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Social Entrepreneurship: a poorly recognised element of Entrepreneurship Education at HE institutions

Abstract: Entrepreneurship has become a critical competency in the 21st century. Higher education (HE) institutions, aware of the need to answer market needs, have started several initiatives to develop entrepreneurial education. However, the concept of social entrepreneurship does not seem to be widely known among graduates. The aim of the article is an attempt to assess entrepreneurial competencies and knowledge in the field of social entrepreneurship. The authors have focused on the teaching of social entrepreneurship, an undervalued element of entrepreneurial education in HE institutions. For that purpose, a case study of a course introduced at the academic level was used, which allowed answering the following questions: Is social entrepreneurship known among students as a possibility for entrepreneurial development? How do they assess a course in social entrepreneurship regarding its usefulness and ability to develop competencies? The study shows that social entrepreneurship seems to be a form that is not well recognised, which means that students do not even have the chance to know the whole entrepreneurship picture. Research has shown students' positive approach to a course devoted to social entrepreneurship and its potential to develop the knowledge and skills to run one's venture in the future. The results are a part of a broader trend related to the need for social entrepreneurship in HE institutions.

Keywords: case study; entrepreneurship education; higher education institutions; social entrepreneurship; social entrepreneurship education

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship is one of the key elements in contemporary social and economic development. Attempts are made to incorporate it into study programs, and these are promoted at workshops, training sessions and conferences. Even the term 'academic entrepreneurship'

is used to underline academics' role in the commercialisation of their research results. Therefore, it is worth raising the topic in this discussion. Social entrepreneurship fills the gap between a typical business approach and non-profit activity, extending the understanding of entrepreneurship far beyond just business-oriented ventures.

Discussing and teaching social entrepreneurship in academia can reveal more options for career paths. It supports the development of entrepreneurship in general and, at the same time, strengthens the so-called 'third mission' of HE institutions by preparing people to work in organisations with a strong social orientation. While social entrepreneurship education is becoming ever more popular at the HE level and in non-formal education, it is still not fully known among students.

Discussing the literature and taking into consideration the educational experiences of the authors, the following research questions were asked:

1. Błażej Socha Is social entrepreneurship known among students as an opportunity for entrepreneurial development?
2. How is a 'massive open online course' (MOOC) in social entrepreneurship assessed by the students regarding its usefulness and ability to develop competencies?

The article aims to assess entrepreneurial competencies and knowledge in social entrepreneurship. The research method used was an online ex-ante and ex-post survey distributed among students via the internal e-learning platform on which a course on social entrepreneurship was provided. The research results should be treated as an example of how to supplement entrepreneurial education beneficially.

The imperative for higher education institutions to teach different facets of entrepreneurship

One of the tasks of HE is to prepare graduates to live in society and bring positive values to it. Hence, as Peart and Knowles (2018: 86) rightly point out, "institutions of higher education have the dual purposes of educating and training people in both the knowledge and technology necessary to pursue career paths that meet the demands of society." As well as the different skills and abilities expected from future workers, entrepreneurship seems to be ever more critical. Therefore, it is an attractive topic to both study and develop, something that can be considered as being part of the idea of the 'third mission' of universities (for more, see Laredo, 2007; Marzocchi, Kitagawa, Sánchez-Barrioluengo, 2019; Mihaela, Amalia, 2014; Rubens et al., 2017). As Sam and Van Der Sijde (2014: 904) note, "[...] Entrepreneurial university is not merely a university executing the third mission in promoting entrepreneurship, but it also incorporates it into teaching and research to maintain its academic identity."

The complexity of the idea of entrepreneurship means that HE institutions see the need to redefine the dimensions of their activities by proposing new solutions that go beyond the framework of an institution established primarily to achieve academic goals. Entrepreneurship includes the sphere of HE management and the ability to use resources to create valuable solutions for a wide range of stakeholders. It "refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, and the ability to plan and manage projects to achieve objectives. This supports everyone in day-to-day life at home and in society, makes employees more aware of the context of their work and better able to seize opportunities, and provides a foundation for

entrepreneurs establishing a social or commercial activity” (Commission of the European Communities, 2006).

Entrepreneurship can have two dimensions, external and internal, and its orientation in academia can have two contexts: student-oriented or employee-oriented. The employee-oriented perspective is strongly related to the transformation of knowledge and innovation, commercialisation of research results, or technology transfer for external environment purposes (see, for example, Markman et al., 2005; Mendoza, Sanchez, 2018; Wright, Birley, Mosey, 2004).

The shift in the approach of HE institutions toward entrepreneurship has been noticeable for many years (see Etzkowitz et al., 2000). As Siegel, Wright (2015: 585) show, the emerging perspective reshapes the frameworks of academic entrepreneurship, giving space for more comprehensive social and economic benefits using different tools, for example, “accelerators; entrepreneurship garages; student business plan competitions; collaborative networks with industry and alumni; employee mobility; public-private ‘incubators’” empowering student and alumni start-ups. The “entrepreneurial university is a trend in developing and transforming higher education institutions” (Taucean, Strauti, Tion, 2018: 588).

Entrepreneurship is a set of different competencies (see, for example, Robles, Zárraga-Rodríguez, 2015, or Premand et al., 2016), for which there are different classifications of their types (see, for example, Man, Lau, Chan, 2002; Man and Lau, 2005; Mitchelmore, Rowley, 2010). People considering becoming entrepreneurs are expected to be innovative and creative, know how to raise funds, be leaders, manage people, etc. HE institutions can meet the need for these skills by fostering specific crucial competencies.

HE institutions involved in entrepreneurship education formulate the goals and tasks that should be achieved in connection with such education. They should address the various aspects and dimensions, which means presenting different points of view, methods and ways to attract students’ attention. Promoting this subject among students is equally important. This applies to less known forms, such as social entrepreneurship, and faculties and departments with no courses or study programs. Entrepreneurial knowledge and skills should be taught in management faculties and business schools. It is because HE institutions are accountable for the quality of all future employees and their abilities to find a role for themselves on the labour market and develop careers that will support their professional predispositions.

Entrepreneurship education

Entrepreneurship education is getting increasing attention (for example, Kuratko, 2005). It is equally important to incorporate different aspects into study programmes, both compulsory and optional. What is more, HE institutions also recognise the need to teach entrepreneurship in non-business fields, allowing students to develop entrepreneurial competencies in disciplines other than economics or management. Moreover, when it is being taught, social entrepreneurship should be included, as it is becoming a more popular form of developing new business ventures with a social mission.

Entrepreneurship education programmes can have different objectives, such as:

- developing entrepreneurial drive among students (raising awareness and motivation);
- training students in what is needed to set up a business and manage its growth;

- developing the entrepreneurial abilities needed to identify and exploit business opportunities (European Commission, 2008: 24).

Entrepreneurship is taught through different methods and assessed by indicators (see the reviews by Mwasalwiba, 2010, and Lorz, Mueller, Volery, 2013). These include conferences, program courses, additional courses, online learning, study visits, internships in enterprises; mentoring, and others. Teamwork techniques, creativity-based learning, new ideas development, case studies, business simulations, and guest speakers (European Commission, 2008: 28) are among several possibilities to attract students and educate them in an exciting way.

As revealed above, entrepreneurship education is now an essential aspect of a HE institution's activity, as it helps students organise knowledge and discover resources and abilities to conduct future business activities. Although the ways entrepreneurship education is taught may vary, those requiring student's involvement seem to be more effective. Being engaged, undertaking challenges, and problem-solving seem reasonable solutions for teaching such a practical field as entrepreneurship. In formal and non-formal education, more and more time is devoted to online courses. Education using online platforms combined with gamification seems to be an excellent route to attracting students' attention. 'Massive open online courses' (MOOC) are assessed as "a valuable and rapidly expanding opportunity for complementary Entrepreneurship Education, reaching a large and diverse audience that can enjoy the freedom of self-paced instruction with the social support of the learning network and online peers" (see Welsh, Dragusin, 2013).

Learning entrepreneurship in a university context, as emphasised by Mueller and Anderson (2014: 508), "seems to be a dynamic process related to a particular form of personal development," which "involves the development of a set of personal qualities who interact and emerge in a certain dynamic." Other factors can support entrepreneurial education, especially at HE institutions, for example, the entrepreneurial climate. Bergmann et al. (2018: 700) examined drivers for students and their perceptions in Germany, where the research results showed that the presence of entrepreneurship content in a study programme "seems to be required to initiate a social process of sensemaking." Moreover, it was shown that "general university characteristics have the strongest influence on climate perceptions." In practice, students should consider the place where they study as entrepreneurially oriented, which induces them to act.

The subject literature describes diverse internal and external factors that determine careers (e.g., Franke, Lüthje, 2004; Lee et al., 2011). Studies suggest that the majority of students have positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship education with different dimensions or meanings and have been investigated by some authors (see Barba-Sánchez, Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2018; Franco, Haase, Lautenschläger, 2010; Peterman, Kennedy, 2003; Pittaway and Cope, 2007; Premand et al., 2016). As studies reveal (see Von Graevenitz, Harhoff, Weber, 2010), students who can learn entrepreneurship can assess whether they have the abilities to become entrepreneurs in the future (Research question 2). It also allows an assessment of the students' convictions (on an individual level) about future entrepreneurship career paths, which provides information on whether students are well-suited. It must be underlined that it can foster or decrease entrepreneurial intentions. The statistical analysis presented by Nabi et al. (2018) on entrepreneurship education is not conclusive. Although the change in entrepreneurial intentions differs little between students who have had this kind of education and those who did not, any decrease is linked more with

being aware of the complexity of the process rather than a negative approach to the idea. The review made by Lorz, Mueller, Volery (2013: 134) concludes that “most of the authors reported positive outcomes of participating in an entrepreneurship program. Across all analysed studies, a positive impact was reported for 67 dependent variables. Only two studies reported negative influences on three outcome variables.”

Social entrepreneurship

The concept of social entrepreneurship is widely discussed by researchers as a field worth exploring, developing typologies and justifying its existence (see, for example, Macke et al., 2018; Huybrechts, Nicholls, 2012), as well as among practitioners who are seeking effective methods of managing these kinds of organisations. There are many definitions of social entrepreneurship (see, for example, Weerwardena and Mort, 2006; Zahra et al., 2009). Considering the different approaches and disciplines, it seems that more important than a concrete definition is a correct understanding of the idea, which focuses on both the business and, at the same time, the non-profit aspects of running one. “Social entrepreneurship encompasses the activities and processes undertaken to discover, define, and exploit opportunities in order to enhance social wealth by creating new ventures or managing existing organisations in an innovative manner” (Zahra et al., 2009: 523). It is “a process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyse social change and/or address social needs” (Mair, Mart, 2006: 37). According to Seelos and Mair (2005: 243–244) “social entrepreneurship creates new models for the provision of products and services that cater directly to basic human needs that remain unsatisfied by current economic or social institutions.” It could be considered that “a cluster concept implies that social entrepreneurship is a representation of the combined quality of certain sub-concepts, i.e., social value creation, the social entrepreneur, the social enterprise organisation, market orientation, and social innovation” (Choi, Majumdar, 2014: 372).

The topic of social entrepreneurship is complex, involving a diversity of discourses regarding legal systems, cultural roots and business orientation. It has tremendous economic strength and provides concrete benefits to society. In the European Union, 13.6 million people are employed in the sector, providing 6.3% of total employment (Chaves and Monzón Campos, 2019). Social entrepreneurship allows solving social problems and creating social value through innovative and inclusive business initiatives. It results from blurring the borders between sectors and searching for development potential in a system other than purely economic.

Considering the definitional context, it is worth underlining the repeated combination of its business and social dimensions. Studies show that commercial and social entrepreneurship have many common points and differentiating features (Austin, Stevenson, Wei-Skillern, 2012). “Social entrepreneurs share many characteristics as their for-profit cohorts—risk-taking, proactiveness and independence” (Zahra et al., 2009: 529). “[...] Young social entrepreneurs are likely to share a series of behavioural characteristics with commercial entrepreneurs, such as the ability to detect opportunities, the drive to innovate, the willingness to bear the risk and the display of proactive behaviour towards survival, growth and serving the market” (Tkacz, 2016: 27). As Chell (2007: 14) points out, “[...] entrepreneurs (both social and economic) consciously garner alienable resources (e.g.,

through networking and other processes) and use their personal or human ‘capital’ in order to achieve their espoused mission of wealth and the social value creation.”

While entrepreneurship itself is not that different from social entrepreneurship, knowledge and awareness of these differences among students vary. Research conducted in Egypt by Kirby and Nagwa (2011: 412) shows that “the sample was not unaware of the concept but that there was some confusion over what a social entrepreneur is or does and only relatively weak awareness of Egyptian social entrepreneurs.” Polish research brought coherent results: students from economic and non-economic disciplines have little knowledge about social entrepreneurship and do not consider their professional careers in this area (Reichel, Rudnicka-Reichel, Socha, 2021; Reichel, Rudnicka-Reichel, Socha, 2019). Students who took part in the research did not have many opportunities to participate in social entrepreneurship courses and generally did not associate this activity with earning money. There is a knowledge gap to be improved.

There also seems to be a specific reason to consider integrating social entrepreneurship education at an academic level. Social entrepreneurship, including the social context and an assigned social role, is rooted in a solid axiological context. It refers to the duty of an entrepreneur towards society, shaping specific values influencing the choices made, and creating attitudes. It broadens the scope to which we can interpret the issue of entrepreneurship as a whole – not only social entrepreneurship. A narrow understanding could, and sometimes does, present it solely in terms of a set of characteristics necessary for risk-taking in economic activity. The references to social roles and expectations, values and ethos make it easier to link the presence of entrepreneurship education, including social entrepreneurship, with the so-called ‘third mission’ and broader responsibility of HE institutions to raise awareness and support students with ideas that are socially desired. Graduates should be competent to find a suitable job position and have attitudes that support society in solving their challenges. HE institutions are designed to support social and civic attitudes, thanks to which the sense of unity and social sensitivity is strengthened (Nejati et al., 2011). Social entrepreneurship is part of this, allowing combining entrepreneurial attitudes with serving a community. Social entrepreneurship supports economic development and is an expression of responsibility for the quality of life of people at risk of exclusion. It is an element of education and brings specific social benefits that go beyond economic profit. It creates a framework for inclusive organisations and empathetic leaders to become role models.

Knowledge of social entrepreneurship, its possibilities and ways of developing organisations is essential, especially considering the research results of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Bosma et al., 2016: 5): the level of education among social entrepreneurs in most countries except Sub-Saharan Africa is high. It implies that social entrepreneurs are highly educated, an essential point for researchers and practitioners to consider when promoting and teaching social entrepreneurship in academia. Designing course proposals for students of all fields, including non-business programmes, will improve the potential of students to establish social enterprises after graduation. It will foster a more profound knowledge about social entrepreneurship and sensitise the students to the needs of the labour market.

Case study

The course described below was developed under the OPEN MIND project, a gamified platform and open online course in social entrepreneurship for female learners and students

from diverse fields of study.¹ The course was designed by experts from eight institutions in Poland, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and the UK. The idea of the project was to promote social entrepreneurship, spread knowledge about owning a company and improve entrepreneurial skills among students. The gamified massive open online course (MOOC) was available to everybody interested in this topic. Ultimately, most students took part in the course.

The course created a new learning experience for those interested in social entrepreneurship. It comprised eight modules with an overall duration of 75 hours of study. The modules covered all topics necessary to understand the idea of social entrepreneurship and develop practical skills.

Module 1. Basics in social economy and entrepreneurship

Module 2. Business Management

Module 3. Legal framework

Module 4. The business model canvas

Module 5. Social enterprise marketing

Module 6. Fundraising

Module 7. Business plan writing

Module 8. How to implement social projects and produce social impact.

Besides the set of exercises itself, the additional value of gamification was teamwork related to the new social enterprise and the support of mentors. “The game elements (missions, levels, awards, leader boards, collaboration and fun) create an engaging and motivating learning environment, through which students will develop the basic knowledge, skills and mindset required to become social entrepreneurs in an exciting way” (The Open Mind Newsletter 2, 2017: 4).

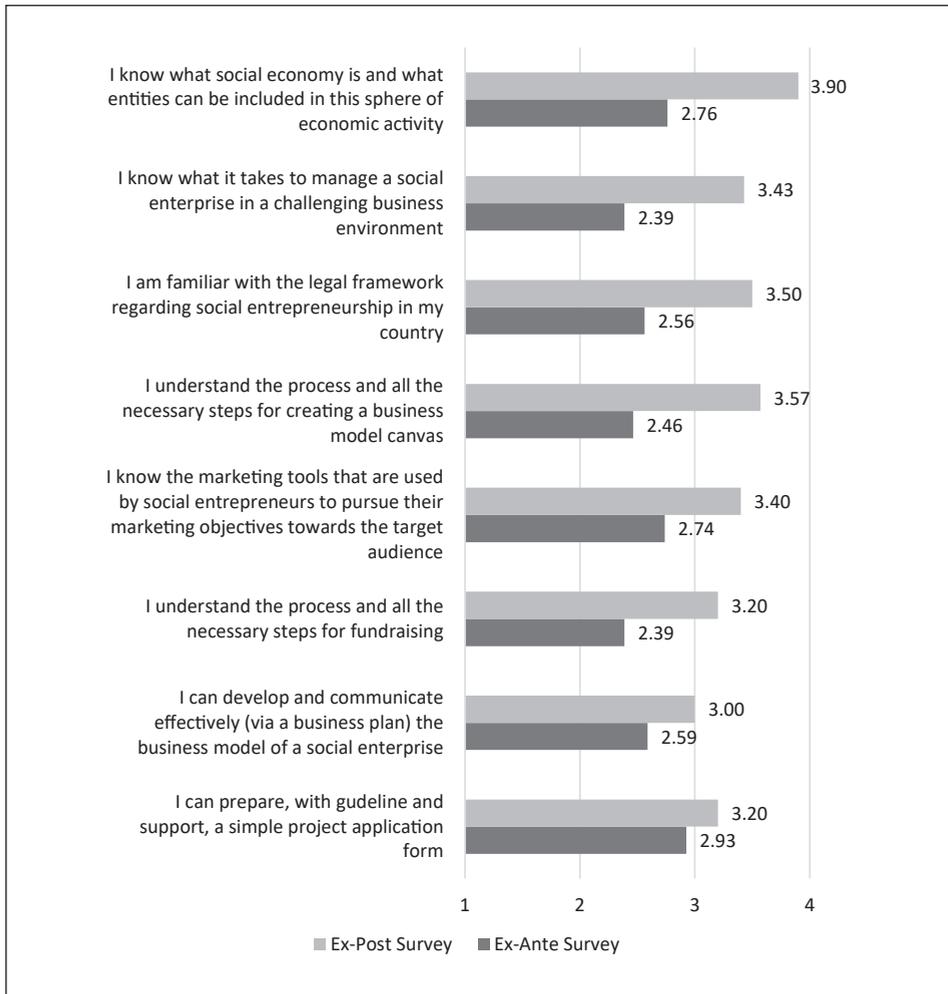
To check how well students understand social entrepreneurship and are willing to develop their careers in this type of organisation, data on the knowledge of issues related to social entrepreneurship among those who decided to join the course was analysed. The survey questionnaire included questions about the overall assessment of the course and questions related to the individual modules (modular assessment). This article presents only the results that allowed the stated research questions to be answered.

The results, visible in Figure 1, confirm the information contained in the literature review that students, as a social group from which future social entrepreneurs mainly recruit, do not know this form of entrepreneurship.

In the five participating countries, one thousand eight learners enrolled in the MOOC. The course addressed the gap in knowledge and skills as the ex-ante surveys showed that only 18.07% of participants (the average for all questions) declared that they possessed the knowledge and skills mentioned in the questionnaire. Ex-post surveys explored the satisfaction gained by roughly 22% of students who managed to finish the course by the end of the project’s lifetime. Most students confirmed a high level of satisfaction thanks to participation in the course (about 90% as an average of all questions regarding gathered knowledge and skills with “definitely agree” or “rather agree” answers considered

¹ OPEN MIND – gamified platform and open online course in Social Entrepreneurship for female learners and students from diverse fields of study (Project No: 2016-1-BG01-KA203-023754) (2016–2018) – is an Erasmus+ project, coordinated by VUZF (the University of Finance, Business and Entrepreneurship) from Bulgaria. All data about the Open Mind project, graphs, citations, and some conclusions come from the “Impact assessment – policy report” by the Open Mind project team (2018, project document) if not stated otherwise.

Figure 1. Skills and knowledge about social entrepreneurship – ex-ante vs ex-post surveys: assessment of the outcomes of module learning



Source: authors based on Impact assessment – policy report, 2018, project document (definitely agree = 4, rather agree = 3, rather disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1)

together). It shows that 9 out of 10 participants absorbed the necessary knowledge and skills to become social entrepreneurs as a result of the course. Participants also confirmed that the content of the modules was valuable and practical (most answers were “definitely agree” or “rather agree”).

Respondents also agreed that the course raised their knowledge of social entrepreneurship and their multidisciplinary and soft skills. The comparison of ex-post and ex-ante results (see Fig. 1) suggests that participation in the course improved social entrepreneurship skills and knowledge in all analysed areas. The most significant progress occurred in understanding the process and steps for creating a business model, knowing what is needed

to manage a social enterprise and general knowledge of social entrepreneurship. The least progress was shown in the ability to communicate effectively in a business model and the ability to prepare a project application form. It seems that acquiring these skills requires more interaction with the students and proficiency in the use of background knowledge.

The ex-post surveys also reflected the students' satisfaction with the overall learning experience, as well as with specific learning content related to social entrepreneurship (over 98% agreement – “definitely agree” and “rather agree” when these responses are considered together).

Thanks to the analysis of ex-ante and ex-post surveys, it can be concluded that among the many advantages of the course, accessibility can be mentioned as one of the most important. The course was accessible from anywhere (online) and allowed for self-paced learning, with the content and language being adapted to each participating country. Its innovative gamified nature and interactivity might also be mentioned. Mentor support is crucial in such courses – the participant is not left entirely alone with the learning content and the platform.

The target group benefited from increased general and specific knowledge and skills, involvement in entrepreneurial and social entrepreneurial activities, greater self-efficacy and increased awareness of the value of social entrepreneurship and its social impact.

Conclusions

This article supports the development of knowledge in research on entrepreneurship education, with particular emphasis on social entrepreneurship. The research shows that social entrepreneurship education is insufficient (or does not exist) in various fields of study. Meanwhile, surveys from participants of the platform show they rated both the increase in their knowledge and building their entrepreneurial attitude positively, even though students declared that at the beginning that they had very little knowledge in this field. It further justifies the need for such education at the HE level because looking at the type of person who manages social enterprises and the knowledge and skills necessary in the field of social entrepreneurship could also be worth developing.

The described example of a course on social entrepreneurship shows that education in social entrepreneurship can be successfully implemented via modern methods such as MOOCs. Participants of the course pointed to its usefulness and its positive impact on their knowledge and skills, showing that social entrepreneurship education can be attractive and practical. It is worth mentioning that although the analysis was based on the presented number of responses from respondents from five countries, the results should only be considered preliminary and exploratory. Although the research demonstrates the positive effects of MOOC-based social entrepreneurship education, such courses themselves are not a guarantee of success, mainly due to the large discrepancy in the quality of emerging courses in this area. In the authors' view, a broader debate on creating a framework for teaching social entrepreneurship at universities is crucial. The results are also a part of a broader trend related to the need to teach entrepreneurship in HE institutions.

Entrepreneurial education should be shown in all forms, not only in relation to the typical orientation towards business goals. Future graduates should learn about different opportunities entrepreneurship provides and assess which dimension corresponds to their needs and possibilities.

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