

Why are social innovations important?

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Social innovation initiatives can create products, services, and models that answer to structural transformations of civic communities – but they are still fragile and unevenly diffused in Central Europe.

This is one of the reasons why the Pontis Foundation has joined an international project that aims to contribute to positive changes in various communities. In September, the Social(i) Makers project launched the Social Innovation Academy, which anybody can sign up for. You can learn by taking the online version of the course or by attending offline trainings in Bratislava and Košice (October – December 2018). Participation in the course and trainings is free – all you need to do is register.

The Social Innovation Academy was launched at the Social Innovation Festival, which took place on 20 September in Bratislava. The festival aimed to present social innovations and social entrepreneurship as sources of positive changes in society. The discussion participants also focused on a presentation of the new social entrepreneurship law and the opportunities it brings to projects, organizations, and institutions. They used specific examples to define the greatest opportunities, challenges, and potential of social innovations and social entrepreneurship.

One of the speakers was Peter Mészáros from Green Foundation, who is responsible for the foundation's Social Innovation Program. He has been working in the non-profit sector for more than ten years and also manages the 3lobit civic association, which supports people with autism spectrum disorder. He has previously led a program aimed at supporting social entrepreneurs called Can Fish Fly? at the PROVIDA Foundation. Mészáros is also active in the areas of consulting, public policy creation, and the creation of social innovation support schemes.

At the festival, he explained the concepts of social innovations and social entrepreneurship, when and why they entered our vocabulary, where these terms were borrowed from, and how social innovations are viewed abroad. Mészáros also focused on the new social economy law. Its adoption should promote social entrepreneurship in Slovakia. Mészáros explained what it means in practice and what type of change will actually come.

In addition to Mészáros, the festival also included talks from:

- Katarína Hutyrková, Co-Founder and Manager of the Nosene second-hand store
- Martina Jakubcová, Head of the Stopy snov (Traces of Dreams) civic association, which organizes theater performances by professional actors together with mentally handicapped clients of the PRIMA Social Services Establishment. They perform at the Ticho a spol. (Silence & Co) chamber theater
- Jana Žišková, who works for the City of Trnava Social Department and focuses on the community planning of social services

The discussion was moderated by Martina Kolesárová from the Pontis Foundation and the festival also included a talk by Andrea Lelovics, who presented the new online course about social innovations.

The Social Innovation Academy is organized by the Pontis Foundation as part of the international Social(i)Makers project, which is a cooperation between seven EU countries and aims to promote interest in social innovations and social entrepreneurship in Central Europe. The course is intended for those who want to take on a more active role in their community by coming up with innovative solutions to the problems they encounter. Being an international online course, it also provides the opportunity for exchanging ideas with people solving similar issues in different regions, countries, and even continents. The online version offers simple, interactive materials about the creation and implementation of socially beneficial projects. You can access the online course on social innovations here: <https://social-innovation-academy.teachable.com>

It is built on the strong expertise of the Social(i)Maker partners, which covers the entire scope of social innovation — from becoming an active citizen to creating, funding and implementing your own solutions to the societal challenges of today. It doesn't matter whether you are a policy maker, a driven entrepreneur, an investor with an impact agenda, an inspired academic, a passionate donor or an engaged citizen willing to be part of the solution (instead of the problem). Seven systematic, targeted, practice-driven and simple but comprehensive course modules will guide you through the entire cycle of social innovation.

The course is free and open to everyone. The seven modules it consists of are: Active Citizenship - Be Part of the Change; Social Business Entrepreneurship for Social Good; Technology and Creativity for Social Innovation: Explore and Test Your Innovative Solution; Stakeholder Engagement: We Can make a Change, Together; Impact Assessment - How to Measure and Manage Impact; Impact Finance - finance Your Social Adventure; Social Innovation Policies: Co-create Policies for Social Innovation.

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