

# ATTITUDES OF YOUNG RURAL RESIDENTS FROM ŁÓDZKIE VOIVODESHIP TOWARDS THEIR OWN INNOVATIVENESS

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**Abstract.** In a knowledge-based economy, innovativeness is a quality desired on the labour market. It may increase young people's employment opportunities. The article discusses the issue of young rural residents' attitudes towards their own innovativeness. It presents the results of sociological research carried out in 2014–2015 in Łódzkie voivodeship among upper secondary school students from rural areas. Three components of the innovative attitude were analysed: cognitive, emotional/evaluative, and behavioral. The study was carried out using a case study method and an auditorium survey involving a total number of 209 people. On the basis of the study, conclusions were made referring to weak points of young rural residents' attitude to their own innovativeness, and it was demonstrated that relatively few of them display an innovative attitude.

**Key words:** innovativeness, innovations, knowledge-based economy, rural youth, attitude

## INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest problems of the contemporary labour market in the European Union is unemployment among young people (Eurostat, 2015, p. 2, 5). Discrimination of this age group, combined with the limited number of vacancies, many of which involve “junk contract” (civil law contract) employment, result in delaying the moment when they can really become adult, independent individuals and start

their own families (European Commission, 2014, p. 12–13).

The requirements young people face on the labour market are not only connected with knowledge, qualifications and formal skills, i.e. those that may be acquired in formal education. They also include experience and personality traits or predispositions corresponding to the specificity of knowledge-based economy (Prystrom, 2012, p. 50–61). An important element of such economy is the ability to generate and implement technological, organizational, social or ecological innovations (Bojewska, 2015, p. 31–37; Najder-Stefaniak, 2010, p. 14–15). Individuals who are open to change and display creativity, skills and competencies that facilitate cooperation may enhance their chances on the labour market (Król, 2014, p. 21).

Innovativeness, understood as a set of individual traits which motivate people to act creatively and enable them to present and implement new ideas, is not a strong point of young people in Poland (cf. Kozusznik, 2010, p. 17; Odorzyńska-Kondek, 2011, p. 138). They manifest low self-evaluation of qualities such as creativity and taking the initiative (Górniak, 2014, p. 195–198, 203) and hardly ever attend extracurricular classes that help develop creativity (cf. Kasperek and Magierowski, 2014, p. 6). Moreover, only approximately 1/3 of them do any social activity (Boguszewski et al., 2014, p. 127), and available studies show that social activity promotes openness to collaboration and the formation

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of social networks, being the usual source of various innovations (cf. Rutten and Boekema, 2007; Machnik-Słomka, 2014, p. 24). It is so because innovations not only originate with human capital but also with social capital, defined as the potential of cooperation between individuals and communities based on trust and shared norms and values (Lubimow-Burzyńska, 2014, p. 84).

Such an innovative attitude is determined by personality traits but also by broadly understood social influence. It has an objective dimension but also a subjective one, which reflects, not the actual predispositions the person has, but rather their ideas and beliefs in that regard. The article presents the results of sociological research carried out in the years 2014–2015 in the Łódzkie voivodeship among upper secondary school students from rural areas. Its objective was to investigate the attitude of young rural residents (people living in rural areas and attending upper secondary schools) towards their own innovativeness. That attitude was identified with the subjective self-evaluation of their innovativeness, and the aim of the study was to characterize its weak points.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the presented research<sup>1</sup> innovativeness was defined as a set of individual traits which motivate one to create and implement various kinds of innovation (i.e. technological, organizational, ecological and social ones). Those traits referred to the resources of human and social capital of the participants. Following the definition by Stefan Nowak (1973, p. 23), the respondents' attitude to their own innovativeness was described as beliefs regarding the characteristics of innovativeness, relatively constant dispositions to evaluate it, and behaviours accompanying its development. Three components of the innovative attitude of youths living in rural and urban-rural

<sup>1</sup> The study was carried out within the framework of the project "Attitudes of young rural residents in Poland towards entrepreneurship and innovativeness and the opportunities to apply them for local development – Sustainable development of rural areas of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region" implemented by a team of employees and doctoral students of the Institute of Sociology, University of Lodz, within the framework of an agreement with the Foundation of Assistance Programmes for Agriculture (FAPA), project code B141120000059.03, MPK code 2122528000, agreement no. KSOW/63/0692014, performance period: 29/09/2014 – 28/02/2015.

communes were analysed: cognitive, emotional/evaluative, and behavioural. The index question regarding the cognitive component referred to the students knowledge about innovations and innovativeness. The index questions regarding the emotional/evaluative component referred to the respondents' self evaluation concerning traits attributed to innovative persons and their evaluation of behaviour of peers who demonstrate different types of innovative personality. The index questions regarding the behavioural component referred to creative activities the participants took on their own initiative beyond the compulsory school classes (e.g. creation and publication of their own texts, music, graphics or other works), as well as their involvement in broadly understood community work, i.e. any activities taken for the common good, which may promote the development and use of the innovative potential.

The study was carried out on a sample of upper secondary school students aged 16–18, using a case study method and an auditorium survey. This stage of education was chosen because after its completion one can become professionally active, which requires the students to reflect on the characteristics of the labour market and their own future on that market<sup>2</sup>. It was carried out within the Łódzkie voivodeship. Public databases of Education Information System were used to select upper secondary schools located in towns or villages with the population below 10 thousand in rural and urban-rural communes (49 schools). Letters with invitations to participate in the study were sent to all of them. The principals of 6 schools expressed their consent to have the study conducted<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> In Poland, vocational schools and technical secondary schools can grant students certificates confirming their professional qualifications (upon the passing of exams to confirm qualifications in the profession). The completion of a 3-year vocational school is usually tantamount to entering the labour market. After completing 4 years of education at a technical secondary school, one can enter the labour market or (on the condition of passing the maturity exam) continue at university. General secondary schools, which last 3 years, do not provide any professional titles and usually their completion means the student will continue education to obtain some professional qualifications, either at university or at a post-secondary school. However, sometimes graduates enter the labour market without any particular profession. Students completing this type of school also need to reflect on their future on the labour market.

<sup>3</sup> Sampling was not random in this case, so the findings of the study cannot be generalized to the whole population.

In order to gather the desired information, the auditorium survey technique (frequently used in research carried out at educational institutions) was applied. It is a technique of gathering materials based on the process of mutual communication between the researcher and the participant, involving the participant answering the researcher's questions in writing. It involves many respondents completing the questionnaire in the presence of the interviewer in the same room and at the same time. Thanks to the interviewer's supervision (including possible explanations, assistance in the case of problems or doubts, and collecting the questionnaires personally from the respondents), the researcher has better control of the process of respondents completing the questionnaires, and thus of the quality and completeness of the materials to be analysed (Żmijewska-Jędrzejczyk and Dyjas-Pokorska, 2005, p. 300). A total of 209 persons participated in the study<sup>4</sup>.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPONENTS OF RURAL YOUTHS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEIR OWN INNOVATIVENESS

The respondents obtained the information on innovations during classes such as the basics of entrepreneurship, as well as practical classes, field workshops or form tutor classes, when the issues regarding the students' future (e.g. the choice of further education, students' chances on the labour market, or extracurricular classes which might provide additional competencies and skills) are discussed. The subject of individuals' innovativeness, in turn, had been discussed during classes concerning micro entrepreneurship and predispositions to conduct business activity, and during classes focused on functioning in various social communities ("Innovativeness was mentioned when we talked about the choice of a micro enterprise", "We learnt what innovativeness was during the lesson on groups and behaviours"). Importantly, slightly more than 2/5 of the participants had never met in their school education such significant issues concerning the properties of knowledge-based economy as innovations and innovativeness, and

<sup>4</sup> The largest part of the sample was students of technical secondary schools (77%); 14.4% of the participants attended general secondary schools, and only 8.6%, vocational schools. The aim of the analysis was not to compare the self-evaluation of students attending different types of school.

slightly more than 1/3 declared to have been taught about it in a very limited scope<sup>5</sup>. Apart from limited knowledge on innovations, the selective character of that knowledge was a weak point of the participants' attitude to their own innovativeness. The respondents were able to provide examples of technological and organizational innovations, but not social ones. Students declared that the subject of innovations had been discussed in terms of implementing modern technologies, the development of mechanization, new products on the market, and new agricultural production technologies ("We discussed the issue of modern agriculture", "We talked about how various equipment can help run modern farms"). The examples of organizational innovations the students mentioned were new ways of company management ("It was a lesson about management"). None of the respondents provided an example of social innovations aimed at solving various social problems with the participation of groups or communities that are affected by those problems (MacCallum and Mehmood, 2010, p. 4; Sharra and Nyssens, 2010; Adams and Hess, 2010, p. 150). Their implementation does not involve considerable financial expenditure but facilitates the solution of social problems such as unemployment among young people, e.g. by supporting the establishment of innovative businesses by them. It needs to be stressed that the problem with defining innovations does not only refer to young people. Several research projects carried out in Polish rural areas (involving adult Poles samples) have demonstrated that if their residents do try to define the term innovation, they usually understand it as new technological solutions (Tuziak, 2013, p. 246), only implemented by largest and wealthiest organizations (Zajda, 2012, p. 74).

It is worth emphasizing that the unemployment rate among young people in Poland is approximately three times higher than among other categories of labour

<sup>5</sup> The respondents who had participated in classes devoted to the subject of innovation and innovativeness evaluated them positively. Approximately 90% of them admitted that the material had been presented in a clear, understandable way, and 91.4%, that the classes had been attractive for the students. Nearly 89% of the respondents indicated that interactive methods had been used during those classes. Slightly above 86% of them also mentioned the use of modern technologies. What is important, almost 90% of the participants declared that the information they had received during those classes was important in everyday life, and 88% of them, that it had been a pleasure to take part in such classes.

market participants (Federowicz and Sitek, 2011, p. 14). The fear of difficulties with finding a job is mainly dominant in villages and smaller towns. There the belief is becoming more and more prevalent that the solution to problems with finding a job is to go abroad (Boguszewski and Kowalczyk, 2014, pp. 16–25). Effective implementation of social innovations oriented at solving the problem of professional passivity among young people is conditional on their participation in the process. It is facilitated by knowledge on the specificity of such innovations, including the awareness that implementing these innovations does not have to involve considerable financial expenditure. Knowledge on different types of innovation, including social innovations, proves to be useful too in applying for EU funds resources for the development of business activity. It can be used to demonstrate that the business is innovative, which means it may be more risky but it also is unique for the local market.

The respondents mainly identified innovativeness with creativity<sup>6</sup> (cf. Król, 2014, p. 21; Nęcka, 2003, p. 19; Brzeziński, 2009, p. 14; Trompenaars, 2010, p. 25). They appreciated the role of school in its development: more than a half of them (51.2%) admitted that the classes they had attended helped them develop their own creativity to a great extent, and slightly more than 13% of the respondents declared that the influence of school classes on the level of their creativity was very high<sup>7</sup>. More than 60% of the participants evaluated their creativity positively. Approximately 72% of them agreed with the statement: “I often have original and unique ideas”<sup>8</sup>, and 60.2%, “I like the most the lessons which give me the opportunity to express my own opinion and present my own views”<sup>9</sup>. More than half of the respondents had a positive attitude to their peers who represented different types of innovativeness. The participants

<sup>6</sup> According to the respondents, an innovative person also manifested openness to change (indicated by 6.7% of the participants) and eloquence (mentioned by 5.7%).

<sup>7</sup> Only 4.3% of the respondents were of the opinion that the role of the school classes in that regard was negligible.

<sup>8</sup> 23.8% of them were not sure (they chose the answer “I neither agree nor disagree”). Only 14.4% of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

<sup>9</sup> 31.1% of the respondents did not have a specific opinion on that. Nearly 9% of the respondents admitted that the lessons which give them the opportunity to express their opinion and present their views were not their favorite ones.

mostly approved of innovative people with the qualities of social activists (almost 91% of them declared they would have a liking for such a person and be able to collaborate with them<sup>10</sup>). They could potentially benefit from the assistance of such people. They were less willing, however, to have social interactions with an innovative but individualistic person<sup>11</sup> (almost 69% of them declared they would have a liking for such a person and be able to collaborate with them). Such people were not a potential source of support for the respondents but did not pose a danger for them, either. The respondents had relatively least liking for demanding innovative people<sup>12</sup>, whose activity might entail extra, unwanted activity on the part of the respondents, although nearly 60% of them still declared that they would like such people and would be willing to have different social interactions with them.

The weak point of the respondents’ attitude to their own innovativeness was their very limited participation in extracurricular classes oriented at the development of creativity. Few of them (7.3%) attended extracurricular classes devoted to that, e.g. involving the creation and publishing of original texts, music, graphic art etc. It is hard to decide whether the reason for such low “popularity” of classes developing creativity is the lack of special interests the respondents would like to develop or the fact that they prefer other forms of developing creativity. Low participation in such classes may result from financial deficiencies, but also from insufficient offer (or no offer at all) of classes suited to students’ interests in close proximity or even in a larger area.

<sup>10</sup> The person was described this way: “Marek is all the time inventing something new, he is always active during classes, he has a lot to say and he often raises his hand. He likes sharing his ideas with classmates, and when he can see someone has a problem with answering a question or doing a task, he helps or does it for that person”.

<sup>11</sup> The person was described this way: “Ola thinks in an unconventional way. She is always inventing or improving something. She takes part in many contests. She often wins and gets many awards. For her it is the most important to be able to develop her passions, but at school she’s quiet. She is not very willing to share her ideas”.

<sup>12</sup> The person was described this way: “Zuza is very creative and active during the lessons. She often raises her hand to answer or to do some extra tasks. She assumes the role of the leader, she has many good ideas so she tries to force others to follow them. She often initiates interesting projects in which the whole class must be involved”.

Interpreting the obtained results, we need to remember that the educational offer in rural areas is poorer (especially in comparison to metropolitan cities), and the social and professional status of parents of rural teenagers makes it impossible for those youths to attend extra classes (Konarzewski, 2012, p. 7; Szalaniec et al., 2015, p. 173–176).

It is also hard to decide whether the social activity of the respondents is the strong or weak point of their attitude to their own innovativeness, since only fewer than 1/3 of them declared to be involved in some forms of social activity. The most frequently mentioned forms were:

- voluntary work out of school
- organization of school events
- voluntary work at school, including assistance for other students with learning difficulties, participation in activities taken for the school community.

Further there were:

- participation in school self-government
- participation in organized charity
- individual activity for the sake of the needy ones and
- work for non-governmental organizations.

Work for church organizations was mentioned less frequently, and the least mentioned form was work in political party youth organizations. What seems especially important in the context of development of their innovativeness is not only the form of the activity but the possibility to display a proactive approach, i.e. taking the initiative and creativity, not just passively doing the assigned tasks. Only 1/5 of the respondents declared the proactive approach, i.e. initiating social activities. The rest of them just performed the assigned tasks. Hence, on the one hand the social activity of the respondents does not differ from declarations of most young Poles concerning that issue: in 2013, membership in an informal group, an association, an organization, a club, a fan group or a religious movement was declared by 32% Poles aged 17–21 (Boguszewski et al., 2014, p. 127). On the other hand, however, the social activity declared by the respondents is very often connected with the school environment and nobody knows whether it will be continued after graduation or what impact it has on the formation of lasting networks of cooperation, mainly heterogeneous ones (particularly valuable for the implementation of different innovations). Besides, the activity mostly involves performing tasks assigned by someone else. It is hard to expect

that everybody who is socially active will only manifest an active attitude, but this attitude can definitely be regarded as particularly significant for the development of young people's innovativeness.

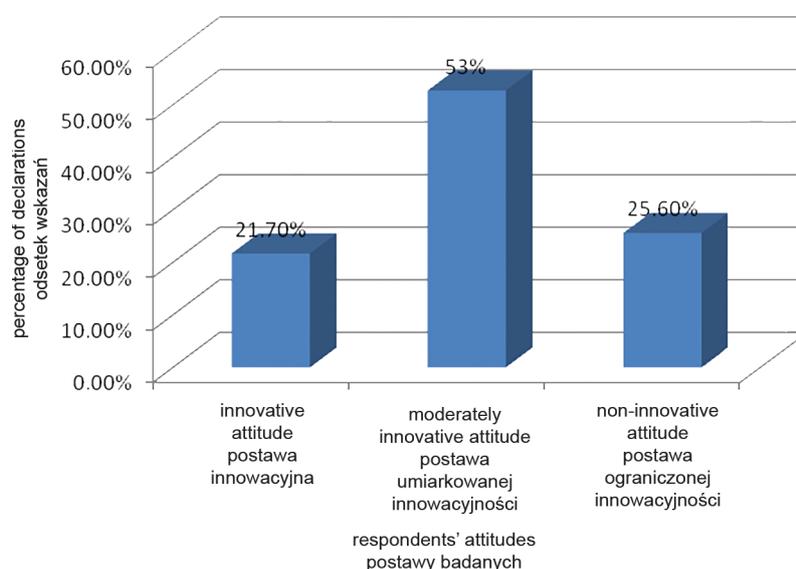
## CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEIR OWN INNOVATIVENESS AS A SYNTHETIC VARIABLE

The synthetic variable defined as the attitude of young rural residents towards their own innovativeness included selected variables transformed to the dichotomous format, i.e.: 1) as part of the cognitive component, the variable: respondents' knowledge about innovations and innovativeness<sup>13</sup>, 2) as part of the emotional/evaluative component: a) respondents' self-evaluation concerning creativity<sup>14</sup> and b) approval of innovative people<sup>15</sup>, 3) as part of the behavioral component: a) attending classes which develop creativity, and b) taking social activity. Although the sampling mode did not justify the verification of statistical significance of correlations between the variables, the analysis of contingency tables proved

<sup>13</sup> Variable transformed to the dichotomous format (values of the variable: 1. the respondent declared to have knowledge on the subject, 2. the respondent declared not to have knowledge on the subject).

<sup>14</sup> The synthetic variable was made up of two variables: the respondents' declaration of whether they often have original and unique ideas (possible responses: 1 – yes, 2 – no) and the respondents' declaration of whether they like the most the classes that give them the opportunity to express their opinion and present their views (possible responses: 1 – yes, 2 – no). The value of the synthetic variable ranged from 2 to 4; 2 – meant a positive evaluation of one's creativity, 3 – a moderately positive evaluation, and 4 – a negative one. The variable was transformed to the dichotomous format, in which 1 meant a positive attitude to one's own creativity, and 2, the lack of positive attitude.

<sup>15</sup> The synthetic variable included 3 variables: 1 – respondents' attitude to innovative people with the qualities of social activists (variable values: 1 – positive attitude, 2 – negative attitude); 2 – respondents' attitude to innovative people with the qualities of individualist (variable values: 1 – positive attitude, 2 – negative attitude); 3 – respondents' attitude to innovative people, whose activity might entail extra, unwanted activity on the part of the respondents (variable values: 1 – positive attitude, 2 – negative attitude). The value of the synthetic variable ranged from 3 to 6. The variable was transformed to the dichotomous format, in which values 1 and 2 meant, respectively: 1 – full approval for different types of innovative personalities, 2 – the lack of full approval for different types of innovative personalities.



**Fig. 1.** Percentage of respondents representing different attitudes towards their own innovativeness

Source: own elaboration.

**Rys. 1.** Odsetek badanych reprezentujących różne postawy względem własnej innowacyjności

Źródło: opracowanie własne.

the co-occurrence of those variables and legitimized including them in the synthetic variable. It was found that the people who declared to have knowledge on innovations and innovativeness more often evaluated their creativity positively<sup>16</sup>. They also more often declared their approval for different types of innovative persons<sup>17</sup> and taking up social activity<sup>18</sup>. The persons who had a positive attitude towards their own creativity slightly more often (than those who had a negative attitude) approved of different types of innovative persons and

declared social activity<sup>19</sup>. The respondents who approved of different types of innovative persons slightly more often participated in extracurricular activities aimed at the development of creativity and engaging in social activity<sup>20</sup>.

The synthetic variable ranged from 5 (the highest rate) to 10 (the lowest). Its mean value was 7.52. The respondents' attitudes to their own innovativeness included: an innovative, moderately innovative (corresponding to the mean variable level), and non-innovative attitude. The first of these attitudes corresponded with values 5, 6, the second – 7, 8, and the remaining values (9 and 10) were associated with the non-innovative attitude. 21.7% of the respondents displayed an innovative attitude, 52.7% of them, a moderately innovative

<sup>16</sup> The difference between declarations concerning the evaluation of one's own creativity by the persons who reported that they had some knowledge on the subject and those who admitted that they had none was approximately 10 percentage points.

<sup>17</sup> The difference between declarations concerning the approval for people representing different types of innovative personalities by the persons who reported that they had some knowledge on innovations and innovativeness and those who admitted that they did not have such knowledge was approximately 7 percentage points.

<sup>18</sup> The difference between declarations by the persons who reported that they had some knowledge on the subject and those who admitted that they had none was approximately 6 percentage points.

<sup>19</sup> The difference in the scores of these two respondent categories was approximately 6 percentage points in the first case and 8 percentage points in the second one.

<sup>20</sup> In both cases the difference in the scores of the two respondent categories (i.e. those who approved of different types of innovative personalities and those who did not) was approximately 6 percentage points.

one, and 25.6% of the participants apparently had a non-innovative attitude.

The obtained results indicate that a relatively low percentage of the participants had an innovative attitude. While the selection of the variables used to study the young people's attitudes to their own innovativeness may not be obvious, several weak points of the participants' self-evaluation of that issue are visible anyway. Overcoming these weak points may result in higher respondents' self-esteem pertaining to their innovativeness, which may translate into better chances on the labour market.

## CONCLUSIONS

The article discusses the issue of young rural residents' attitude towards their own innovativeness, taking into account the fact that, on the one hand, the importance of this quality for the person's chances of the labour market is stressed in literature, and, on the other hand, there are not enough studies devoted to that issue, especially to its subjective dimension. The proposed methodology of studying young people's attitude to their own innovativeness involves the selected characteristics of human and social capital, the ones whose significance is most often emphasized in literature in the context of implementing different innovations and which can be measured for adolescents.

The case study of students of upper secondary schools in one of Polish voivodeships (Łódzkie voivodeship) demonstrated a relatively high percentage of respondents who demonstrated a non-innovative attitude. These were people who declared the lack of knowledge on innovations and innovativeness, a negative attitude to their creativity and individuals who represent different types of innovative personality. They did not attend any extracurricular classes aimed at the development of their creativity and were not socially active.

Some weak points of the participants' subjective dimension of innovativeness were identified. In terms of human capital, the weak point was first of all the respondents' limited knowledge on innovations and innovativeness. Even 2/5 of the respondents from rural areas of Łódzkie voivodeship declared they had never met this subject during school classes, and more than 36% were unable to characterize an innovative person. This proves either a gap in the educational offer they have received or insufficient emphasis on the importance of these issues in the didactic process, as a result

of which the presented information has simply been forgotten. Moreover, the students who had met such issues at school rather identified innovations with the sphere of new (or improved) technologies. They defined innovations from the perspective of novelty. They did not know about social innovations. It is disturbing, because it supports the stereotype that innovation is a very capital-intensive process, only available for largest corporations and innovators, who sell their ideas on the market in expectation of financial profits. What is important, a significant number of the respondents did not acquire knowledge on innovations and innovativeness at school and did not attend any extracurricular classes to develop the traits attributed to innovative people.

In terms of social capital, the weak point of innovativeness of the respondents was mainly limiting their social activity to the school environment and the focus on performing tasks assigned by others. Yet, social activity is not only an opportunity to manifest one's innovativeness but also makes it possible to face different social problems that can be counteracted with the use of social innovations. The lack of such activity on the one hand limits the possibility of forming heterogeneous social networks, which according to the available literature are significant for the development and implementation of different innovations, and, on the other hand, it reduces the chances of looking for different ways of solving social problems, including those that affect young people.

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## POSTAWY MŁODZIEŻY WIEJSKIEJ Z WOJEWÓDZTWA ŁÓDZKIEGO WZGLĘDEM WŁASNEJ INNOWACYJNOŚCI

**Streszczenie.** W gospodarce opartej na wiedzy innowacyjność jest cechą pożądaną na rynku pracy. Może ona zwiększyć szanse zatrudnienia osób młodych. W artykule podjęto problem postawy młodych mieszkańców wsi względem własnej innowacyjności. Zaprezentowano wyniki badań socjologicznych przeprowadzonych w latach 2014–2015 na obszarze województwa łódzkiego wśród uczniów szkół ponadgimnazjalnych. Analizowano trzy komponenty postawy innowacyjnej: poznawczy, emocjonalno-oceniający oraz behawioralny. Badania (metodą studium przypadku) zrealizowano za pomocą ankiety audytoryjnej. Przebadano w sumie 209 osób. Na tej podstawie sformułowano wnioski dotyczące słabych stron postawy młodzieży wiejskiej względem własnej innowacyjności oraz wykazano, że relatywnie niewielki odsetek respondentów cechuje się postawą innowacyjną.

**Słowa kluczowe:** innowacyjność, innowacje, gospodarka oparta na wiedzy, młodzież wiejska, postawa

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