

PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. This article examines the problem of social entrepreneurship education in higher education. Along with traditional entrepreneurs, it is of particular importance to create social entrepreneurs through collaboration between academia, social enterprises and business. The development of social entrepreneurship in higher education institutions in Bulgaria faces a number of problems, as well as prospects for its development. The purpose of this article is to identify the problems and outline the prospects for social entrepreneurship in higher education in Bulgaria. By undertaking the necessary activities in the direction of increasing social awareness, sustainability and social responsibility, universities can train socially oriented entrepreneurs to contribute their knowledge and abilities to the development and well-being of our country. The main research methods involved in the development are content analysis, method of analysis and synthesis, method of observation, intuitive and systematic approach.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship; social enterprises; social significance; system of higher education

Introduction

The concept of development and promotion of social entrepreneurship and the social economy are part of the European Union's policy to address the social exclusion of persons in a vulnerable position, their integration and employment, as well as saving funds for social costs in the conditions of inclusive and sustainable growth. Social enterprises and social entrepreneurship occupy a central place in the

agenda of the EC and in particular of the Europe 2020 Strategy for “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”. They are also a key element of the European social model and contribute to the implementation of the socially significant goals of the strategy. (Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021) Social entrepreneurship enjoys great popularity, which in Bulgaria is definitely growing under the influence of shared good practices and brought experience from partner initiatives (Stankova 2019). This article aims to explore the issues and perspectives surrounding social entrepreneurship in higher education and to identify key issues such as limited resources and support for social entrepreneurs and the lack of collaboration between academia and external stakeholders.

Teaching social entrepreneurship in higher education faces challenges such as the lack of a standardized curriculum, a limited number of qualified teachers and access to real-world experience. At the same time, the lack of education or professional qualification of young people in the field of social entrepreneurship requires the institutions in the field of education to direct their efforts to the creation and implementation of educational and training programs for starting a business in the social field (Kyurova & Koyundzhiyska-Davidkova 2021). However, growing interest among students, collaboration with social enterprises, and the integration of social entrepreneurship into a broader business curriculum offer prospects for meaningful education in this area. In this context, it is necessary to keep in mind that it is good to pay special attention to training specifically regarding the essence, characteristic features, role and importance of social entrepreneurship (Kyurova & Koyundzhiyska-Davidkova 2021). Addressing these challenges and embracing the opportunities will pave the way for future generations of socially minded entrepreneurs who can bring about positive change in society.

1. Social entrepreneurship – essence and features

The following definition of social entrepreneurship is given in the National Concept of Social Economy – it is an economic activity that combines market opportunities with social causes, with people and their needs at the center. (Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021) Social entrepreneurship can be defined as a process that involves the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change or address social needs (Mair & Martí 2006). Traditional entrepreneurship is distinguished from social entrepreneurship on the basis of several aspects (Mokhtar, Abdullah, & Kin 2014). Traditional entrepreneurship focuses on increasing profitability and helping to increase economic growth by providing employment opportunities (Apostolakis 2011; Wahid, Hussain, & Ayob 2018; Marshalok et al. 2021; Prokopenko & Kornatowski 2018), while social entrepreneurship focuses on making the world a better place by reducing social problems (Lazorko et al. 2021) such as poverty, needs of disadvantaged children, increasing crime, denied access to education (Kerbo

& Coleman 2006). Also, social entrepreneurship greatly contributes to society by generating social values (Seleznova, Boiko, & Bondar 2020) and by solving environmental and social problems on a high-impact basis, which includes support during economic recession by providing personal and career counseling with job training and employment of the vulnerable, employment development, innovation and equity promotion (El-den, Adikhari, & Adikhari 2017).

The observed technological changes and the transition to the digital environment create favorable conditions for the development of social entrepreneurship (Zlateva 2020). As an additional advantage, the increase in accepted students through the use of university social media and online platforms can be pointed out (Roslan, Hamid, Ijab, & Bukhari 2019). Learners can also understand the technology, its strengths and weaknesses (Chipriyanova, Krasteva-Hristova & Kussainova 2022) at the same time looking for market opportunities (Lynch, Kamovich, Longva, & Steinert, 2018). Technological development challenges entrepreneurship every day. (Drobyszko, Malakhovskiy, Zhovnovach & Mohamed 2020; Hurzhyi et al. 2022; Kibik et al. 2022; Megits et al. 2022) It has changed the face of modern business and forced a transition to rapid transformation, reshaping strategic views to adapt to modern conditions. (Kyurova, Yaneva, & Zlateva 2019; Dykan et al. 2021) The practical importance of education and training is reinforced by the pressure of a number of processes, among which the dynamic development of science, technique and technology is of primary importance, which leads to rapid obsolescence of acquired knowledge and skills. (Lugar & Novičević 2021) In this, both employed and socially excluded persons are equally affected, including the unemployed (Dimitrova 2023). Social entrepreneurship can benefit enormously from the wider use of technology and social media, contributing to improving the visibility of young people, their future employability and unlocking their entrepreneurial potential. (Bantash, Koval, Bashynska & Kozlovtseva 2020) In connection with social entrepreneurship and its development in our country, social enterprises and their activities are most often discussed in compliance with European directives of the European Commission. The Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria (ESC) (Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021) believes that social enterprises in Bulgaria are still an unused business model. Existing social enterprises are mostly non-governmental organizations, applying the relevant legislation, creating social enterprises whose business is focused on realizing the social purpose and mission of the organization. The national concept of social economy (European Commission, 2018) represents the government's framework for the development of the social economy in Bulgaria. The action plan for the social economy, which supports the implementation of the National Concept for the Social Economy, provides a series of priority actions aimed at facilitating the development of the social economy (including social enterprises) in Bulgaria, which include five priorities: raising awareness among stakeholders about the na-

ture and functioning of the social economy; creation of supporting structures for the social economy and social enterprises; information on the social economy; creating favorable conditions for education, training and scientific research in support of the social economy, as well as creating a favorable environment promoting the development of the social economy (European Commission 2018).

After the expected directions of development of social entrepreneurship have been defined, it is appropriate to analyze its relationship with the educational system and, in particular, with the higher education system.

2. Development of social entrepreneurship in the educational system in Bulgaria

Social entrepreneurship is related to the modernization of technology, but its development is also of particular importance to education. Social entrepreneurship in the education sector can lead to an increase in social awareness and also make people respond to problems in their community, create creative solutions to problems and strengthen their potential to offer a new perspective on already developed solutions (Dobele 2016).

In motivating more students to pursue social entrepreneurship in collaboration with social entrepreneurs, education plays an essential role. Social entrepreneurs participate by sharing learning skills, knowledge about business plans, as well as their role as social entrepreneurs (Gupta, Chauhan, Paul, & Jaiswal 2019). Moreover, the possession of certain entrepreneurial qualities by the social entrepreneur is an important condition for the success/failure of his business (Yereshko, Ageieva, Gura & Tkach 2022), which, in turn, allows these entrepreneurs to correctly assess and discover new opportunities not yet noticed by others, as well as new opportunities for long-term benefits (Kyurova, Koyundzhiyska-Davidkova & Durmishi 2022). It is of particular importance to recognize social entrepreneurship and understand its overall concept at the grassroots level. The appropriate place to start studying different concepts of social entrepreneurship is in educational institutions, by using an appropriate curriculum methodology for the learning and teaching process (Halberstadt, Timm, Kraus, & Gundolf 2019). Opportunities to teach social entrepreneurship in higher education could contribute to developing more skills needed through problem-based learning. This approach helps to understand the problems in the nearest community (Catherall & Richardson 2017). This includes many people such as students, community leadership, educational institutions and industry. Different approaches are applied in different places, but it is clear that social entrepreneurship is not a subject that can be easily integrated into the academic curriculum, because teachers are not entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs in turn are not experienced teachers (Catherall & Richardson 2017). Most of the teachers have management experience, expressed as experience in

organizations, human resources, finance, accounting and business ethics (Gupta, Chauhan, Paul, & Jaiswal 2019).

In Bulgaria, the teaching of social entrepreneurship in higher education is still in its infancy. Although there is a growing awareness of social issues and an increase in the number of social enterprises in the country, the integration of social entrepreneurship into the curriculum is relatively limited. For Bulgarian universities, there are both challenges and prospects for the development of this field. We can point out the main challenges:

First. One of the main challenges is the lack of awareness and understanding of social entrepreneurship among students and teachers. Many still view entrepreneurs solely through the prism of profitable ventures without considering the potential for social impact. To address this, universities should invest in awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to promote the concept of social entrepreneurship and its importance in addressing societal challenges. In today's conditions, learning and teaching must be open to innovation and new ideas, integrating and embedding innovation in learning, teaching and assessment can improve students' knowledge and experience, create new pedagogical methods by using new technologies and digital services, to provide opportunities for growth and expansion, as well as the opportunity for effective learning and teaching processes. (Yuleva-Chuchulayna 2022)

Second. A significant challenge is the limited availability of resources and support for social entrepreneurship initiatives. Unlike traditional start-ups, social enterprises often face funding and operational difficulties due to their dual focus on financial sustainability and social impact. Bulgarian universities should establish partnerships and collaborations with funding organizations, mentoring programs and incubators to provide aspiring social entrepreneurs with the necessary support and guidance.

Third. It is essential that students understand the social and economic problems specific to the country and explore innovative solutions to address them. By collaborating with local social enterprises and organizations, universities can provide students with practical experience and opportunities to apply their knowledge to real-life situations.

Despite the listed challenges, there are promising prospects for the teaching of social entrepreneurship in Bulgarian universities.

The country's strong tradition of community engagement in social initiatives provides a solid foundation for the development of social entrepreneurship education. By using this existing social capital, universities can train a new generation of socially oriented entrepreneurs who can contribute to the development and well-being of the country.

Based on the above, we can conclude that despite the challenges to be overcome, such as limited awareness, resources and practical experience, there are strategies

for improving the development of social entrepreneurship education in Bulgarian universities.

3. Problems facing the teaching of social entrepreneurship in Bulgarian universities

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a promising force for positive change in society, combining business acumen with a deep commitment to addressing social and environmental issues. The search for solutions for good education is determined by the requirements for its product (Ivanova & Filipova 2022; Kryvoshein et al. 2022). As the need for socially minded business leaders continues to grow, the teaching of social entrepreneurship in higher education is gaining momentum. The competitiveness of higher education institutions in Bulgaria is essential to support this process. (Logodashki 2019) However, there are both challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed for the effective integration of this subject into the curriculum.

First. One of the main problems is the lack of a standardized curriculum and pedagogical approaches. Unlike traditional business education, social entrepreneurship is a relatively new field, making it difficult to develop a universally accepted curriculum. As a result, educators often struggle to design appropriate modules and teaching materials that adequately cover the various aspects of social entrepreneurship. Digital programs could be created to work with students of social entrepreneurship majors, and this would provide flexibility, better results, virtual libraries and resources, without the limitation of geographical location, effective assessments and continuous updating. (Filipova & Yuleva-Chuchulayna 2022)

Second. There is a shortage of trained educators who have hands-on experience in social entrepreneurship. To teach the subject effectively, educators must have first-hand knowledge and understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing social entrepreneurs. However, finding qualified teachers with such experience can be a challenge, limiting the availability of quality education in this area.

Third. Another problem is students' limited access to real social entrepreneurship experience. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, where students can often gain direct exposure by starting their ventures, social entrepreneurship often requires more complex and interdisciplinary solutions. As a result, the inclusion of practical experience, such as internships or fieldwork, is crucial for students to develop a deep understanding of the subject.

Based on the above, we can conclude that although the teaching of social entrepreneurship in Bulgarian universities faces challenges such as lack of awareness, limited resources and the need for practical experience, there are prospects for its development. By raising awareness, establishing partnerships and incorporating local context and case studies, Bulgarian universities can play a key role in promoting social entrepreneurship education and fostering a generation of socially oriented entrepreneurs who can effectively address societal challenges.

4. Possibilities for inclusion of social entrepreneurship in the system of higher education

Social entrepreneurship is an important area for academia as it helps young people, especially students, to develop positive attitudes, skills and mindsets to address social needs as a complement to the development of sustainable economic growth. Therefore, teaching the discipline “Social Entrepreneurship” requires the appropriate skills and abilities, both in academic and research aspects (Dobele, 2016). According to Pache and Chowdhury (Pache & Chowdhury 2012), social entrepreneurship in higher education can be developed through several activities. These activities include the introduction of social entrepreneurship courses in the faculties, the organization of social entrepreneurship events by the university, as well as comprehensive educational programs offered to students who wish to specialize in the field of social entrepreneurship. Through social entrepreneurship and its inclusion in higher education, students can contribute more to the community (Shahverdi, Ismail, & Qureshi 2018).

The three dimensions through which social entrepreneurship in higher education can be understood are awareness, intention and support (Salamzadeh, Azimi & Kirby 2013). The first aspect is being aware of every opportunity when services are needed and acting as an opportunity to help society. The second aspect, intention, expresses the desire to eliminate social needs or societal problems that hinder the participation of social enterprises. The last aspect ends with the need for support in attitudes and beliefs, whether in information or resources. The combination of entrepreneurial attitude, social capital and resources lead to successful integration of social entrepreneurship (Rahman, Ismail & Sahid 2019).

The development of social entrepreneurship in higher education can best foster a sense of social responsibility, personal accountability and a spirit of creativity among students in higher education institutions (Sahasranamam & Nandakumar 2020). More senior social workers in the future may include such programs that deal with social issues and improve the standard of living in the community (Othman & Ab Wahid 2016; Wahid, Hussain & Ayob 2018).

Many higher education institutions have incorporated social entrepreneurship into their educational system through their implementation style (Wahid, Hussain & Ayob 2018). Educational systems in countries influence the preparation of learners for better learning, especially when dealing with social entrepreneurial activities and when starting a new business (Svyrydenko, Amarathunga, Wijethunga & Riznyk 2023). The variety of social enterprises created provides better access to education through technology with the current curriculum, relevant industry skills and training opportunities, which can increase the potential role of social entrepreneurship for students (Md Ladin, Abdullah & Abdulsomad 2017). It is essential that social entrepreneurship is included in higher education, as it can contribute important benefits to traditional entrepreneurship, which is influenced by environmental, organizational and individual factors (Dobele 2016). Increased student interest in

social entrepreneurship education may also lead to more outreach with a growing number of social entrepreneurship clubs and internships that include awards and social entrepreneurship educational environments (Roger & Gurrisi 2017). By using university platforms, social entrepreneurship in higher education can help students to have more networks with many social entrepreneurs (Lahn & Erikson 2016). It can also help provide meaningful support to businesses (Roger & Gurrisi 2017) by engaging in collaborations to provide more practical skills, experience and insight into social entrepreneurship (Thomsen, Muurlink, & Best 2018). It is important to take action between employers and higher education institutions, including actions to encourage the private sector to participate in the development of enabling frameworks that create social and other business incentives, knowledge and expertise (Filipova & Yuleva-Chuchulayna 2023).

This can be a major challenge for entrepreneurship educators. They should also have an insight into the curriculum to help most students pay more attention to change innovation and most importantly contribute back to their communities (Thomsen, Muurlink, & Best 2018). It is also important to create greater awareness of the social entrepreneurship curriculum and combine innovative solutions to solve social problems (Lahn & Erikson 2016). This can contribute to the motivation of teachers to have more programs that are related to social entrepreneurship (Pache & Chowdhury 2012).

The demand from universities for more external stakeholders to have greater engagement with local government and business is growing rapidly. Another vital importance of social entrepreneurship education in higher education is that it fosters the connection between universities and external communities by providing these external resources and communities (Kickul, Gundry, Mitra & Berçot 2018), an opportunity to share more about their experience and knowledge with students.

There is little difference between entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship, and the ultimate goal would be more on social value, thus universities will produce graduates who are charged with humanistic values (Sundin 2011). Students should be informed that the methodology of social entrepreneurship education emphasizes some basic facts, (Springer 2011) namely, the main priorities for a social entrepreneur are the creation of social value or social impact. (Shahverdi, Ismail, & Qureshi 2018) Resources to support the regulation of social enterprise can be acquired from organizations with a social mission, private donations, government subsidies and any legitimate means of generating income, those who have the greatest influence are stakeholders and other (Pache & Chowdhury 2012) institutions that are connected with the social entrepreneur (Bahari & Suhaimi 2016).

It is important to point out that it is extremely important for universities to create awareness and understanding of social entrepreneurship among students and faculty members. Organizing workshops, seminars and guest lectures by successful social entrepreneurs can help educate and inspire students to pursue social entrepreneurship as a viable career.

By creating opportunities for students to work on real social challenges, universities can provide valuable practical experience and enable students to develop the practical skills needed for social entrepreneurship. Integrating social entrepreneurship into core business courses can help foster a comprehensive understanding of business practices. By including modules on ethics, sustainability and social responsibility, universities can teach students how to integrate social impact considerations into their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Conclusion

Despite the existing challenges to the development of social entrepreneurship in higher education in Bulgaria, there are promising prospects for teaching social entrepreneurship in higher schools.

First. There is a growing interest among students to make a positive impact through their careers. This increased demand enables educational institutions to create specialized programs serving the growing interest in social entrepreneurship.

Second. Collaboration and partnerships between educational institutions and social enterprises can lead to impactful teaching experiences in practice. By building strong links with local social enterprises, universities can provide their students with real projects, mentoring opportunities and access to resources. Such partnerships enhance student learning and enable them to tackle real social issues under the guidance of experienced professionals.

Third. Cooperation between universities and the business community is also important. This will bridge the gap between academia and the real world, providing students with valuable insights and networks into the social entrepreneurship ecosystem.

In conclusion, we will note that the teaching of social entrepreneurship in Bulgarian universities faces challenges, but also presents promising prospects for growth. By raising awareness, cultivating partnerships, incorporating practical experience and collaborating with the business community, Bulgarian universities can significantly contribute to the development and promotion of social entrepreneurship education. This will enable the emergence of a new generation of socially oriented entrepreneurs who can drive positive change and contribute to the well-being of Bulgarian society.

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