

TITLE:

Student social enterprise engagement: capturing contribution, benefits and measuring social value

AUTHORS:

Matouskova, Gabriela; Sukumar, Arun; Elvidge, Harriet; Tomlins, Richard

Introduction

Since 2009, there has been an expansion of social enterprise, social innovation and social entrepreneurship in Higher Education (HE) in the UK. This engagement takes many forms, including: creating opportunities for students to develop their own social enterprises; providing placements for students in social enterprises; offering specialist courses in social entrepreneurship; providing incubation spaces, dedicated support services, or research expertise to social enterprises (British Council 2018). A recent review of HEFCE-funded Social Entrepreneurs in Education Change programme (HEFCE/Flourish Together CIC 2018) laid out a number of recommendations that were subsequently in part adopted in The Office for Students (OfS) Business Plan (2018). Together with the upcoming Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) they give emphasis on capturing and measuring the impact, including **social value** and **return on investment** of student related engagement with the **workplace, local communities and student and social enterprise**. However, there is a dearth of existing evidence focusing specifically on social enterprise and in the UK the research on enterprise education interventions reports purely economic and immediate impacts with short-term focus (Rae et al, 2014). In addition, whilst OFS is committed to social value it does not define it nor identify how it might or can be managed. This gap is mirrored by KEF's consultation although Ulrichsen (2018) does refer to socio-economic impact in a background paper on the clustering of Higher Education Institutions. In essence the entire societal impact of the social enterprise. The full range of benefits and outcomes of social enterprise engagements often goes unreported or remains hidden within utilitarian metrics that fail to capture the rich diversity of student-social enterprise activities in our universities and the value they add to the student experience more generally (HEPI 2018). It is in this context that this paper is set; it aims to study the evidence of social value of student contribution to, and benefits from engagement with social enterprise incubation centres. Through creation of four detailed case studies, the study will capture the journey and longitudinal impacts of student-social enterprise engagement activities and the ways to measure and present the benefits and social value arising from these engagements.

METHODOLOGY:

Case study methodology was primarily used as the vehicle to explore the above research question. A total of 4 case studies were selected which met all of the following selection criteria,

- completed enterprise education intervention and
- took part in SE internships or SE work placement or
- founded SE start-up

Participants were selected from Coventry University Social Enterprise database who met the above criteria. The four case studies represented a varied sample including,

- gender split (2 male, 2 female)
- SE lifecycle (e.g. recent start-up, established)
- SE work placement sector (e.g. health, education etc)

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Interview questions were designed to capture detailed life stories of the graduates, the choice to start a social enterprise, the journey from pre-start up to start up and the support they received. Questions also focused on the current operations of the social enterprise and in their own viewpoint the impact their engagements are making in society. The interviews lasted approximately for 1.5 hours with notes and audio recording.

The recorded data was further transcribed and thematically analyzed to understand the value creation in the context of social enterprise engagements and support received through incubation center. Further data was also collected on the information pertaining to the selected case studies, for example, data relating to SE start-up, SE internship information, founding dates, number of employees, financial statements, social impact, awards received etc. This was gathered to draw out a detailed picture of the four start-ups and the support they received. The data collected was analyzed thematically to draw inferences and provide recommendations.

Results and Discussion

According to Robinson (2006), while the concept of social enterprises are catching up, research still is lacking in understanding the process of social entrepreneurship. Typically, when it comes to theory building, research into social enterprises is still understanding social enterprises create value and how it is measured (Robinson, 2006, Tomlins, 2015). Especially in differentiating social entrepreneurship with other 'social initiatives' (Mair, 2006). This work looks at this process of social entrepreneurship, using the experiences of social entrepreneurs, it examines, the motivations to start social enterprises, how opportunities were recognized, how institutional and social factors were addressed in evaluating the opportunities and how these were overcome. Finally, the work also examines, how the entrepreneurs sustain value creation in a changing social sector markets. Before venturing into the thematic analysis of data, a brief overview of the cases is given in table 1. After reviewing the interviews, business documents and other information available on the ventures, three themes emerged from the analysis of qualitative data.

Theme 1: Identification of opportunities; how did the entrepreneurs identify the opportunities, what was the motivation and factors that led to the starting of the enterprises?

Theme 2: Negotiation of barriers; what sort of barriers did the entrepreneurs face in the distilling and supporting the opportunities, interventions and support received to pursue the opportunities. Testing the social innovation

Theme 3: Continuing value creation; how do entrepreneurs sustain value creation in the changing social market sector; since the formation of the business, how the entrepreneurs are managing the need to create value (social/economic) and further investments in innovation

Discussing the themes individually, when it comes to identification of opportunities, the data revealed that, the personal circumstances and the social environment played a major role in shaping the entrepreneurial behavior of the participants. In the first case, 'Youth Work' was established to address problems faced by young people in Warwickshire County. Issues of social exclusion, disengagement from education, training or employment among young people aged 11-24 in North Warwickshire, Nuneaton, and Coventry are tackled through the initiatives of the enterprise. The motivation to start the enterprise came from the founder actually experiencing the social unrest during his childhood. He saw opportunity in addressing issues the younger population was facing in the region and decided to address them. Further evidence of experiences and frustration of individuals leading them to identify entrepreneurial

Table 1: Snapshot of the social enterprises

Case No	Name, Founded in, Entrepreneur profile	Form and Brief Info	Financials	Employees	Clients	Recognition and Rewards
1	Youth Work, 13/07/17, Male, White British, Age: 30, Faculty: Health and Life Sciences, BA in Youth Work, graduated in 2017 from Coventry University	CIC; Tackling social exclusion by supporting vulnerable young people aged 11-24 who are disengaged from Education, Employment or Training from Nuneaton, North Warwickshire and surrounding areas.	Debt capital raised in last year: £0; Funding Received: £0; Income/Sales in the last 12 months: £130,000	6 FT; 4 PT	No of active clients: 40	Most Evolved Start Up of CUSE, Santander Evolve Awards 2018; Since becoming established we have worked with over 40 young people aged 11-24. We have re-invested close to £100,000 back into our community to do this.
2	Creative Outreach, 13/04/2016 as Limited Company- CIC 13/04/2019; Male, Ghanaian, 31, Faculty: Engineering and Computing, BEng Aerospace Engineering, graduated in 2013 from Coventry University	Limited company in 2016, converted to a CIC In 2019; Creative outreach is a platform for youth development and creative growth. We connect youth talent with organizations and stakeholders who have interest in our youth community	Debt capital raised in last year: £0; Funding Received: £0; Income/Sales in the last 12 months: £24,000	1 FT; 30 Volunteers	No of active clients: 150+/month	Santander Evolve Awards 2019 – Creative Business Award, BCAa British Citizen Award – Arts , Coventry University Entrepreneur of the Year 2013
3	Language Translations, 18/08/2016 as CIC and August 2019 as CIC, Female, EU Romanian, 28, Business and Law, LLB and French, graduated in 2014 from Coventry University	CIC since 2019, Translation, interpreting and community outreach company, currently delivering services and creating social impact in the local communities, with plans to branch out nationwide.	Debt capital raised in last year: £0; Funding Received: £9996; Income/Sales in the last 12 months: £4807	1 FT	No of active clients: 10	Santander Evolve Awards winner of GBP1K for Woman in Business Entrepreneur of Erasmus
4	Mindful Gifts, 16/07/2018, Female, 24, Black British, Health and Life Sciences, MSc Mindfulness and Compassion, graduate in 2019 from Coventry University	Sole Trader since 16/07/2018. Mindful Gifts is about promoting wellbeing by teaching mindfulness workshops, delivering chakra balancing therapy and selling self-care focused homemade body butters	Debt capital raised in last year: £0; Funding Received: £0; Income/Sales in the last 12 months: £394.91	1 PT	No of active clients: 40	

opportunities can be extracted from the other case studies. For example, language translations, an enterprise founded to help asylum seekers and non-native English speakers with translation and community services. The opportunity was identified when the founder saw difficulties in finding affordable translation services when non-English speakers were using public services including NHS, government agencies and judicial bodies. Similar examples can also be observed in the other two cases, where, the circumstances, the experiences and frustrations of the current state of affairs led to entrepreneurial opportunities that were identified by these entrepreneurs, and addressed through innovation to create value- both socially and economically

The entrepreneurs in this study are very passionate about their businesses and there was a strong desire to address social issues and develop solutions that can create value. The next theme looks at how the entrepreneurs were able to negotiate the barriers faced in realizing their business opportunities. The entrepreneurs who were studying at university at the time of venture creation were able to utilize the university’s social enterprise incubation center to explore their business ventures. Table 2 lists the interventions the student entrepreneurs received from the incubation center, each of the entrepreneurs went through systematic programs that not only gave them theoretical knowledge of setting up businesses but also practical internship experience that allowed them to develop their skills and reflect on solutions to social issues they were trying to address. The programmes offered by the university’s social enterprise incubation center include entrepreneur training (Evolve/Evolve Social - innovative interactive business start-up training alongside personal development), social enterprise development (SE mentoring – coaching and 1-2-1 support on social venture development) and pioneering social innovation (externally funded projects: Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (international mobility), MiFriendly Cities and Collaborate to Train (internships, placements and apprenticeships with SEs).

Table 2: Interventions received:

Participant	First contact made with CUSE	Evolve	SE mentoring	Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs	Evolve Social	MiFriendly Cities	Collaborate to Train - Internship at SE
01	2017	X	X				
02	2016	X	X				
03	2017	X	X	X	X	X	
04	2017	X	X				X

The third theme that came out of the analysis of the data was about the continuing work done by the social entrepreneurs. The data showed that out of the 4 entrepreneurs, 3 are continuing their businesses and have evolved based on market conditions. 1 entrepreneur recently filed for closure of the business, citing expanding mission drift and limited focus on financial position of the organisation.

When asked about their continuing mission to support social causes, all of them showed strong interest in continuing their work and look at further innovations that will help them to sustain better. The entrepreneurs were committed to provide products and services to their communities, using new avenues like social media, vlogging, blogging, and networks; they

are able to offer products and services that are more tailored to community needs. A key sub-theme that came across strongly is the entrepreneurs' strong sense to provide employment opportunities to community members. Each of the case study businesses had an embedded commitment to uplift marginalized members of the society through employment opportunities. They believed that the commitment to provide employment is a fundamental route to value creation. When asked specifically, how they manage the pressures of commercial vs social value creation, the respondents noted that, even though, there are financial pressures, it is their fundamental commitment to provide services and products to their community that allows them to continue their operations. Networking and using effectuation strategies, they are able to expand the businesses and sustain value creation in a changing social market sector. Further exploring their commitment to environmental sustainability, two of the respondents highlighted that it is extremely important for them to trade in an environmentally stable way that included looking at the entire supply chains and the sourcing of ethically and fair-traded suppliers and raw materials. When probed about how they manage the work-life balance of working in a social enterprise, nearly all the respondents, noted that by being in a social enterprise, their work-life balance is better and able to devote themselves to causes they believe in. There are financial pressures but they are able to derive satisfaction from the work they are doing and the personal experiences play a major role in continuing commitment and future direction of the business.

Conclusion

This paper is an exploratory study looking at student social enterprise engagement, specifically, looking the social value created. The study has shown that personal circumstances and situations faced by the entrepreneurs played a major role in identifying opportunities that they could exploit and create sustainable social and economic value. Realizing their entrepreneurial dreams meant that these entrepreneurs faced hurdles and barriers in their journey but there were support systems like CUSE and university tutors who actually helped them to shape the dreams better and follow an entrepreneurial journey. The businesses are constantly innovating to sustain their journey and have a strong commitment to continue value creation. Measuring the impact they have created, it can be seen that the social enterprises were engaging with some of the most fundamental social challenges facing the UK such as youth social inclusion given the decline in public service provision and issues such as knife crime; wider social inclusion and community cohesion and cross cutting well-being services."

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