common practice in many countries, however, these efforts are also resulting in a widening gap between students whose socio-economic and cultural backgrounds disadvantage them when compared to their more advantaged peers (Ballas et al., 2012, OECD, 2016). The occurrence of schools that are trying to intervene in their students' environment and life chances is regarded as a logical step (Cummings et al., 2011) as such schools 'may, in later generations, develop much firmer conceptual foundations, and be capable of acting to address educational disadvantage in a much more coherent and strategic manner, marshalling the resources needed to do so' (Kerr & Dyson, 2016).

In the context of this paper, such efforts are assigned to a social enterprise operating in agriculture that is offering activities within the system of dual education at a secondary school level.

Dual education in fact is a pathway of vocational education and training that combines theoretical and practical training at the workplace (Barnová et al., 2020). It is provided via support for cooperation between secondary vocational schools and enterprises located in their vicinity (Hanák et al., 2020). The benefits of this type of education contain enhancing students' practical skills, increasing their contact with the real world of work and helping employers to prepare the future workforce in accordance with their current technologies and production facilities. Additionally, there are also financial incentives for students to participate in the dual education system (Gerbery, 2016).

For running such educational activities in the case of social enterprises, the partnership can be regarded as a crucial concept. In general, social enterprises are more effective when partnering up with fellow entities as this process enables access to resources and contributes to smoother development of social innovations based on the opportunities found by social enterprises, which could be lacking capacities or abilities to address them individually (Phillips et al., 2017). The partnership is similarly a cornerstone of the system of dual education, where it can have the following shapes: analysing the situation on the labour market, identifying the requirements of the workforce, excursions to modern workplaces, providing practical training in modern operations, and organizing pupils' competitions (Nová, 2016).

According to Lawson & van Veen (2016), the educational facilities and their partners begin to develop a "new institutional design" addressing the emerged issue. An example of such institutional design is a subject matter of this research addressed later in the text.

1.2 Institutional background for social enterprises and dual education in Slovakia

Despite the fact that the two concepts – social entrepreneurship and dual education – seem to be rather divorced from each other, one important intersecting point could be identified and elaborated upon. It is the same administrative unit, namely a self-governing region/higher territorial unit (NUTS III level), that has the competence to establish both: enterprises (including SEs) and secondary schools.

Self-governing regions as a legal entity, which under the conditions laid down by law, independently manages its own property and its own income, secures and protects the rights and interests of its inhabitants. A self-governing region carries out its own investment and entrepreneurial activities in order

to ensure the needs of the inhabitants and the development of the region itself (Act No. 302/2001 Coll. on self-governing regions as amended by subsequent provisions).

Despite the fact that the law does not explicitly cover social enterprises, SEs represent one option of entrepreneurial activities of self-governing regions, additionally, they can be used for the provision of some of the competencies of self-governing regions.

Currently, social enterprises in Slovakia are regulated mostly by Act No. 112/2018 Coll. on social economy and social enterprises. The legislation defines a variety of financial and non-financial mechanisms for supporting specifically SEs. Thus, it contributed a great deal to the enhancement of position and recognition of these enterprises.

The law defines the social enterprise as an entity of the social economy that:

- carries out economic activity on a continuous, independent basis, on their own behalf and under their own responsibility,
- whose main goal is to achieve a measurable positive social impact,
- in which the goods or services which it produces, supplies, provides or distributes, or the way in which they are produced or provided, contribute to achieving a positive social impact,
- if makes a profit from its activities, uses more than 50% of the profit after tax to achieve the main goal (measurable positive social impact), if distributes part of the profit according to the Commercial Code, distributes it according to procedures and rules that do not interfere with the main objective,
- involves stakeholders in the management of its economic activity.

Thus, the establishment of social enterprises by self-governing regions seems logical since these entities are sharing objectives when it comes to the fulfilment of public or community interests via generating positive social impact and meeting the needs of the inhabitants.

Based on this Act, the Register of Social Enterprises was established to complete the institutional ecosystem of SEs and also to fill out the information gaps. After application, SEs in Slovakia can obtain the status of registered social enterprises. In terms of focus, a social enterprise can be registered as:

a) an integration enterprise,
b) a social enterprise for housing,
c) a general registered social enterprise.

As of March 2022, there are 512 registered SEs, out of which 2 are general registered SEs and none is focused on housing.

On the other hand, as stated by Polačková (2021), to draw conclusions about the SEs landscape based on the registered SEs is far from being accurate. Additional to those 512 entities, there are hundreds even thousands of civic-associations, non-profit organisations, foundations or non-investments funds that may comply with the characteristics of SEs as defined by law but never applied for registration and may never do so.

When it comes to education, self-governing regions have competencies in establishment and abolition of schools and school facilities (secondary schools, vocational schools, practical training centres, hobby-educational facilities, primary art schools, youth homes, school catering facilities, practical training facilities, school service centres, outdoor schools).

As mentioned before, the secondary vocational education underwent a system change when the dual education was established. The dual system of education and training can be characterized by:

1. contractual relations:
    a. dual education contract between the secondary vocational school and the employer/ organization providing workplace training;

b. apprenticeship contract between the student/legal guardian of the student and the employer.

2. practical in-organization/workplace training;
3. workplace training financed by the employer.

The aim of the new legislation was to increase employers' motivation to enter the dual system of education and training. In addition, in 2015, the government tried to increase organizations' interest in participation by introducing tax incentives (Barnová et al., 2020).

Using these provisions, self-government regions were given another instrument for addressing the problems with the inclusiveness of the labour market and consequently instrument for contributing to generate positive social impact.

Another interlink between the analysed aspects is the national framework for support for the least-developed districts that was initially adopted in order to provide support to 12 out of 79 districts of Slovakia with the highest unemployment rate (the current number of the least-developed districts is 20). The districts elaborated strategic documents – action plans that contained measures for the local, regional and even national levels. These plans contained measures also for the improvement of labour mobility, matching the needs of current and potential employers with local labour supply, improving the quality of primary and secondary education in the region, supporting vocational education and training, as well as providing consulting services to starting entrepreneurs, small businesses or municipalities (Varecha & Fáziková, 2019). Many local self-governments used the plans to initiate discussions on the establishment of SEs.

Aside of the legal provisions, the institutional context for this topic is also formed by the existence of Regional centres for social economy. These units are established by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family thus belonging to the system of state administration as opposed to the self-governing regions that form the self-government administration. On the other hand, they are established in every regional centre which are identical to the seats of self-governing regions. This proximity enables the transfer of knowledge, information and innovation between the units of state administration and self-government administration, hence, contributing to a favourable environment.

2. Methodology

The presented analysis is focused on a conceptual description of a sustainable business model (Geissdoerfer et al., 2018, DaSilva & Trkman, 2014). The described model is based on connecting dual education and social economy within the registered social enterprise – Agro-tree ecosystem of Banská Bystrica Self-governing Region, Ltd.

Object of the analysis – the social enterprise – is located in the municipality of Rovňany in the Poltár district. The district is part of the Banská Bystrica region in Central Slovakia (see picture 1).

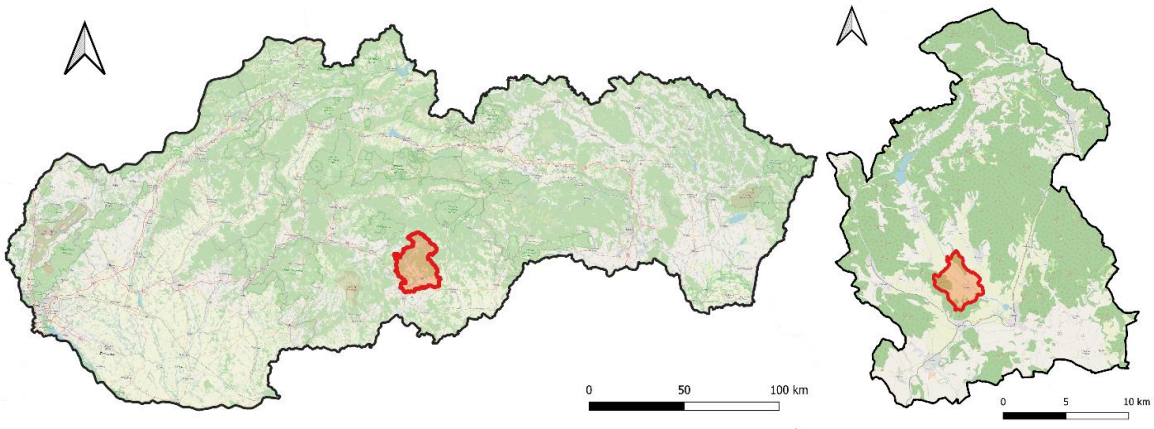


Fig 1. Location of Poltár district within Slovakia and Rovňany municipality within the district. Source: own processing

Poltár district is, due to its high long-time unemployment rate, one of the least developed regions within the Banská Bystrica Self-governing and also within the country. According to the Slovak Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the registered unemployment rate reached 12.95% in January 2022. More than 87% of job seekers are disadvantaged in the labour market – 69.10% of them are more than 12 months without a regularly paid job, 35.52% are older than 50 or 34.14% are with low education. The average unemployment in the Banská Bystrica region was the third highest (9.30% in January 2022). Unemployment disparities between Slovak districts are considerable. The lowest rate was 3.19% (Ilava district) and the highest was 20.26% (Rimavská Sobota district). The Slovak average rate was 6.96% in January 2022.

Territory of the Poltár district has been reaching a negative balance of migration over the last 20 years. During the period, mainly productive residents emigrated. More than 40% of emigrants were from 25 to 39 years old (Integrated territorial strategy of Banská Bystrica region 2021–2027).

For the last 20 years, the regional GDP of the Banská Bystrica region (per capita) has been the second-lowest among Slovak regions. In 2020, its share was 71.75% of the average national domestic product. The gross value added in the current prices is the lowest in the Banská Bystrica region (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022). Economic activity in this district is very low. In 2020, only 31.71 enterprises per 1000 economically active persons were located there (while in the Banská Bystrica region, it was 65.63 and in the Slovak Republic 118.92). The situation for entrepreneurs – physical persons is better. In the Poltár district, there is 84.98 of them per 1000 economically active persons registered (while in the Banská Bystrica region 98.44 and in the Slovak Republic 127.91) (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022).

The selection of the subject of the research is based on its unique characteristics that are outstanding in the Slovak environment, thus can serve as an example of the best practice.

The main method used in conducting the research was interpretive case research – a case study. The suitability of the method is justified by its ability to allow researchers to systematically analyse and synthesized the findings what serves as a backbone for the emergence of new concepts or patterns (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

The enterprise, that represents the object of the analysis, was established in 2019 by the Office of the Banská Bystrica Self-governing Region (BBSGR) in the village Rovňany. In the same year, the enterprise was registered as a social enterprise in the Register run by the Slovak Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The enterprise is a work integration social enterprise (WISE) and as of October 15th, 2021, it employed 11 people, 95% of whom belong to the group of disadvantaged and vulnerable in relation to the labour market. The main economic activities (according to the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities SK NACE Rev. 2) of the enterprise include:

- agriculture and forestry and the provision of services in agriculture, horticulture, forestry and hunting,
- wood processing and production of wood components and products,
- preparation of buildings and construction, realization of exteriors and interiors,
- extracurricular educational activities and organizing events.

It is also a workplace where practical training of students of study branches related to agriculture takes place in schools established by the BBSGR. The company's agricultural production is intended primarily for canteens in schools and social services homes.

The main motives behind this research include assessment of the following aspects of SE's operation: the reasons for its establishment, the setting of the current activities, which result in a business model and finally, the relationship between the enterprise and its environment in form of effects. The process of the formulation of research questions could be defined as iterative process as the original ideas were partially refined throughout the analysis.

The following research questions were formulated for the case study:

- What was the motive for starting the social enterprise?
- What is the business model of the social enterprise?
- What are the drivers and barriers of the model?
- What are the direct and indirect, intended and unintended, local and regional effects of the social enterprise activities?

The source of information and data for addressing the research questions were of primary and secondary nature. The secondary data cover domestic and foreign studies and scientific papers, grey literature as well as valid legislation. The content analysis was used during the processing the information and it resulted in the elaboration of the theoretical background for the analysis.

The primary data were collected using in-depth interviews with various types of actors of the model. Convenience sampling was used for selecting the respondents. The research team conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with key persons of the social entrepreneurship – managers of the social enterprise (2), mentor (1) and other employees (7 integrated and 2 non-integrated) of the social enterprise, management of a secondary school (3), students (3) and masters (2) of vocational training and representatives of the regional office of the Social Economy Institute (3) – a total of 23 respondents. The interviews took place in mid-2021. The interview with the social enterprise manager (and at the same time author of the idea of the agro-tree ecosystem and principal shaper of the model) lasted 2 hours. Interviews with the other respondents lasted from 30 to 60 minutes each and were conducted either at the office of the social enterprise or online. Interview questions were open-ended, involving a stem-probe technique. Questions focused on a description of the model, and they were aimed at explaining motives, business model, drivers, barriers and effects of social entrepreneurship in the enterprise. For processing the transcripts of interviews, manual coding was used.

The intention behind the method selection was to obtain an in-depth internal perspective on the existence and functioning of the selected enterprise. External perspectives were beyond the scope of the study and could be a subject of further research.

3. Results

The case study brings a response to questions, which can be of interest when considering effects of social economy (either intended or unintended). It serves as a baseline for social value assessment. It is necessary to have a knowledge on motivations and objectives of the action to assess it properly. This paper also brings information on drivers and barriers in regional conditions of the Banská Bystrica region and in the national context of the Slovak Republic.

3.1 Motivations

The social economy creates a possibility for execution of the competencies of regional (and local) self-government in several areas. *'The main motive was to produce local healthy food that would end up on the tables of our children and grandparents, who are clients of social services homes, create employment for disadvantaged and vulnerable people and make agriculture and agricultural education more attractive'* (executive manager of the social enterprise).

The more fragmented motives for establishing the social enterprise in Rovňany were as follows:

- integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups into the labour market,
- increase of employment – creation of jobs for secondary schools' graduates,
- making agriculture more attractive to young people,
- agricultural development in the least developed regions,
- development and attractiveness of agricultural education,
- increasing the social recognition of agricultural professions,

- local food production, food self-sufficiency,
- increase of the BBSGR's property (revitalization of dilapidated buildings and orchard of former breeding and genetic station).

The motives mentioned here are to some extent identical to those of WISE. The findings are in line with those of Defourney & Nyssens (2017) who assigned such motivations especially, to public sector social enterprises. According to these authors, public sector SE is typically oriented toward missions covering general interest, which can also be confirmed in this case.

The idea of an agro-forestry ecosystem was developed by the executive manager of the enterprise. *'I have had the idea of an agro-tree ecosystem in my head since my university studies. Management of the Office of the BBSGR has provided me with a place to implement it'* (executive manager of the social enterprise). The factors that influenced the choice of sector and locality were the agricultural and forestry character of the region and the location of the facilities of the unused breeding and genetic station in the least developed district with high unemployment.

3.2 Model

Agro-tree ecosystem of BBSGR, Ltd. is a registered social enterprise according to Act No. 112/2018 Coll. on the social economy and social entrepreneurship. It operates as a social farming enterprise focused on the labour integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

A business model can be defined as a way of using resources to achieve planned or intended results. In general, the main components of the business model are: resources (financial, human, tangible and intangible assets that the company uses in its business activities), activities (through which it converts resources into a product or service – quantitative or qualitative value), actors (partners, suppliers, customers and others), relationships, value creation method, distribution channels, etc. (Zott et al., 2011, DaSilva & Trkman, 2014, Geissdoerfer et al., 2018). All these components will be analysed further in the following text.

The social economy business model is different from the conventional business model. The main features of the social entrepreneurship model are: emphasis on the creation of social and societal value, democratic management of the company regardless of the ownership and reinvestment of part or all of the profit in the social and environmental goals of the company (Chreneková et al., 2021).

The WISE model is characterized by the fact that the employees themselves are also beneficiaries of the social value. In addition to economic value in the form of income, it provides also social value (most often labour and social integration), health effects (through activity and labour therapy), acquiring work habits and skills, increasing the chances of employment in the open labour market, etc. According to the SE's model typology proposed by Mair et al. (2012), this SE belongs to Cluster 2 that is characterised by addressing issues such as the environment, education, and health. The most distinctive characteristic of this type of SEs is that human capital is placed at the centre of their efforts to contribute to social change.

As the social enterprise in Rovňany is characterized by the connection of social entrepreneurship in agriculture with the dual education, its business model in all components acquires innovative aspects.

If taking into account the SE typology proposed by Defourny, Nyssens, and Brolis (2020), the SE in Rovňany would probably fall into the category of "entrepreneurial non-profit model". There are four clusters of SEs belonging to this category, however, it is rather difficult to identify the one cluster, as SE in Rovňany is characterized by features that fluidly move in between the clusters.

3.2.1 Resources

The work integration social enterprise in Rovňany manages 3 ha of agricultural land (of which 1.5 ha is arable land and 1.5 ha is an orchard), which it leased as land originally used by the Secondary School in town Poltár. The buildings and facilities of the social enterprise were originally used by a breeding and

genetic station in Rovňany. It is currently owned by the BBSGR. This property also includes an orchard planted in 1950 with 1,300 fruit trees.

As of October 15th, 2021, the social enterprise employed 11 people, 95% of whom belong to the group of disadvantaged and vulnerable in relation to the labour market. It plans to employ 20–25 integrated employees within five years. One of the employees is a mentor, who guides the employees during the work activities. Pupils/trainees from secondary vocational schools (agricultural fields) can also be considered as human resources of the enterprise. During the practical training, they contribute to value creation and, at the same time, acquire practical skills. After graduating from secondary school, they can find a job in a social enterprise. *'It is our goal to provide them with work and keep them in the territory when they finish their studies'* (executive manager of the social enterprise).

The financial resources were initially provided by the BBSGR office as the founder. When establishing the company, the BBSGR contributed by EUR 74,000. Further, it is assumed that the social enterprise will be financially and economically self-sufficient and no additional financial contributions from the founder will be required.

3.2.2 Activities

Activities for the transformation of resources to economic and social value belong to the core elements of a business model. Economic activities of the analysed entity are aimed at: agriculture, forestry and the provision of services in agriculture, horticulture and forestry, wood processing and production of wood components and products, and education. Works in construction are currently carried out only for their own purposes.

Within the framework of agricultural activities, the main principle of production is the combination of cultivating field crops with the planting of fruit and ornamental trees in the agro-tree ecosystem without the use of synthetic chemical products. The main product of plant production is garlic. In 2021, it was planted on an area of 0.8 hectares. The company also grows raspberries, tomatoes, peppers and lavender. The trees are apples, pears, black walnut and white acacia. The orchard is used extensively and intensively. Part of it is also used for experiments with types of mulching, irrigation, terracing, etc. After the establishment of the company, the orchard was revitalized and fenced – 500 new trees (apples and pears of the original varieties) were planted.

The method of cultivation (combination of the field crops and trees) contributes to mitigating the adverse effects of climate change – it helps keep moisture in the production site. The company has built a system for capturing rainwater from the roofs of buildings.

Beekeeping production is focused on the reproduction of bee families. Joinery production is also associated with beekeeping (wooden hives, frames, insect houses, etc.), which, among other things, provides work in the winter, when no agricultural activities are carried out.

The economic activity of the social enterprise is also connected with dual education via intensive cooperation with 5 secondary agricultural schools founded by the BBSGR. Schools also act as guarantors of the company's professional activities.

Based on the experience gained in setting up and managing their two social enterprises, BBSGR's employees provide consultations and advice in the field of social economy for start-ups or existing social enterprises. It is mainly about transferring the know-how and experience in the field of legislation and financing.

3.2.3 Actors and relationships

Social entrepreneurship is characterized by networking and cooperation with other actors in the social economy – public administration entities, clients, client organizations, members of the local community, etc. The partnership seems to be of high importance for SEs' effectiveness (De Silva et al., 2019).

The key actor of social entrepreneurship in the BBSGR is the Office of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region through its Development Agency, non-for-profit organisation. The role of the Development Agency in the field of social economy is to:

- create their own social enterprises,
- provide professional advice and assistance to all types of entities (NGOs, municipalities, private companies, agricultural entities) in the establishment and management of social enterprises,
- assist in the elaboration of project proposals, and
- raise awareness in the field of social economy.

The Office is the founder of two social enterprises – the construction social enterprise Development services of the BBSGR, Ltd. with its registered office in Brezno and the agro-tree social enterprise Agro-tree ecosystem of the BBSGR, Ltd. based in Rovňany. The Office and its organizations act as customers for products and services produced and provided by the social economy entities.

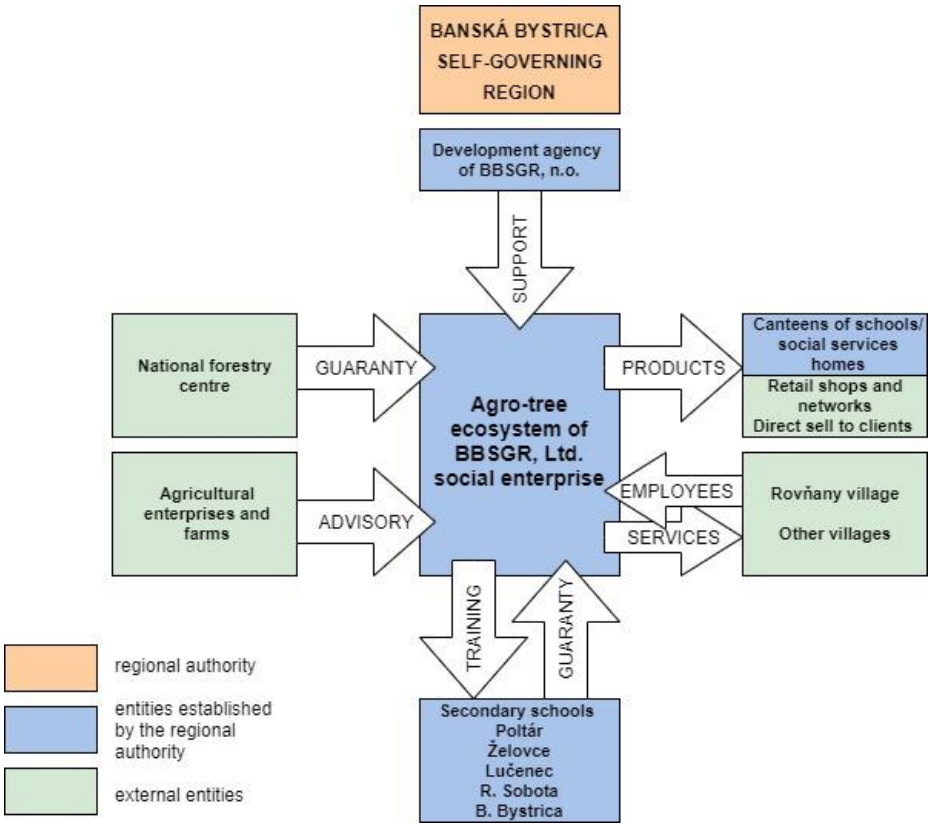


Fig 2. Links between main actors of social entrepreneurship in Rovňany. Source: own processing

The key partner of the social enterprise in Rovňany is the Secondary Vocational School in Poltár (Figure 2). Other secondary vocational schools with education in field of agriculture and horticulture founded by the BBSGR also cooperate with the social enterprise. Secondary schools provide the social enterprise with a professional guarantee for its activities in those fields that are taught at these schools. The School in Poltár is a professional guarantor in the field of agriculture and vegetable growing, School in Želovce in the field of horticulture, orchard management and fruit growing, Banská Bystrica School in the field of beekeeping. The enterprise provides schools with space for practical teaching of students.

The National Forestry Centre is a research and advisory authority established by the Slovak Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The centre is a professional guarantor for activities in the field of forest tree growing as a part of agro-forestry systems.

Farms located in the area provide know-how on the basis of informal relationships.

The social enterprise provides services for the municipality of Rovňany and other municipalities in the maintenance of public spaces and other activities.

Canteens of facilities founded by the BBSGR (schools and social services homes) are the main customer for the company's production. Products are also distributed to the sales network.

3.2.4 Value creation

Compared to conventional farming, social entrepreneurship in this sector creates more types of societal values as it interlinks multifunctional agriculture and novel social services for urban and rural areas (Moruzzo et al., 2020).

The spectrum of work in agriculture provides an opportunity for people with various disadvantages (Elings, 2011). It provides conditions for the employment of people, who are excluded from the labour market for various reasons (Hudcová et al., 2018) or whose condition does not allow them to work in a proper work commitment and rhythm. Agricultural production and primary processing of products with a high share of manual labour are particularly suitable for social agriculture.

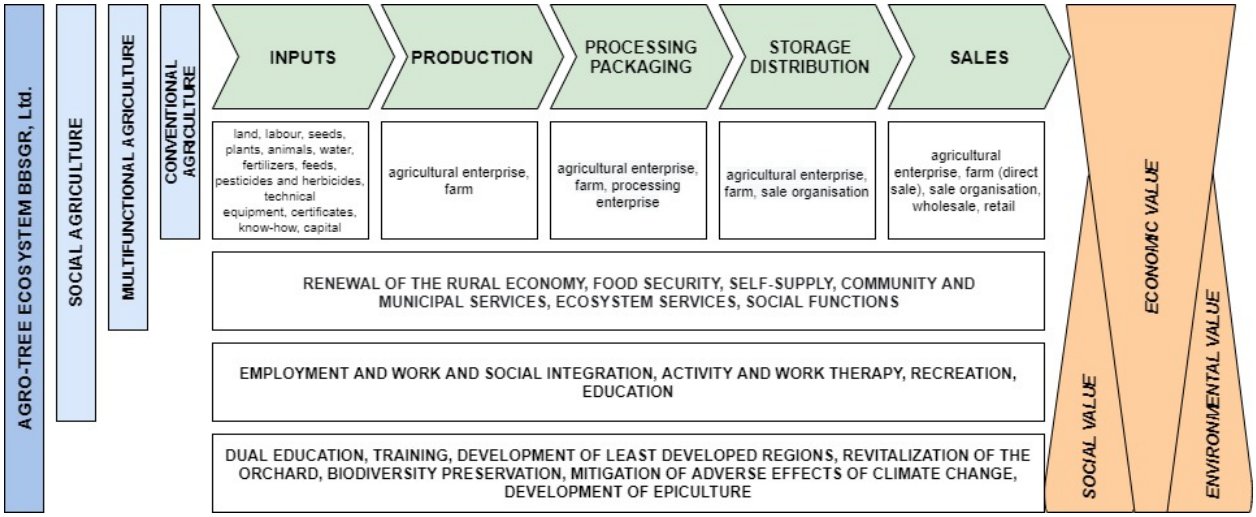


Fig 3. Value chain of Agro-tree ecosystem BBSGR, Ltd. Source: own processing

The social enterprise in Rovňany can be characterized as a social agricultural enterprise fulfilling the definition of multifunctional agriculture (where agriculture performs also other functions apart from production of food). Compared to the economic value, it creates a higher share of social and environmental value (this fact is illustrated in figure 2). The entire profit of the company is reinvested in its social goals. Although its registered measurable social impact is employment and work integration, the company creates a number of other forms and types of societal value (these are illustrated in figure 2 and described in details in the following chapter).

3.3 Change

If any entity is an author or creator of a positive societal change, it creates societal (social or environmental) value. Social value involves the pursuit of societal betterment through the removal of barriers that hinder social inclusion, the assistance to those temporarily weakened or lacking a voice and the mitigation of undesirable side effects of economic activity (Smith & Stevens, 2010). Societal value is, on one hand, the value of change that one experiences, and, on the other hand, the value that society gains if such change occurs (Chreneková et al., 2021).

The final beneficiaries of the activities of the social enterprise in Rovňany, thus the beneficiaries of the social change, are:

- employees and workers (especially those in labour and social integration),

- students of agricultural professions,
- consumers and clients of the products and services,
- residents of the territory in which the social enterprise operates.

3.3.1 Change for employees and students

In addition to employment and work integration, the company also provides for its integrated employee´s social integration and health effects, work habits and skills, increased employability in the open labour market, etc. Respondents stated that their lives improved in material and social terms *'my income has increased; housing is being addressed*' (integrated employee 2). They feel like members of the community, in which they have a place. *'We are here as one family... no quarrels. We help each other.'* (integrated employee 1). They are aware of their value and they appreciate the possibility of self-realization *'I'm glad I have a job'* (integrated employee 2). *'I like it here; I would like to stay permanently*' (integrated employee 2). They are proud of the skills they have acquired. *'I will be certified to work with a saw and brush cutter'* (integrated employee 1). They also see the value in preserving the tradition of horticulture *'my grandfather founded this orchard and now I work here'* (integrated employee 4).

The mentor who works with them on a daily basis leads them to collective responsibility, communication and cooperation in the work they do. *'We are a very good team, also because we do work control together... success or guilt is also collective because at work they must check each other*' (mentor).

Employees appreciate the presence of trainees. '*They want to work and they want to learn. They have never refused help. I advised them when they had failed'* (employee 1).

Students acquire work skills. *'We are participating in the treatment of trees, now I know how to do it'* (student 1). In a social enterprise, they are given the opportunity to develop their potential and to participate in innovation. The company can become their future employer.

3.3.2 Change for regional development

The benefits of the social enterprise for the region include increasing employment, harmonizing the labour market, building human capital and social inclusion for people who are excluded from the labour market and society. *'We are not interested in profit, we are not interested in technological innovation, we are interested in regional employment*' (executive manager of the social enterprise).

Social enterprises with a focus on agriculture and horticulture provide various services to municipalities and local communities (Sempik, 2010, Moruzzo et al., 2020). The social enterprise in Rovňany provides services for the municipality of Rovňany and the surrounding municipalities, such as maintenance of public spaces, landscaping, mowing, etc. The company contributes also to the preservation of cultural values and heritage in the form of the development of traditional industries, such as beekeeping or traditional horticulture.

Secondly, the company helps to increase economic activity in the region by creating new companies and new business opportunities, as the know-how is transferred by means of advisory services to those who want to start. Providing the conditions for practical training and employment opportunities for graduates contributes to retaining young skilled people in the region.

In the long term, the social economy has an impact on reducing poverty and social tensions at the regional and national levels.

3.3.3 Change for the environment and human health

The main environmental benefits of social enterprise are regulatory and cultural ecosystem services and, in particular, the reduction of the adverse effects of climate change. The agri-forest ecosystem helps to:

- keep moisture in the territory,
- mitigate soil erosion,

- regulate runoff conditions and protect against floods,
- create a microclimate for organisms and microorganisms,
- promote species and ecosystem diversity,
- preserve traditional varieties,
- maintain the landscape.

Organic farming contributes to maintaining the purity and quality of the soil and to improving the soil structure. Rainwater harvesting from roofs reduces irrigation water consumption. *'We have made a water retention measure with 20 thousand litres of rainwater tanks'* (executive manager of the social enterprise).

Beekeeping – pollination contributes to the development of the life cycles and processes.

The nature of agricultural production – working close to nature, with living material (plants and animals) has an impact on the psyche and mental health of employees or clients (Elsey et al., 2014). It leads to a sense of responsibility for the treated live plants and animals *'My duty is to care for live trees'* (integrated employee 7).

The production of healthy local food is beneficial for consumers and local communities, clients of social services homes, pupils and students of schools.

3.4 Drivers and barriers

The most important factor in the functioning of the model of combining social entrepreneurship and dual education in Rovňany is the understanding of the benefits and support from the founder. The fact that the secondary school in Poltár and other cooperating schools, same as the social enterprise, are within the founding competence of the BBSGR, facilitates decision-making and management processes and coordination of actors.

In this setting, the social enterprise can draw support from instruments under the Least Developed Districts Act, the Social Economy and Social Entrepreneurship Act and the Employment Promotion Act.

In Slovakia, the Act No. 112/2018 Coll. on the social economy and social entrepreneurship creates conditions for the support of social entrepreneurship of all types of entities, including regional self-government. On the other hand, this law excludes investment aid for enterprises operating in primary agricultural production.

Additionally, at the national level, the incompatibility of education legislation is an obstacle to the introduction of a similar model by other actor in the country. Legislation regulating dual education (Act No. 61/2015 Coll. on vocational education) is binding and restrictive. It does not sufficiently take into account the specificities of practical training carried out outdoors – in the forest, orchard or field.

Activities of the social enterprise in the agricultural sector has advantages but also disadvantages arising from the nature of production. The advantage is the spectrum of work and work in nature. Dependence on external factors – weather, alternation of agrotechnical cycles, seasonality and uneven workload during the year – is the disadvantage.

Another barrier is also formed by the lack of educational opportunities for professions in the social economy and social agriculture (combination of knowledge of agricultural technology, animal production and social work) and insufficient opportunities for counselling in Slovakia.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The social economy provides opportunities for solving a number of mainly social problems (Bornstein, 2003). Specific results can be achieved through different models of social enterprises (Mair et al., 2012). Such a model, where social enterprise is set up by a local or regional self-government entity has a special importance and position, as it can become a tool for fulfilling the competencies of self-government and

an engine of community development (see. e.g., Eversole et al., 2014). On the other hand, it needs to be emphasized that such models are rather unusual in CEE countries (Defourny & Nyssens, 2021).

The Office of the Banská Bystrica Self-governing Region, as one of the key actors in social entrepreneurship in the region, is the founder of two social enterprises. This fact is in line with the claim of Mair et al. (2012, p. 355) that: 'public authorities can be the beneficiaries, clients, and/or actors with the critical knowledge or resources to push social change'.

An innovative model was recognized in the case of one of them – the Agro-tree ecosystem of BBSGR, Ltd. This model combines the social economy, more specifically social agriculture, with dual education.

The main motives and intentions for running the social enterprise not only reflect the regional self-government competencies but go far beyond their framework. Integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups into the labour market, skills obtaining and jobs creation for agricultural schools' graduates, local food production and self-sufficiency are the principal issues that motivated the establishment of the social enterprise. It is rather a common scenario that SEs are trying to address more than one social issue (Spear, 2006), on the other hand, in Slovak conditions, such an approach represents a unique and innovative way of fulfilling the notion of Zahra et al. (2009) that one of the greatest skills of many social entrepreneurs is their ability to inspire, marshal and mobilize the efforts in the pursuit of overall social wealth.

This innovative model analysed in the case study is focused on the connection between a social enterprise operating in the field of crop production, fruit production and apiculture with dual education based on the cooperation with five secondary vocational schools aimed at agricultural theoretical teaching and practical training. Resources for running such a model are innovatively combined. Human resources are apart from regular employees co-covered by disadvantaged and vulnerable people and students. Hrivnák et al. (2020) described social inclusion and integration within the rural social economy as a crucial innovation leading to rural transformation.

Know-how for social enterprise management comes from the founding authority and the know-how for agricultural technology, fruit production, forestry and apiculture is provided by the cooperating secondary schools and other partners, e.g., National Forestry Centre. The partnership could be recognized as the main domain of this category of resources as confirmed by Pearce & Doh (2005) who also recognized it as a crucial factor of success in implementing social initiatives.

Production of the SE is principally placed for preparing daily meals in the canteens of schools and social services houses established by the BBSGR. Municipalities in the region form the demand for services of the social enterprises and at the same time, they provide the supply of labour force. Cooperation with schools and municipalities is therefore mutually beneficial.

The social enterprise fulfils its original intentions. The way how the regional authority manages this activity brings, apart from principal intended change, also multiple indirect intended and direct and indirect unintended effects and synergies. Principal value for employees, integrated employees and students is in employment opportunity, social and work inclusion and skills. Being employed, they have found means for self-fulfilment and development of their potential. This activity, among others, enhances the recognition of agricultural professions and attractiveness of agricultural education. Value for the regional development is triple – economic, social and environmental. Effects of SEs in these three spheres were reported in Slovakia by Chreneková (2019), in international environment e.g., by Eversole et al. (2014), Anderson & Lent (2017) and many others.

Main driver of the described model is understanding of the benefits and support from the regional authorities and the fact that the main creators of the change – the social enterprise and the secondary schools, and also the consumers of products (canteens), are within the founding competence of the BBSGR. This enables the decision-making and smoother coordination of involved actors and creates a fertile ground for partnership.

The model does not work without barriers. There are several bottlenecks in the application of the national law on the social economy and social entrepreneurship and the law on dual education in this model. There

is lack of educational opportunities for professions in the social economy (European Commission, 2020) and social agriculture and still insufficient opportunities for counselling in Slovakia. Moravčíková, Tkáč & Mušinská (2021) pointed out that substantial changes are required in regulation and support of innovations in the Slovak agro-food sector at national and regional policy level.

Entrepreneurship in agriculture has numerous advantages for the social and work integration and therapy close to natural factors (e.g., Elings, 2011), but also disadvantages arising from the nature of production (e.g., seasonality, dependence on external factors, etc.).

Varecha & Fáziková (2019) stressed the necessity to reflect specifics of the territory in the measures of supporting interventions. Additionally, there is the claim of Hayek in Zahra et al. (2009) that entrepreneurial opportunities can only be discovered and acted upon at a very local level. Despite that, we believe that the model analysed in this case study reflects on social issues that are quite frequent in Slovak but also the international environment (problems with social integration, disinterest in agriculture-related jobs, youth unemployment, etc.) and thus it can be applied under the condition of tailoring also to other territories or communities.

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