



S.E.E.D

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND
ECOSYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

WORKBOOK TEACHERS

**Social Entrepreneurship and Ecosystems
Development**



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Social Entrepreneurship: the power of purposeful enterprise

Introduction: A new generation of changemakers

Imagine stepping into a classroom filled with young people dreaming of their futures. Some aspire to become successful entrepreneurs, others want to make a difference in the world. What if you could show them that these ambitions are not mutually exclusive? This is the heart of social entrepreneurship—a movement that unites the drive of business with the mission of social and environmental impact. As a teacher, you are the guide who can open this world for your students.

1. What is Social Entrepreneurship?

Social entrepreneurship is the art of identifying, developing, and implementing innovative solutions to social, cultural, or environmental challenges using entrepreneurial principles. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, where maximizing profit is the ultimate goal, social entrepreneurship puts social or ecological impact at the very center.

Three key concepts

- **Social enterprise:** An organization, company, or foundation that earns (part of) its income by selling goods or services, but is founded and run by a social entrepreneur with a clear social or environmental objective.
- **Social entrepreneur:** The person who initiates and leads the social enterprise, using entrepreneurial skills to address societal challenges.
- **Social entrepreneurship:** The set of skills, processes, and mindsets needed to create and sustain a social enterprise.

Assignment:

Think of a social or environmental challenge in your community. How might a social entrepreneur approach this problem differently than a traditional business? Jot down two possible social enterprise ideas that could address this challenge.

2. Working definitions: international perspectives

Social entrepreneurship is defined in various ways by leading organizations:

- **SEED project:**

“Social enterprises are companies that provide a product or service; instead of with a profit objective, do so primarily and explicitly to contribute to a social goal that is laid down in its articles of association; (re)invest part of the turnover in achieving the social goal and/or are limited in the distribution of profit and assets, all to ensure that the social goal takes precedence; identify their relevant stakeholders and enter into dialogue with them at least annually; are transparent about the most material social value created; and are able to pursue their own strategy independently of the government and/or other entities.”

- **OECD:**

“Any private activity conducted in the public interest, organized with an entrepreneurial strategy, whose main purpose is not the maximization of profit, but the attainment of certain economic and social goals, and which has the capacity for bringing innovative solutions to the problems of social exclusion and unemployment.”

- **European Commission:**

“An operator in the social economy whose main objective is to have a social impact rather than make a profit for their owners or shareholders. It operates by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative fashion and uses its profits primarily to achieve social objectives. It is managed in an open and responsible manner and involves employees, consumers, and stakeholders affected by its commercial activities.”

- **EMES Network:**

Social enterprises combine economic activity (selling goods/services, taking risks, employing staff), a clear social aim (community benefit, limited profit distribution), and participatory governance (autonomy, stakeholder involvement).

Assignment:

Review the different definitions of social entrepreneurship from the SEED Project, OECD, European Commission, and EMES Network. Which definition resonates most with you, and why? Discuss with a colleague or write a short reflection on how this perspective could influence your teaching.

3. Social Entrepreneurship in practice

Legal and organizational forms

Social enterprises can take many forms, depending on national legislation and context:

- Associations
- Foundations
- Cooperatives
- Companies (except those with a single owner)
- Consortia

Examples from Europe

- **Italy:** Social enterprises are legally recognized as private entities that pursue civic, solidarity, and social utility purposes, operate transparently, reinvest profits in their mission, and involve stakeholders in governance.
- **Finland:** Finnish social enterprises are defined by their societal objectives and reinvestment of profits. They operate in health, education, wellbeing, and the circular economy, often providing employment for people with disabilities or those at risk of exclusion.

Sectors of activity

Social enterprises can be found in a wide range of sectors:

- Social and health services
- Education and training
- Environmental protection and the circular economy
- Cultural heritage and community development
- Social housing and integration of migrants
- Fair trade and ethical supply chains

Assignment:

Identify a social enterprise (local or international) that inspires you. What legal form does it take? In which sector does it operate? What makes this enterprise unique?

4. Principles and drivers of Social Entrepreneurship

Social enterprises are often positioned between three main drivers in the economy:

- **Capital Interest (CI):** Focused on profit and shareholder value (traditional businesses)
- **Mutual Interest (MI):** Focused on member or community benefit (cooperatives, mutual societies)
- **General Interest (GI):** Focused on broader societal benefit (charities, public benefit organizations, social enterprises)

What makes social entrepreneurship unique is that it combines entrepreneurial action (market-based, innovative, risk-taking) with a primary commitment to general or mutual interest. Social entrepreneurs are pioneers who develop new products, services, or business models to tackle unresolved societal challenges.

Assignment:

Reflect on the three drivers: Capital Interest, Mutual Interest, and General Interest. Think of a Capital Interest company. How could you encourage a shift toward greater general or mutual interest for this company.

5. Key features of Social Entrepreneurship

What sets social enterprises apart?

- **Primacy of social/environmental impact:** The main goal is to create positive change for people or the planet, not to maximize profit.
- **Innovation:** Social entrepreneurs often develop new products, services, or business models to address unmet needs.
- **Market orientation:** Many social enterprises generate income through the sale of goods or services, ensuring sustainability.
- **Stakeholder involvement:** Employees, users, and communities are often involved in decision-making.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Social enterprises report on their impact and operations openly.

Case study mini-analysis

Think of a successful / inspirational Social Enterprise.

- What makes this enterprise or initiative successful?
- What challenges do you think they face?
- How could you use their story to inspire your students?

Assignment:

Choose one key feature (e.g., innovation, stakeholder involvement, transparency) and brainstorm a classroom activity or discussion that would help students experience or understand this feature firsthand.

6. Why teach Social Entrepreneurship in VET?

The job market of tomorrow demands people who can collaborate, innovate, and take responsibility for society. By integrating social entrepreneurship into vocational education, you give students the chance to develop entrepreneurial skills and become engaged citizens.

- **Relevance:** Prepares students for careers that combine business skills with social responsibility.
- **Empowerment:** Encourages students to be proactive in solving real-world problems.
- **Employability:** Develops entrepreneurial, creative, and collaborative skills valued by employers.
- **Community impact:** Strengthens ties between schools, students, and local communities.

Design a micro-project

Imagine you have one lesson (or a short series) to introduce social entrepreneurship to your students.

- What small project or activity could you design that would get students thinking about social or environmental challenges in their own community?
- How would you encourage them to come up with solutions?

Assignment:

List three ways that teaching social entrepreneurship could benefit your students, your school, or your community. Share your ideas with a fellow teacher to start a conversation about integrating social entrepreneurship into your curriculum.

7. The Social Entrepreneurship ecosystem

A social enterprise never stands alone. Successful social entrepreneurs are part of a vibrant ecosystem—a network of people, organizations, funders, governments, and knowledge institutions that reinforce each other.

Essential Components of the ecosystem

- **Social entrepreneurs and enterprises:** The engine of innovation and impact.
- **Networks and platforms:** Incubators, accelerators, and coworking spaces where collaboration, knowledge sharing, and inspiration are central.
- **Leadership and role models:** Inspirational individuals who set the bar high and guide others.
- **Finance and capital:** Access to funding—grants, impact investments, or loans—enables social enterprises to start, grow, and scale their impact.
- **Knowledge and talent:** Education, training, and research support innovation and organizational development.
- **Supporting services:** Mentors, legal advisors, and consultants provide practical help.
- **Government and policy:** Local and national governments can make a difference with supportive policies and recognition.
- **Culture and social values:** A society that values social impact, collaboration, and entrepreneurship provides fertile ground for social innovation.

How does the ecosystem work?

The ecosystem is more than the sum of its parts; its strength lies in the quality of relationships and collaboration among actors. Trust, a shared vision, and mutual support ensure that opportunities arise, resources flow effectively, and innovation flourishes.

Practical Examples from Across Europe

The Netherlands

- **Utrecht:** The Social Impact Factory is a hub where social entrepreneurs collaborate on societal issues. Supported by the city council, it offers a platform for networking, knowledge exchange, and social procurement, and is recognized by the OECD and EU as a model for business support.

Social Entrepreneurship and Ecosystems Development (SEED)

Erasmus+ KA2 project

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- **Amsterdam:** The Amsterdam Impact program fosters social entrepreneurship by connecting partners, organizing “Buy Social” events, and supporting social enterprises in addressing city challenges. The city also offers an Integrated Capital Network for financing and acts as a central hub for ecosystem partners.
- **The Hague:** The Social Entrepreneurship Action Programme aims to increase the number of social enterprises and labor participation. Initiatives include a single municipal point of contact for social enterprises and the Social Hub The Hague, which supports startups and scaling up.

Italy

- **Consorzio Sociale Abele Lavoro (CSAL), Turin:** CSAL is a social cooperative that provides employment opportunities and training for people facing social exclusion, such as former prisoners, migrants, and people with disabilities. It collaborates closely with local authorities, businesses, and NGOs to offer integrated support, from job coaching to social services. CSAL is part of a wider network of social cooperatives in Italy, which are legally recognized and benefit from supportive national legislation that encourages reinvestment of profits and participatory governance.
- **Gruppo Cooperativo CGM:** CGM is Italy’s largest network of social cooperatives, supporting hundreds of member organizations across the country. CGM provides shared services, advocacy, and access to finance, and is a key player in shaping Italy’s social enterprise ecosystem. It works closely with public authorities and private partners to scale social impact in sectors such as health, education, and community development.

Finland

- **Vates Foundation:** The Vates Foundation is a national organization that promotes employment for people with disabilities and those at risk of exclusion. It supports Finnish social enterprises through training, research, and advocacy, and works with both government and private sector actors to create inclusive workplaces. Vates also helps social enterprises access funding and develop sustainable business models.
- **Uusix Workshops, Helsinki:** Uusix is a city-run social enterprise that provides work and training for long-term unemployed people, especially those with disabilities or social challenges. Participants gain skills in areas such as recycling, handicrafts, and digital services. Uusix collaborates with the city government, local businesses, and NGOs, and is a prominent example of how municipal support can help social enterprises thrive.

These examples from the Netherlands, Italy, and Finland demonstrate how ecosystems can take different shapes, but always rely on strong networks, supportive policies, and a culture of collaboration. Whether through national legislation, local government initiatives, or networks of cooperatives and support organizations, social entrepreneurship flourishes where people and institutions work together for the common good.

Why is an ecosystem important?

A strong ecosystem increases the chances of success for social entrepreneurs, leads to more innovation, and amplifies social impact. It creates fertile ground for new ideas, job creation, and solutions to social and environmental challenges. Moreover, it encourages a culture of collaboration and shared values, helping social entrepreneurship become a recognized and valued part of society.

Assignment:

Map the ecosystem for social entrepreneurship in your city or region. Who are the key players (organizations, networks, government bodies, etc.)? How do they engage with the community? Identify one potential partner you could invite for a guest lecture, field trip, or collaborative project.

8. The skills of Social Entrepreneurs

Social entrepreneurs are not just dreamers—they are doers, innovators, and leaders. Their work requires a unique blend of skills and mindsets that set them apart from traditional entrepreneurs. What are the essential skills that every social entrepreneur needs?

Core skills for Social Entrepreneurs

- **Vision and purpose:** The ability to see opportunities where others see problems, and to articulate a clear mission that inspires others.
- **Empathy and social awareness:** Deep understanding of the needs, hopes, and challenges of the communities they serve.
- **Creativity and innovation:** The courage to think outside the box, experiment, and develop new solutions to persistent problems.
- **Resilience and perseverance:** Social change is rarely easy. Social entrepreneurs must be able to cope with setbacks, learn from failure, and keep going in the face of obstacles.
- **Collaboration and networking:** Building partnerships with diverse stakeholders—communities, governments, businesses, and NGOs—is crucial for scaling impact.
- **Resourcefulness:** Making the most of limited resources, finding creative ways to finance and sustain their initiatives.
- **Leadership and influence:** Inspiring and mobilizing others, building teams, and leading by example.
- **Ethical decision-making:** Navigating complex moral dilemmas and always putting the mission and beneficiaries first.
- **Communication skills:** Effectively sharing their story, engaging supporters, and advocating for their cause.
- **Business acumen:** Understanding how to run a sustainable organization, including finance, marketing, and operations.

Social entrepreneurs combine these skills to turn their vision into reality, creating lasting change for people and the planet.

Assignment:

Review the list of core skills for social entrepreneurs. Which of these skills do you already use in your teaching practice? Which skills would you like to develop further? How could you model or foster these skills in your students?

9. How can VET contribute to the ecosystem?

Vocational schools can build bridges between education, social enterprises, and society:

- **Internships and practical assignments:** Students learn directly from real-world experience in social enterprises.
- **Co-creation of curriculum:** Social entrepreneurs contribute guest lectures and help develop up-to-date course content.
- **Collaboration with municipalities:** Participation in local innovation projects and policy development.
- **Events and challenges:** Hackathons, pitch competitions, and “Buy Social” events stimulate entrepreneurial thinking and networking.
- **Partnerships with businesses:** Joint projects with companies engaged in corporate social responsibility.
- **Community projects:** Students work with NGOs and community organizations to solve real local challenges.

Assignment:

Design a mini-project or assignment for your students that connects them to a real social enterprise or community initiative. What would students do, and what learning outcome would you hope to achieve? Write a short outline.

10. The teacher as inspirer and connector

As a teacher, you are the guide who shows students that entrepreneurship and making a difference can go hand in hand. You can spark curiosity, ignite passion, and challenge students to create their own impact. Let yourself be inspired by the stories, examples, and possibilities of social entrepreneurship—and pass that inspiration on.

“Social entrepreneurship is not just about doing business differently, it’s about doing business for good. It’s about daring to dream—and then daring to do.”

Let this book be an invitation to dream, to dare, and to do. Together, let’s build a future where entrepreneurship and social responsibility go hand in hand—because the world needs people who ask not just, “What’s in it for me?” but, “What legacy will I leave behind?”

Assignment:

Reflect on a teacher or mentor who inspired you. What did they do that made a difference in your life?

How can you bring that same spirit into your classroom as you teach about social entrepreneurship?

Write a short “teaching manifesto” (3-5 sentences) to remind yourself of your mission.

How can you encourage students to see themselves as changemakers, regardless of their background or ambitions?