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This doctoral dissertation researches social enterprises (SE) - relatively new phenomena of increasing interest in the scientific community, but still seeking its space in practice. The social enterprises combine economic activity with social sensitivity. They focus their efforts on the implementation of social mission and positive impact on their environment, instead of the pursuit of profit maximization, as is in conventional enterprises. The values, on the basis of which the economic activity is conducted, constitute the key distinguishing feature of social enterprises, deviating from the trends and behaviours prevailing in the market economy. The author of the thesis amazed by this different approach and intrigued by the practical functioning of social enterprises, set out an objective to evaluate the activity of social enterprises for local development on the example of the Sądecki subregion and to demonstrate the relationship between local development and social enterprises. The goal formulated in this way was achieved through theoretical considerations as well as empirical research conducted on the social enterprises' group from the Sądecki subregion. The thesis consists of five chapters, the first three of which are theoretical and touch the topics of: (1) social economy, (2) social enterprises, (3) local development, while the last two are the empirical. Chapter four presents the adopted methodology and analysis of the functioning of social enterprises. Final assessment of the role of the surveyed organizations in local development is presented in chapter five.

The research technique was based on individual, casual interviews with social enterprises' representatives operating in the selected subregion. Nineteen entities with the status of a social enterprise and all social cooperatives (with and without status of a social enterprise) were invited to participate in the interviews. As a result of the following information was received: the scope and method of operation, motives for the creation, relations with the ongoing development, or the financial situation. It allowed to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of social enterprises, which impact their importance for local development. The surveyed social enterprises were assessed based on five criteria explained in the study. All, apart from a few exceptions, were initiated and managed by people familiar with obtaining grants and having experience with such initiatives, at the same time enjoying the possibility of helping others. In most cases, these entities show a high dependence on public funds and connections with the commune, which often determines the "to be or not to be" of the enterprise. The author sees great potential in the activities of social enterprises in the Sądecki subregion, however this potential is not fully utilized.