

BUSINESS STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN LATVIA AND STUDY CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Social entrepreneurs play an important role in the economic and social development of the communities in which they operate. The career aspiration of social entrepreneurs can be encouraged if youths are given early educational exposure when they are young. The purpose of this paper is to work out the proposal for study curriculum in order to include a subject of social entrepreneurship. To attain this aim, the following tasks were put forward: (1) to research literature regarding social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship education; (2) to describe the empirical research methodology; (3) to discuss research results; (4) to propose a module for teaching social entrepreneurship to business students. These tasks account for the structure of the article: introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, conclusions and recommendations. The theoretical basis of the current article consists of recent literature on the social entrepreneurship (taking into account Covid-19 circumstances), social entrepreneurship education, as well as of the legal documents of the Republic of Latvia. The empirical research is bipartite – first, a survey of business students, applying the snowball sampling method, using 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, second, a survey of business school lecturers. The results are interpreted using methods of descriptive and inferential statistics – mean ranking and Kruskal Wallis test. The results of the research have a practical value, as they identify the problematic areas of business education in regard to social entrepreneurship and make it possible to offer a practical solution – an insert module of social entrepreneurship.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneur, business education, entrepreneurship intentions, career aspirations

JEL Classification: L31, I23.

Introduction

The realm of social entrepreneurship without any doubts has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic – traditional sources of funding (grants, fellowships, crowd-funding, venture capitalists, etc.) are thinning out due to the overall economic difficulties and limited finances; managing social goals become more difficult because social demand has shifted drastically and that call for the new social entrepreneurship agility model (Weaver, 2020). Bacqa and Lumpkin (2021) unearthed five fundamental assumptions underlying the field of social entrepreneurship that have been challenged by the crisis – (1) during the pandemic many businesses stepped up to create solutions benefitting the public good, without regard to their initial motives; (2) the social enterprises have more complex relations with various

stakeholders than the regular enterprise, this, according to the authors make them more adaptable to different crisis situations; (3) traditionally, it is believed, the social enterprises use market in order to create a social value, but the situation changes when the market is instable or volatile, this call for refiguration of this basic assumption; (4) the pandemic has made it necessary to give up the “purist” conception of the social enterprise and consider the cross-sector opportunities (social and non-social); (5) the revaluation of the role of the social entrepreneur is needed according to the current crisis circumstances, namely, the emphasis shifts from the individual to the plethora of socially oriented organizations. It is inevitable that these changes should affect also social entrepreneurship teaching in the universities, finding the best form of instruction and student engagement. But this still is a question for further investigation, as it is important first

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to assess the changed situation in the realm of the social entrepreneurship itself. Meanwhile we have to employ the existing theoretical framework for our investigation of business students' attitude to the social entrepreneurship (in relation of its social goals, business goals, or the balance of both). The purpose of this paper is to work out the proposal for study curriculum in order to include a subject of social entrepreneurship. To attain this aim the following tasks were put forward: (1) to research literature regarding social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship education; (2) to describe the empirical research methodology; (3) to discuss research results; (4) to propose a module for teaching social entrepreneurship to business students. This accounts for the structure of this article, it consists of the following parts: literature review devoted to the concept of social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship education, the legal framework, methodology, results and discussion, conclusions and recommendations. The result of our research (its practical value) is a proposal for an insert module of social entrepreneurship for different levels of business education (college, bachelor, master ones). The research questions put forward in this research are the following: RQ1 – Does the attitude of business students' towards social entrepreneurship depend on the study level (college, bachelor, master)? RQ2 – What teaching format of the social entrepreneurship would be the most efficient?

1. Literature review

Social entrepreneurs play an important role in the economic and social development of the communities in which they operate. There is no general consensus regarding the definition of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise, it has been viewed through the lens of skills development, service learning, social performance, ethics, social innovations, etc. Alegre et al. (2017) have attempted to compile a classification of definitions consisting of six clusters: social and financial, innovation, community, sustainability, change. The concept itself has been conceptualized by many scholars and practitioners (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018; Choi & Majumdar, 2014; Luke & Chu, 2013; Alvord et al., 2004; Austin et al., 2006; Dacin et al., 2011; Dees & Anderson, 2006; Seelos & Mair, 2005; Shina & Titko, 2017; Dobeles, 2013). Sekliuckiene and Kisielius (2015) describe three main factors that, in general, influence the social entrepreneurship, i.e., demand (demand for social services/products), supply, institutional and legal framework. To describe social entrepreneurship as a process, the definition of Yunus (2007) is often used. According to him, social business is a financially sustainable organization created to solve a social problem. Despite the differences in conceptualization, there is some agreement regarding the fields of activity: work integration, personal social services, support of disadvantaged areas, and environmental issues. For the sake of the current investigation, we propose to use the description of the social enterprise

given by the European Commission (2018). According to this document the term “social enterprise” refers to the following types of businesses: (1) Those for whom the social or societal objective of the common good is the reason for the commercial activity, often in the form of a high level of social innovation; (2) Those whose profits are mainly reinvested to achieve this social objective; (3) Those where the method of organisation or the ownership system reflects the enterprise's mission, using democratic or participatory principles or focusing on social justice.

The Latvian Social Entrepreneurship law defines a social enterprise as a limited liability company that creates a positive social impact (e.g., provision of social services, formation of an inclusive civil society, promotion of education, support for science, protection and preservation of the environment, animal protection, or ensuring cultural diversity) (Legal Acts of the Republic of Latvia, 2017). As of 31, January 2022 there are 194 active social enterprises, the grant contracts are being signed by 149 of them for the sum of money of 9377 Euro. The realms of activities of 194 social enterprises are distributed like this: work integration (28%), education (20%), sports, health and medicine (17%), inclusive society and diversity (11%), support for risk and marginal groups (9%), social services (4%), environmental protection (4%), other (7%) (Ministry of Welfare, Republic of Latvia, 2022). The organization promoting social entrepreneurship in Latvia is the Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia (SEAL) founded in 2015. The Association operates in three main directions – (1) advocacy of interests at local, regional and national levels (for instance, participating in the legislative activities and the finance allocation; (2) improvement of the capacity of members, development of the experience and knowledge-sharing platform; (3) informing society about social entrepreneurship (Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia). The situation in Latvia has been researched by a number of scholars (Lešinska et al., 2012; Lukjanska et al., 2017; Līcīte, 2018; Sannikova & Brante, 2018; Vevere et al., 2019). Especially we would like to mention the publication “Social entrepreneurship in Latvia: a brief overview of the current situation. Ecosystem mapping” (Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia, n.d.). In there we can find a description of existing legal framework and practices of social entrepreneurship in Latvia. There is no single legal form for social enterprises. Many social enterprises operate in the form of social cooperatives, some are registered as private companies limited by guarantee, some are mutual, and a lot of them are non-profit-distributing organizations like provident societies, associations, voluntary organizations, charities or foundations.

Thinking about future of the social entrepreneurship it is important to educate future entrepreneurs – business students instilling in them beliefs about what is right and what is wrong and about the social importance of their future venture (Yujuico, 2008).

Social entrepreneurship education plays ever growing role in the contemporary society. The career aspirations of social entrepreneurs can be encouraged if youth are given early educational exposure when they are young. This particularly regards business students in various higher educational institutions. The organization of the courses and teaching formats is rather diverse: from free standing courses to integration modules, from practical training to theoretical research. Of course, this depends on the study level (college, bachelor, master) and on the specialization (business administration, sales management, marketing, economics, finances, and accountancy, etc.). So the question arises – is it possible to work out a universal model, fitting various levels and specialities? At the end of the current article we would propose some recommendations for the study curriculum development. Many university programs include at least some aspects of social entrepreneurship training or the whole courses. As Lehner and Kansikas (2011) admit that the education regarding this subject should be transdisciplinary in its character, providing students with opportunity to develop their “soft” skills. Innovative social entrepreneurship competences are recognized to be of a high importance in training future social entrepreneurs (Solomon et al., 2019; Shahverdi et al., 2018). Roslan et al. (2020) on the basis of their research have delineated four main challenges that social entrepreneurship education faces today. They are: (1) design of curriculum – at present it is mostly based on the technical knowledge and developing managerial skills instead of focusing more on building and strengthening students’ awareness, roles, and qualities as social entrepreneurs; (2) financial and funding problems, i.e. possibility to hire industry professionals and practitioners; (3) lack of professionals to teach the according courses, namely, the subject has largely been taught by the academic staff trained in other areas of expertise – corporate social responsibility, sustainability, circular economy, etc., in other words, the field of the social entrepreneurship should be detached from other subjects; (4) university social environment issues – students are not been involved in solving the local community problems. Pache and Chowdhury (2012) offer their model of education: a pedagogical strategy to help students acquire the skills to bridge competing social-welfare, commercial and public-sector logics. That is, this strategy involves the synthesis of general management knowledge, entrepreneurial skills and multiple logics bridging skills. All in all most of the researchers agree upon the transdisciplinary and experiential approach to teaching. Despite the above-mentioned claim of necessity to single out the social entrepreneurship subject in the curriculum, still the teaching mode could be of use in planning the process. In general, we can speak about three main approaches to teaching the social entrepreneurship in business schools.

The first approach presupposes that issues of the according subject should be essentially woven in the

fabric of curriculum, namely, most subjects are to include themes on CSR in a coordinated manner. Of course, this requires a thorough subject mapping and mutual consultations on the strategic level when working on syllabuses. This approach, though, raises a few questions, such as: Who is responsible for the whole process? Doesn't this mean meddling with other subjects? The second approach, in contrary, stresses the importance of the stand-alone course according to the level and/or year of instruction. But is this possible at all, taking into account the fact that business schools have their curricula set? In some occasions – yes, if there in the university are programs, like circular economy, business psychology and human resource management, business administration, etc. But it would entail some difficulties (or even huge ones) to convince other program directors of necessity to introduce the whole course on the social entrepreneurship. The third proposal could be deemed as a middle way, development of the microinsert module compatible with a wide variety of business courses (from management to human resource development and accounting) (Daudisa & Vevere, 2020). Working on this proposal the authors relied on a few publications: “Teaching Business Ethics Through Strategically Inserted Micro-insertions” (Slocum et al., 2014) and “Ethics in the Details: Communicating Engineering Ethics via Micro-Insertion” (Riley et al., 2009). The micro-insertion modules presuppose working out mini-lessons, practical exercises, seminars that could be inserted in the according subjects on the basis of mutual agreement and coordination among lecturers.

Another aspect to be taken into account is business students’ intention to engage in the social entrepreneurship activities. There is a number of studies devoted to business students’ attitude to the socially oriented business (Bazan et al., 2020; Alsaaty et al., 2014; Sutha & Sankar, 2016; Andriyansah & Zahra, 2017; Setiadi & Puspitari, 2014). There has been a previous research on Latvia’s business students attitude to the social entrepreneurship (Vevere et al., 2021). Upon conducting a factor analysis the authors concluded that respondents’ goal of engaging in social entrepreneurship to promote the socio-economic growth of society was mostly correlated with possible support for starting dream project; respondents’ subjective goals were mostly correlated with personal intention to engage in social business. At the same time, it was concluded that students did not see the socially oriented business as means for advancement of their future career, whereas they voiced their support for the social entrepreneurship. This research served as a springboard for the next step – the current investigation of business students’ attitude to the social entrepreneurship in three aspects: domination of social goals, domination of business goals, balance between social and business goals. These goals were set against the level of business education (college, bachelor, master).

2. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach because the study involved conducting some statistical analyses to interpret data collected from the respondents. The research consisted of two surveys: (1) of business students; (2) of business school lecturers. With aim to identify business students' attitude to the social entrepreneurship the online survey was conducted using the purposive snowball sampling method. The choice of this sampling method was determined by the aim of the current research to evaluate business students' perception of the social entrepreneurship in order to work out recommendations for the curriculum. Criterion for choosing respondents was simple – they had to be business students in Latvia studying in Latvian; international students were not surveyed since for the most part their future plans after graduation are not related to Latvia. Of course, it would be valuable to research differences in the opinion of Latvian and foreign students to understand if differences are caused by the respective cultural background. Still, this was out of scope for the present paper. According to Cooper and Schindler (2014), the non-probability snowball sampling method is used where respondents are difficult to identify and are best located through referral networks. The procedure involves several steps: first, to locate the initial respondents, applying to them certain criteria (individuals are discovered and may or may not be selected through probability methods). The second step is to instruct the initial group of respondents how to distribute the questionnaire to others who possess similar characteristics and who, in turn, identify others. The reduced sample sizes are advantage of the current method, still it entails a possibility of being bias in selecting the target group. Still, in the authors' opinion, the snowball sampling was the best choice because it made it possible to reach students from different universities studying business. The initial group of respondents consisted of the students taking courses with the authors of the current article, the students were asked to fill out a questionnaire administered through the Google forms. Then they were asked to send the link to other students who fitted the criteria (being business students and studying in Latvian). Altogether, 165 responses were recognized as valid. Among them, 81 bachelor students, 32 master students, and 52 college students. The 5-point Likert scale questionnaire consisted of questions related to business students' perception of social or/and economical goals of the social entrepreneurship. The question posed was: Is there a correlation between the study level and prevalence of social or economic goals or both? The second survey was conducted among business school lecturers ($n = 174$) representing various subjects – from marketing, management and economics – to human resource management, public relations, etc. Here, as well, the snowball sampling method was used. Two main questions were put forward: (1) What could be the most appropriate teaching mode

of the social entrepreneurship? (2) What could be the most appropriate methods of instruction of the social entrepreneurship?

3. Results and discussion

The results were processed using the Kruskal-Wallis test. Students' evaluation of priorities for the social entrepreneurship goals in three component groups was compared:

- “Dominant of social goals”;
- “Dominant of business goals”;
- “Balance between social and business goals”.

First the calculation of results regarding the dominant of social objective was carried out (see Tables 1, 2).

Table 1. Kruskal-Wallis test “Dominant of social goals” (source: authors)

	ST4	N	Mean rank
S4	B	81	80.43
	M	32	102.67
	C	52	74.89
	Total	165	

Note: ST4 – type of program: B – bachelor, M – master, C – college; N – number of students, Mean Rank – evaluation of mean rank for the component.

Table 2. “Dominant of social goals” test statistics^{ab} (source: authors)

	S4
Kruskal-Wallis H	7.834
df	2
Asymp. Sig	0.20

Note: a. Kruskal Wallis test. b. Grouping Variable: ST4.

Test $p = 0.02 < p_0 = 0.05$, which means that there is a relationship between the student's affiliation with the program and his/her assessment of the necessity of the dominance of the social component. The need for this priority is assessed higher by bachelor's students and highest by master students. In our opinion, the differences can be explained by the fact that on the lower levels of business education (college and bachelor) the attention is paid primarily to the basic business subject, whereas starting with a bachelor program and up students learn also such subjects as corporate social responsibility, innovations, sustainability, etc. In other words, students are more informed about social issues. This aspect has to be taken into account when designing curriculum – the bachelor, and, even more important – master program students should be orientated towards practical projects and collaboration with social entrepreneurs.

The next the component “Dominant of business goals” was calculated (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Kruskal-Wallis test "Dominant of business goals" (source: authors)

	ST4	N	Mean Rank
B4	B	81	82.48
	M	32	93.22
	C	52	77.52
	Total	165	

Note: ST4 – type of program: B – bachelor, M – master, C – college; N – number of students, Mean Rank – evaluation of mean rank for the component.

Table 4. "Dominant of business goals" ^{ab} (source: authors)

	B4
Kruskal-Wallis H	2.349
df	2
Asymp. Sig	0.309

Note: a. Kruskal Wallis test. b. Grouping Variable: ST4.

The test $p = 0.309 > p_0 = 0.05$, which statistically confirms that there is no correlation between the student's program and his/her assessment of the need for the dominance of the business component. Student evaluations are the same. In a sense, this result is not surprising, as business students at all levels are presented with various business courses. Each level students, of course, have them on the varying difficulty level.

Tables 5 and 6 represent the results of Kruskal Wallis test regarding the component "Balance between social and business goals".

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis test "Balance between social and business goals" (source: authors)

	ST4	N	Mean Rank
CO4	B	81	84.17
	M	32	80.28
	C	52	82.85
	Total	165	

Note: ST4 – type of program: B – bachelor, M – master, C – college; N – number of students, Mean Rank – evaluation of mean rank for the component.

Table 6. "Balance between social and business goals" test statistics ^{ab} (source: authors)

	CO4
Kruskal-Wallis H	0.180
df	2
Asymp. Sig	0.914

Note: a. Kruskal Wallis test. b. Grouping Variable: ST4.

The test $p = 0.914 > p_0 = 0.05$, which statistically confirms the hypothesis H_0 : the student's affiliation to the program does not affect the assessment of the dominance of the component "Balance of social and business goals".

So all in all, the research shows, that there is a positive correlation between the social dominant in the social emperorship education and the study level, that should be taken into account when designing the business study curriculum.

In order to work out recommendations for the development of the study course curriculum, we conducted a second survey, respondents ($n = 174$) being different business school lecturers of various subjects (general and specialized). It has to be noted that the response rate was rather high, it shows lecturers' interestedness into the curriculum development. Table 7 represents answers regarding the teaching mode, respondents were offered four possible answers (see Table 7).

Table 7. Business school lecturers' answers about the desirable teaching mode of social entrepreneurship (SE) (source: authors)

Item	Response rate (%)
SE should be taught as stand-alone subject	37.9
SE aspects should be integrated in other subjects	29.3
SE should be taught as a multivalent insert module	27.6
SE should not be taught at all	5.2

Although the results are not entirely conclusive, since the distribution of the answers is roughly equal, still the majority of the respondents (37.9%) admitted that the best teaching mode of social entrepreneurship in business schools should be the stand-alone subject.

The second question asked to the lecturers was related to the most suitable form of instruction of the social entrepreneurship (see Table 8).

Table 8. Arithmetic means of responses (Likert scale 1–5) regarding the method of instruction of the social entrepreneurship (SE) (source: authors)

Item	Arithmetic mean
Group discussions	4.29
Case studies	4.28
Students' independent projects	4.28
Practical tasks and class projects	4.14
Guest lectures	3.9
Company report studies	3.71
Theoretical lectures	3.62

The results show that the majority of the business school lecturers opt for interactive and experiential teaching methods. This also should be taken into account when designing the course "Social entrepreneurship" syllabus. Although this research needs to be continued, the current results clearly demonstrate that none of the teaching modes can be picked out as the most promising. It means that there should be prepared several packages

depending on such factors as: the study level (college, bachelor or master), as well as subject mapping in the respective business school (if there is a space for a stand-alone subject). At this moment we can put forward some tentative recommendations.

For college students (1st level) we suggest the inclusion of the social entrepreneurship themes within the subjects of specialization (1–2 topics); the topics should be worked out together by the respective lecturers and social entrepreneurs. The instruction methods, in our opinion, should be mostly case studies and practical works in the classroom.

For bachelor students (2nd level) we suggest the multi-valent insert modules. It means that the lecturer of social entrepreneurship prepares the basic module (4–6 academic hours) than can be compatible with different subjects in business education. The methods of instruction are to be the mixed– the theoretical and practical ones (a lecture on the basic concepts+case studies+practical exercises+guest lectures). Of course, thorough coordination is necessary in order not to repeat the same materials for the same students within a study year.

For master students (3rd level), we believe, the stand-alone course of the social entrepreneurship would be the most appropriate mode of teaching. This course would consist of (a) theoretical studies (lectures, reading assignments, seminars, tests); (b) practical tasks and exercises in the classroom (individual and group projects); (c) close contacts with industry (guest lecturers, company visits, etc.).

In order to gain the real practical results, further research is necessary in the following areas: business program curricula studies, interviews with program directors and industry representatives.

Conclusions

The aim of the current article was to investigate Latvia's business students attitude towards the social entrepreneurship focusing upon three component groups: "Dominant of social goals", "Dominant of business goals", and "Balance between social and business goals." The research question (RQ 1) was: Does the attitude of business students' towards social entrepreneurship depend on the study level (college, bachelor, master)? The results demonstrate that there exists correlation between the affiliation (the study level) and students' perception of the dominance of the social component – the higher study level, the higher awareness of the social mission of the social entrepreneurship. It could be explained, at least partly, by the overall length of the study process (2 years college, 4 years bachelor, 4+2 years master) and a number of study courses attended (including the ones of corporate social responsibility, sustainability, etc.). At the same time, Kruskal Wallis test results regarding the business component, as well as the balance between the social and business components show that there do not exist statistically significant differences in opinion of

students regardless of their affiliation.

The second research question (RQ 2) was: What are the most efficient forms of teaching social entrepreneurship for college, bachelor, master students? On the basis of the current research, we propose to work out three different modes of teaching the social entrepreneurship.

Disclosure statement

Authors Velga Vevere, Aija Sannikova and Iveta Linina declare that we do not have any competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties.

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