



## Teaching Entrepreneurship for Social Inclusion

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### Abstract

*It is widely argued in the international literature that sustainable economies emerge from indigenous entrepreneurial ventures. The OECD (2008) recommended that Entrepreneurship Education in higher education should shift its focus to growth-oriented entrepreneurship. This suggests a movement away from a traditional business management approaches to Entrepreneurship Education, with more attention being given to key business growth strategies such as internationalization, exports and finance and facilitating the development of students' skills to include opportunity identification, risk-taking, strategy-making, leadership, negotiating, building strategic alliances and Intellectual Property protection. HEIs can then produce graduates of a high calibre with the business acumen needed to recognize and foster creative potential through the creation of high-potential start-ups. Such companies would be capable of achieving high growth, high turnover and high levels of employment, servicing both national and global markets. Entrepreneurship education has been driven by national reviews, demands of a changing labour market and awareness of the impact on communities and individuals of sustained social marginalization. A significant link has been established between entrepreneurship approaches and models and the structures of social enterprise. Development of social enterprises stems from a long tradition of cooperative approaches that stretch back to the nineteenth century. Social enterprises represent a set of initiatives that address issues pertaining to social inclusion, reduced marginalization and creation of measures to ensure viability for vulnerable groups. The link established between quality of education in an increasingly competitive world and the importance of inclusion is a cogent one. In that link between education and inclusion the specific role of entrepreneurship education is being forged. This is illustrated by description and analysis of the EU funded SIATE project (Social Inclusion Through Entrepreneurship). The Lead Partner is VUC Storstrøm, adult education center in Denmark. The aim is to identify models of best practice in fostering entrepreneurship for marginalized groups and to develop a European network. The paper describes the methodology, development and outreach involved in project activities to create meaningful and sustainable training courses. This has been supplemented by a sequence of major conferences in partner countries and the development of a European network on entrepreneurship education and social inclusion (ENTNET). The paper describes cooperation between existing national or regional networks of adult education providers at European level by creating a network of networks focusing on entrepreneurship in adult learning. It also describes how capacity-building for all relevant stakeholders can be constructed on specific themes of career management skills, migrant integration and social inclusion, aiming at increasing the number and enhancing the quality of providers using entrepreneurship as a specific model for Adult Education.*

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship; Innovation; Adult learning; Enterprise; Social inclusion

### Introduction

Developing and promoting entrepreneurship education has been one of the key policy objectives of EU institutions and individual Member States for many years. In the context of continuing social inequality, massive inward migration, high youth unemployment, economic crisis due to austerity policies and rapid technological change new emphasis is placed upon the role that entrepreneurship could play in addressing socio-economic priorities. Profound and rapid changes in our complex knowledge-based economy and society highlight transversal skills such as entrepreneurship as essential elements in shaping the values of young people, but also providing the skills, knowledge and attitudes central to



developing an entrepreneurial culture in Europe. Different countries have conceptualized this in different ways. But the importance of entrepreneurship in providing opportunities for adult learners and those at risk of social exclusion is a new and exciting dimension.

The current context of entrepreneurship education in Europe indicates that most countries are undergoing a process of educational re-thinking. Among the stated objectives is trying to strengthen entrepreneurship education within a perspective of lifelong learning. The challenges involved in teaching entrepreneurship require significant changes in the way teachers themselves are educated. In the SIATE project described in this paper, the key objective is to improve entrepreneurship education and training (as initially defined by the European Commission) and to identify best practices and common themes. There are significant challenges involved in fostering an entrepreneurial attitude in educational institutions. Accommodating difference and diversity is one dimension. There is also the need to support teachers through training programs which adopt policies that pursue long-term strategies that are both creative and innovative. Experience and good practice indicate that when this type of training is offered, the framework and innovative methods associated with entrepreneurship are quickly adapted to educational needs of participants.

This conceptualisation of entrepreneurship as a key competence has since been developed by the European Commission Thematic Working Group on Entrepreneurship Education:

*Entrepreneurship education is about learners developing the skills and mind-set to be able to turn creative ideas into entrepreneurial action. This is a key competence for all learners, supporting personal development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability. It is relevant across the lifelong learning process, in all disciplines of learning and to all forms of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal) which contribute to an entrepreneurial spirit or behaviour, with or without a commercial objective.*

This common European understanding of entrepreneurship as a key competence demonstrates two dimensions. First, there is the development of entrepreneurial attitudes, skills and knowledge to enable individuals to turn ideas into action. Second, entrepreneurship is not only related to economic activities and business creation, but also to wider areas of life and society. Innovation and creativity are critical dimensions in adding value to entrepreneurship education aims.

## **Shaping entrepreneurship innovation**

Partnership models developed in Europe have rely heavily on policy frameworks that promote and foster creativity and innovation. These merge social and economic perspectives in shaping learning paradigms based on community. The European vision is for learning communities driven by innovation that supports inclusion for all. Innovation and inclusion therefore form two sides of the one learning system.

According to Csikszentmihalyi's model of creativity (1996), the development of an individual's creativity depends on three interrelated components: teachers/trainers (as experts on the field), school/work environment (as domain) and a student/worker. The consolidation of this complex concept of creativity has also been enriched with subsequent theorizations made by Csikszentmihalyi himself in collaboration with Howard Gardner and William Damon (2002). In effect, the creative and innovative practices described and interpreted by science and research do not occur in an abstract vacuum - as if nothing were happening in the external environment. Educational and training efforts are rooted in the structure of the labor market, where asking oneself why, what for and who for is crucial. Professional action in which creative and innovative abilities question themselves about qualitative outcomes, thus addresses human needs, beyond immediate interests of profit and gain. According to Craft (2003), , creativity studies have been led by systemic theories that regard creativity as a co-functioning of several elements, including cognitive skills, personality traits, social, cultural and historical factors.

Research on creative learning and innovation is critical for enhanced European competitiveness in globalized contexts. Innovation includes learning methodologies, practices, systems and applications. This includes a focus on how such innovative practice can be rolled out to improve creative competencies



of learners and students in vocational, and adult education and work-based environments. The issue is also a priority for European policy makers. Due to the Bologna and Copenhagen processes, we are facing a profound reform of curricula on both vocational and higher education levels. Development of research findings and a network of competent institutions with experience in applying innovative methodologies to promote creative competencies in vocational and adult education is a valuable resource for professionals and training institutions. The application of these results to adult education should also be straightforward, at least to specific target groups of training subjects.

The economic crash and recession of 2008 had a profound impact on European society and, by extension, education and vocational training systems. The recovery proved difficult and problematic. While socio-economic conditions had improved significantly by 2016, the crisis forced a fundamental re-evaluation of strategic objectives regarding learning, employability and socio-economic relevance. While the economy has now returned to pre-crisis levels of activity, the legacy of uncertainty, volatility and indebtedness will last many years more. While unemployment is now at a historically low level, there is evidence of significant imbalance in access to resources and a consequent marked degree of social and economic inequality. The further as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 on, which has complicated many plans and policy developments. It is in this context that initiatives around entrepreneurship as a tool to develop enhanced social inclusion should be viewed.

## **Entrepreneurship Education in Context**

In the past decade, entrepreneurship has entered the realm of learning and competence development through Entrepreneurship Education. Education and training bodies are encouraged to play a strategic role in fostering entrepreneurship and increase the rate of entrepreneurial activity by promoting and supporting courses and campus entrepreneurship. Until the early 1980s in Ireland, for example, there was little or no acknowledgement in economic policy of the intrinsic links between economic growth and the education system (Carr, 1998). A key change of Ireland's economic development policy was the recognition of the importance of education in strengthening the enterprise sector.

A fundamental challenge for entrepreneurship educators and curricula designers is that there is no standard definition of entrepreneurship. This has led to a lack of uniformity in curricula design and delivery. The lack of sound conceptual frameworks and approaches to entrepreneurial education has resulted in debate about what is the appropriate content for the subject. The OECD (2008) recommended that Entrepreneurship Education in higher education should shift its focus to growth-oriented entrepreneurship. This suggests a movement away from a traditional business management approach to Entrepreneurship Education, with more attention being given to key business growth strategies such as internationalization, exports, finance and facilitating development of skills to include opportunity identification, risk-taking, strategy-making, leadership, negotiating, building strategic alliances and Intellectual Property protection. High-potential start-ups would be capable of achieving higher growth, turnover and levels of employment. One of the objectives of Entrepreneurship Education is also to nurture the personal qualities that form the basis of entrepreneurship – creativity, initiative and a spirit of independence. The net result of Entrepreneurship Education was designed to be the deployment of an entrepreneurial mindsets amongst faculty and students and improving the probability of campus and/or graduate enterprise development.

Stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship through education plays an important role in entrepreneurship education is offered across the sector in various formats and across many disciplines. Course modules and programmes in entrepreneurship have been adapted and transferred into other disciplines. Efforts increased to organise education activities on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, which involve students from different faculties and departments in the form of interdisciplinary modules throughout the duration of their studies. These activities develop “soft” skills which enable students to communicate in entrepreneurial terms outside their traditional disciplinary silos and make graduates valuable to employers.



## Social Entrepreneurship and Inclusion

Since 2000, the European Commission and other EU bodies have adopted and launched more than 200 initiatives recognising the importance and contribution of social enterprises to several key socio-economic objectives of the European Union, including high quality employment, job creation, social cohesion, access to services, social and environmental innovation, promotion of entrepreneurial culture, and local and regional development. The benefits that accrue from social enterprise activity are seen to include:

- provision of training, jobs and employment opportunities both in the social enterprise itself and within the wider economy
- supporting those most vulnerable and marginalised in society
- fostering and sustaining local communities, urban and rural
- addressing market failures
- addressing social problems
- boosting social capital.

The potential of the social enterprise model has become increasingly apparent at an international level. In an era of better informed and socially and environmentally-conscious citizens, the social enterprise model has gained increased traction as a vehicle to deliver social and societal benefits while also utilising the best components of a commercial model. Within these strategies there is only limited mention of social target groups that are under-represented and disadvantaged in entrepreneurship. There is a limited number of strategies or actions that specifically focus on entrepreneurship activity relating to these groups and therefore. Clear objectives for inclusive entrepreneurship policies are not well-defined, despite the large number of initiatives that have been launched to support people within the target groups in finding employment (and to a lesser extent, self-employment).

Overall, the policy framework is strong for broad entrepreneurship. But it is underdeveloped with respect to dedicated and tailored initiatives for under-represented and disadvantaged communities. In recent years, there have been a number of efforts made to support women, youth, unemployed and immigrants in terms of enhancing their entrepreneurial activity, but older people and people with disabilities have received very little attention. One of the challenges involved in rectifying such matters is that very little data is available about the exact number of people from each target community who have started their own business. This significant gap in knowledge negatively impacts on the ability of policy makers to develop tailored supports for each of the groups.

Entrepreneurship education has become increasingly connected with the transformation of society and as a valued element in shaping discourse about a dynamic economic model that actually meets the needs of its citizens as opposed to maximizing the profits of a tiny minority. Public, private and community models of entrepreneurship exist and interact and learn from each other. Promoting entrepreneurship to copper-fasten priorities for sustainable growth not only addresses social priorities but also brings a fresh dimension to social inclusion measures designed to enhance living conditions and economic outcomes for marginalized, vulnerable and excluded populations. Without doubt, the pace of change in recent years has been extensive. Public discourse on diversity, in addition, has increasingly been formed by a more pronounced focus on equality and rights. This has meant a re-examination of the importance of civil rights as the basis for participatory citizenship – including meaningful participation in education and employment.

## Towards Best Practice: the SIATE project

The SIATE project design aims at contributing to the Upskilling Pathways recommendation by focusing on a type of Adult Learning which is particularly suited to a specific target group. Throughout Europe, a substantial amount of low skilled adults lacks the formal competences necessary to fit into the regular labor market. With the right inspiration and entrepreneurial guidance tools they might develop their career management skills and thereby be included in society. The majority of existing adult education providers





use models focused on the employability of their learners. The SIATE consortium believes there is a need to widen the scope of learning provision by focusing on entrepreneurship as a basic skill that enables learners to become self-employed.

The project partners (Denmark, Norway, Italy, Germany and Ireland) are familiar with strategic development models which provide them with a strong foundation for capacity building in each participating country as well as the opportunity to strengthen and enhance the network and its potential European impact. This includes the following outcomes:

1. A structured analysis of the current practice of entrepreneurship in adult education in each of the participating countries to identify current benchmarks and possible success criteria – SIATE will also gather examples of good practice. The final outcome will be capacity building materials
2. Based on identified success criteria and SIATE experiences, the project will create National Policy Briefs to be sent to their respective decision makers.
3. Drawing on the expertise of learning “architects”, the project will create country-specific curated seminars where “developers” of new ways of thinking entrepreneurship will meet teachers, officials, specialists and, from these proceedings, the “owners” will create concrete recommendations for adaptation of policy on regional, national and European levels. These seminars and webinars will be documented as Capacity Building materials.
4. The project will identify potential participants in a much wider circle of stakeholders.

Strategically this project focuses on creating synergies and establishing cooperation between European entrepreneurship stakeholders by creation of a sustainable *European Network for Entrepreneurship in Adult Education* (ENTNET). National Policy Briefs to communicate the results of and a European Entrepreneurship Toolbox, will share outcomes and give examples of good practice. Creating workshops and webinars for Capacity Building of relevant Adult Learning Stakeholders will facilitate sustainable use of the Capacity Building materials through EPAL and through cooperation with the European Basic Skills Network’s Capacity Building Series.

Ultimately SIATE emerges from a vision that sees entrepreneurship as a tool of use to those traditionally excluded by prejudice, discrimination and unequal access to resources. Rather than taking a mythologized sense of heroic individualism driven by profit maximization, the project re-imagines entrepreneurship competence as a tool to maximize opportunities and enhance the self-confidence of those on the margins of society. In this respect, the central involvement of migrants and women demonstrates the benefits of thinking beyond welfare dependence and dead-end obsolete training. Individual opportunity is linked to creating synergies and establishing cooperation and presenting didactic models, examples of good practice, and analyses of success criteria that create sustainable positive outcomes.

As the ecological, psychological and social dimensions of crisis become increasingly apparent, it is essential to rediscover critical capacity. This radically challenges accepted wisdom, creating a deep investigation of the persistence of profound inequalities in human opportunity and access – ranging from entrenched reactionary forces (racism, homophobia, sexism and anti-scientific obscurantism) to the growing disparities in wealth, power and access that now characterize most of our planet. It is in this context that the SIATE model of entrepreneurship education is being developed to both explore options and enhance opportunities for inclusion and participation in labour market engagement and community growth.

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