Transformative Potential of Social Economy Entities

Thematic issue edited by:
Janina Pach, Dorota Murzyn,
Marta Czyżewska, Renata Śliwa

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP REVIEW

VOL. 2/2024

Publisher

Cracow University of Economics
Małopolska School of Public Administration
Collegium of Economy and Public Administration
ul. Rakowicka 27 31-510 Krakow, Poland
tel. + 48 12 293 74 80, tel./fax: +48 12 293 75 59
e-mail: ser@uek.krakow.pl

DPT

Zakład Poligraficzny Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Krakowie
ul. Rakowicka 27, 31-510 Kraków

ISSN: 2720-7277
The online journal is the primary and reference version.

ISSN: 2081-321X (printed version 2007–2020)
eISSN: 1898-7435 (online version, since 2007)

All articles are double-blinded, peer-reviewed by at least two independent reviewers.

The detailed list of reviewers is published on our website once a year.

The journal is distributed free of charge.

All articles published in SER are tagged with an identification number employing the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) System.

Quoting of articles in the journal Social Entrepreneurship Review is permitted with acknowledgement of the source.
The journal is available at ser.uek.krakow.pl

Table of Contents

Articles

Social Entrepreneurship Review
2024, Vol. 2

10.15678/SER.2024.2.00

Transformative Potential of Social Economy Entities

Janina Pach, Dorota Murzyn, Marta Czyżewska, Renata Śliwa

The domain of social entrepreneurs' activities involves the search for creative solutions to social problems, supporting dynamic communities, and catalyzing the creation of social value. Cooperation with the business sector and the public sector in creating resources, sharing them and multiplying them can support this domain. The cognitive and implementation tools offered provide a basis for increasing the innovativeness of business practices, introducing managerial discipline to contribute to lasting social changes with a large/global impact. Encouraging the young generation to integrate their skills for developing entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship, plays a fundamental role in these processes.

The complexity and dynamics of ongoing social changes force the decentralization of operational decisions in terms of including broad social groups, especially those previously disadvantaged, in using more accessible and efficient methods to ensure social security, create social order, and shape family life. Coordination challenges in achieving social policy goals ahead of states, social economy entities, universities, and enterprises push stakeholders toward new areas of implementation and research interests.

The presented special issue of Social Entrepreneurship Review entitled "Transformative Potential of Social Economy Entities" covers selected issues related to examples of unlocking the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship in supporting job creation, professional integration, or social inclusion. The issues of shaping social protection, implementing social services in the public management system and within welfare farms, attitudes of social entrepreneurs towards bankruptcy/failure, responsibility of universities for social issues, and building entrepreneurial attitudes among students (in the U.S. and in Poland) will constitute the contribution of this issue to recognizing the current states and identifying further research niches.

Social policy and social entrepreneurship share the same functions in terms of recognizing alternative possibilities for coping with the functioning of the emerging welfare states. Social policy remains an area of searching for solutions that help move to higher work environment standards or social protection while ensuring flexibility of action and expanding the possibilities of using development opportunities. The state's potential is of fundamental importance in effectively coordinating the dynamics of changes in the social economy sector and facilitating the transfer of changes brought about by social innovations from the local/community level to the level of large-scale/nationwide and regional transformations.

Aleksandra Jasińska and Marek Jasiński analyze the tools for assessing the creation of social security within social policy. They indicate Poland's relatively weak position in rankings despite large social transfers and increased costs of operating the social system. The authors support their conclusions with reference to the importance of social infrastructure and related services, such as nursery and preschool care or healthcare. Simultaneously, they draw attention to the forms, intensity, and goals of social initiatives undertaken, emphasizing the need to include broad social groups and make people in difficult life situations independent.

Emphasizing the costs and monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of social policy actions leads to recognizing ways of providing social services more efficiently and transparently. Karolina Szymaniec-Mlicka, Aldona Frączkiewicz-Wronka, and Anna Kozak examine social welfare centers in terms of using ICT tools to provide social services. In their view, digitalizing these basic organizational units and implementing social policy goals in Poland at the municipal level could possibly reduce the bureaucracy scale as well as accelerate and increase the communication effectiveness, which is to open up opportunities for public sector organizations to multiply the effectiveness in providing social services for the civil society sector and the market sector. At the same time, the article indicates that there are various dimensions of using communication and information tools for the operation of social welfare units, relating to intra-organizational communication efficiency, accelerating data verification and improving the quality of procedures, increasing data security, shortening the time and cost of decision-making, minimizing errors, simplifying the processes of providing benefits, facilitating reporting, and access to shared information.

Deinstitutionalization of social services as a manifestation of decentralization of social policy and sharing responsibility with various stakeholders for implementing social tasks at the local level strengthens local communities in various ways. Karolina Jarosz presents one of such ways in her article on care farms as forms of providing social services in rural areas. According to the article, the efficient functioning of care farms in the countryside translates not only into increased access to social and health services but also an opportunity to activate rural communities and stimulate local development. Local governments, agricultural advisory units, social economy support centers, social service centers (social welfare centers), and ministries responsible for social policy strengthen the implementation potential of such entities, activating themselves in the provision of social services by implementing the idea of "green" care and developing care services as part of the functioning of farms. At the current implementation stage, educating people willing to run such farms (as a business activity or a social economy entity) and local government decision-makers emerges as the main factor driving desired changes.

Failure is an inseparable aspect of highly innovative solutions. Understanding this phenomenon, its conditions, and recognizable consequences helps transform the costs generated in this way into benefits. In this case, the key area of recognition is the attitude of social entrepreneurs and local government support bodies, which helps draw conclusions regarding the causes and effects of failures/bankruptcies. Despite the negative financial or psychological consequences, the bankruptcy of a social enterprise can become an invaluable research and instructional background, and, more importantly, a buffer or tool for strengthening resilience to subsequent crises. The subjectivity and intensity of experiencing the effects, which often marked by failures in social enterprises, enter tensions related to their amortization due to the contradictory goals inherently assigned to this activity, the supremacy of social norms and values, as well as the importance of identity. As Martyna Wronka-Pośpiech emphasizes, the need to simultaneously manage these elements leads to friction in the use of alternative approaches, tools, and solutions. Wronka-Pośpiech recognizes developing the ability to understand, predict, and respond to stakeholder groups' failures in social entrepreneurship as a key challenge for social enterprises.

Promoting non-profit strategies and business leadership in the social sector or public education is a major challenge for the academic world. However, the support of students through courses, career development programs, involvement in the work of the social sector, book publications, case studies, implementation of research and implementation projects, and integration through research forums, and conferences are not the only elements of fundamental importance in this field. These also include good practices and usage recommendations by wide groups of stakeholders. Beata Detyna raises the issue of the special role of universities as socially responsible entities and discusses the diverse contexts of practical use of the concept of universities' social responsibility. The complexity of the issue of university's social responsibility, including the involvement and recognition of benefits by wide groups of stakeholders (students, employees, external partners) forces the transition to higher integrity levels in the processes being launched. Building efficient communication between stakeholders (regarding the university's readiness to develop the idea of social responsibility, the mission or strategy of university development, systemic solutions, monitoring the progress of activities), creating an academic community around the university, motivating employees and other university stakeholders to co-create policy and results introduces strong roots in the implementation of the idea and increases the possibility of neutralizing crises sources. Detyna mentions tools that could help implement university's social responsibility. For example, this might consist in including the idea of university social responsibility in the university's strategic documents, adapting systemic solutions in this area (mainly the motivation system strengthening the sense of loyalty of employees), creating "maps" of university responsibility towards its employees, creating a network of supervision and strengthening initiatives through coordinators or proxies, announcing results reports for public review.

The success of university programs that affect the integration of broad stakeholder groups and the achieved results is under significant influence of the reaction/responsiveness of students to the policy, teaching, and university's scientific offer.

Research conducted by Jakub Boratyn and Michalina Mróz on a sample of students at one of the Polish non-public universities showed the importance of the offered fields of study and the attitudes of students related to the studied field of study as determining the potential and actual intentions of starting a business activity (studies conducted as self-assessment of students). The foundations of entrepreneurial potential identified most among students of business and IT are most visible in the core curriculum, extracurricular training, and workshop classes. Such a picture of the impact on students' entrepreneurial attitudes essentially confirms the primary role of universities' strategic and systemic activities in noticing market trends and professional needs and effectively responding to the challenges they bring.

The experiences shared by Thomas Gold on the contemporary conditions of higher education in the United States resonate as a call for efforts to rebuild trust in higher education in the face of the intensifying dynamics of labor market structures driven by technological challenges such as AI. In this vein, he emphasized the role of widely perceived innovation, critical thinking, or a focus on problem solving in teaching academic entrepreneurship, but also highlighted empathy and sensitivity as key skills to develop in students preparing to work in consulting or the broader entrepreneurial segment. As Gold points out, the ability to listen, empathize, and adapt is a transformative force for many of his students. Based on lessons from the American experience, there is a growing need for students to feel that the time and energy they devote to acquiring an academic education is linked to influencing real change (linking their aspirations to concrete opportunities in the face of social challenges such as environmental sustainability or income distribution, and the social economy as such).

Additionally, this volume includes a description and presentation of activities undertaken in social economy and social entrepreneurship at the University of the National Education Commission in Krakow. The University employees participate in programs and projects related to education and research for the development of the social economy. They also develop cooperation with the socio-economic environment, including social economy entities. The initiatives aim to create a three-dimensional – research, teaching, and practical – platform for disseminating knowledge about economics and social entrepreneurship.

The articles in this special issue assign a distinctive role to social economy entities in co-creating broadly understood social policy and in activating the transformational forces inherent in innovative process solutions (attitudes towards bankruptcies, use of communication and information tools) or organizational solutions (welfare farms, social responsibility of universities). The potential of entrepreneurship naturally emerges as a critical area of implementation of social economy ventures, and universities' role in better use of available resources is irreplaceable/indispensable.

Strengthening the position of local communities in implementing adopted social models, engaging broad stakeholder groups in the process of shaping well-being as a result of adequate provision of public services, including social services, or stimulating more efficient use of available resources has enabled effective problem identification and a faster response to them. Such response takes the form of a sufficiently accurate decision to find not only permeable channels of communication concerning broad social interests but also, by becoming resistant to crises, achieve good economic results and their desired distribution.

About Authors

Janina Pach, Associate Professor
Department of Economics and Economic Policy
University of the National Education Commission, Krakow
ul. Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland
e-mail: janina.pach@up.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-9177-0742

Marta Czyżewska, Assistant Professor
Department of Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation
University of the National Education Commission, Krakow
ul. Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland
e-mail: marta.czyzewska@up.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-6709-6842

Dorota Murzyn, Associate Professor
Department of Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation
University of the National Education Commission, Krakow
ul. Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland
e-mail: dorota.murzyn@up.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0003-2032-8401

Renata Śliwa*, Assistant Professor
Department of Economics and Economic Policy
University of the National Education Commission, Krakow
ul. Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland
e-mail: renata.sliwa@up.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-5029-8798
* Corresponding author.

Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland

Ministry of Education and Science
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.

Social Entrepreneurship Review
2024, Vol. 2

10.15678/SER.2024.2.01

Social Protection in Poland Compared to Selected Member States of the European Union

Aleksandra Jasińska, Marek Jasiński

Abstract: **Background:** Social policy is an essential element of action for every state. To assess the activities of states in this area, one should look at social protection from a multi-criteria perspective. Such assessment makes it possible to compare the effectiveness of the social policies in the surveyed countries and weigh the social policies in Poland against those in the other surveyed EU member states.

Research objectives: The article aims at designing a measure to assess and compare the social protection policies of selected European countries, and to juxtapose them with the social policies of Poland and develop a ranking of the studied countries. Moreover, the article tries to establish if there is a relationship between public spendings on social protection and the assessment of social policies by citizens.

Research design and methods: The research involved a multidimensional comparative analysis and the TOPSIS method. We analyzed the variables related to social protection and used them to build a synthetic measure for social protection assessment. Based on the obtained ratings, we created a comparative ranking of the EU member states. The examined Polish indicators underwent a comparison with the average for the other studied EU countries. The analysis covered the years 2015 and 2021.

Results: The research produced a ranking of social protection scores for the years 2015 and 2021, with France and Luxembourg in the first two places. Poland ranked 18th.

There is a strong correlation between the social situation assessment and the average equivalent net income per capita in PPS, as well as the average expenditure on social protection in euros per capita.

Conclusions: The countries that scored top positions in the social protection ranking have a higher GDP than the others. Despite large transfers for social protection, Poland's position in the ranking remained unchanged. One needs further research on social protection assessment to identify an effective model of social protection policy.

Keywords: social protection, TOPSIS method, EU, Poland

JEL Codes: H53, I38

Suggested citation:

Jasińska, A., & Jasiński, M. (2024). Social protection in Poland compared to selected member states of the European Union. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, *2*, 11–25. https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2024.2.01

1. Introduction

Social policy is an essential element of action for every state. It influences the welfare of citizens, leads to the inclusion of marginalized and poverty-threatened individuals, improves the situation of citizens, and ensures that every vulnerable individual receives care and is safe in their own country. States undertake various activities in this area in many fields such as housing, education, health care, or the labor market. The country's economic development is crucial because, among other things, it increases the citizens' employment rate and income.

Development also improves the country's infrastructure and the living conditions of its inhabitants. Economic growth results in a larger public budget and therefore wider assistance and a broader scope of the state's care for citizens. Economic development can positively impact social protection by increasing the financial resources allocated to this purpose. To assess the activities of states in this area, one must view social protection through multiple criteria. The aim of this article is an attempt to create a synthetic measure enabling the assessment of the social protection level. A series of factors describing this phenomenon provides for the assessment of Poland and other selected European countries in this respect. This assessment allows for a comparison of the effectiveness of Poland's social policy with those in selected European countries.

2. Social Protection: The Concept

There are many definitions of social protection in the literature. These definitions approach the issue from different perspectives. Some emphasize the goals and functions of social protection, while others focus on the recipients of these systems. Certain researchers concentrate on the financing of social protection or on the types of programs typically associated with protection (Midgley, 2022, pp. 2–4) However, most scholars agree that it encompasses social policy aimed at supporting individuals throughout their lives in various adverse circumstances. These circumstances may relate to the individual only, including poor health, job loss, or old age; or they may involve the entire communities, as in the case of economic downturns or extreme weather conditions (Yemtsov et al., 2018, pp. 4–5) Therefore, "social protection can be defined as policies and programs designed to reduce poverty, increase resilience to downturns, improve human capital, and raise productivity" (Yemtsov et al., 2018, p. 4).

It is the duty of the state to provide every citizen with social protection, which includes social insurance and social assistance. Social insurance covers pensions, sickness benefits, disability pensions, and unemployment benefits. The funds for these purposes come from contributions and serve to guarantee income security in the future. Social assistance consists of both cash and social transfers in kind to poorer individuals. The financing of such services relies on taxes collected from everyone, and their purpose is to protect the minimum income of less fortunate people. The provision of this type of assistance utilizes income criteria (Piotrowska, 2008, pp. 211–212).

States implement various strategies in the field of social policy, and thus many classifications of social policy models have emerged. Table 1 outlines examples of social policy models.

Over the years, as a result of analyses and discussions, new models have emerged to address the new developmental challenges of countries, which did not fit into the above-mentioned classification. For example, the liberal-social model has appeared. This model is present in Great Britain and relies on motivating, supporting, and assisting an individual entering the labor market, where work shall meet with an appropriate reward. Social services have become the responsibility of private companies (Golinowska, 2018, pp. 37–40).

The social-democratic-liberal-conservative model functions in the Netherlands. Dutch citizens have access to guaranteed health care services, including long-term care. Funds for these services come partly from mandatory income contributions and flat-rate contribution. Patients cover the costs themselves if they exceed a set limit. The labor market policy relies on employing highly skilled workers. In such a country, employers are responsible for the rehabilitation of incapacitated employees as well as the system of preventive and therapeutic rehabilitation.

Social assistance takes the form of material aid such as food banks and monetary aid. Benefits depend on the plan to overcome difficulties and speedy re-entry into employment (Golinowska, 2018, pp. 48–49).

Table 1. Examples of Social Policy Models

Author	Model	Features
Richard Titmuss	Marginal	• Individual is the source of social problems • Individuals can satisfy their needs on their own or with the support of family or charitable organizations • The state only takes care of those citizens who have problems • State actions remain limited • Low social benefits and social security • Social assistance takes into account the income criterion Examples of countries: Great Britain, Denmark, Switzerland
	Institutional and redistributive	• Social tasks are part of the state's activity • It encompasses all citizens • Achieving equality of the highest standards rather than equalizing minimum needs Examples of countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, partly Denmark
	Conservative and corporate	• The state meets social needs • Private insurance and supplementary employment benefits are of little importance • Social rights arise from the insured person's situation • It reinforces the traditional family model and family benefits, and encourages having more children Examples of countries: Austria, France, Germany
Harold Wilensky, Charles Lebeaux	Residual	The family satisfies the individual's needs
	Institutional	• An extensive system of social services • The state provides assistance at least at a minimum standard of living
Gøsta Esping-Andersen	Liberal	It provides modest social transfers and social protection. Social benefits are for individuals with low incomes. The social policy aims to support those entering the labor market and counter the situations where individuals' incomes come from social benefits. The state guarantees only the minimum or subsidizes private social security schemes.
	Corporate (Conservative)	Social insurance usually does not cover non-working spouses, and family benefits encourage motherhood. Childcare institutions remain undeveloped. The state intervenes only when the family proves helpless.
	Social democratic	The state provides broad access to social services, and working citizens have the right to these services. The state arranges transfers directly to children, and high social spending aims not only to help families, but also to facilitate employment.
Mirosław Księżopolski	Corporate	• It relies on social insurance • The state guarantees social security at a basic level • Social programs should strengthen the economy • All the insured individuals are the primary persons to receive social benefits Examples of countries: Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Finland, partly France and Italy

Author	Model	Features
	Residual	• Citizens satisfy their needs independently through family or free market • The state should teach people how to live without state's support • The state provides mandatory social insurance, access to health care, and family benefits at a minimum level • Social problems appear rare • Social policy aims to reduce poverty Examples of countries: Great Britain
	Rudimentary	• The guarantee of minimum social income awarded according to citizens' needs • Nongovernmental organizations play a significant role • Assistance provided by family, neighbors, and local or religious organizations Examples of countries: Portugal, Spain, Greece, Ireland, partly Italy
	Protective	• High social benefits • Access to benefits and services for all citizens, i.e., universal and rather free access to health care and education, pensions, and social benefits • Family allowances for each child • A wide range of services for older people and persons with disabilities • There is a belief that the entire society bears the responsibility for meeting the needs of every citizen Examples of countries: Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands

Source: own elaboration based on Mitręga, 2017, pp. 384–388; Księżopolski, 1999, pp. 59–60; Esping-Andersen, 2010, pp. 44–47; Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1958, p. 158; Titmuss, 1974, pp. 145–147.

The social protection policy of a country depends on a range of factors, including political, institutional, and economic ones. Wealthy countries function within political and institutional factors. These countries adjust their social policy to economic goals, reforming their social systems to adapt them to changing social situations. Economic factors have an impact on social protection in developing countries, which cannot afford to offer a public social insurance system.

Social protection is thus a combination of social insurance and social assistance, and spans a range of programs addressed to specific social groups. Table 2 contains the examples of such programs.

Social protection, and especially social assistance, arouses many controversies. There is an ongoing discussion between the advocates and opponents of social assistance on the impact of such support on the society. The opponents believe that social transfers discourage efforts to find employment, while the advocates argue that transfers are necessary because it is the state's duty to ensure an adequate standard of living for every citizen.

Table 2. Examples of Social Protection According to Social Group

Recipients	Social assistance	Social security	Others
Working age population	Social transfers based on needs; public works programs; subsidies, i.e., food, energy, or housing benefits	Unemployment benefit; sickness benefit; insurance against accidents at work	Minimum wage; health and safety; separation allowance
Children	Family benefits based on income criteria; school meals; conditional cash transfers	Family benefits; maternity benefits	Child labor law

Recipients	Social assistance	Social security	Others
Non-working older people	Transfers based on needs; social pensions	Pensions based on a contribution system	Regulations regarding retirement age
People with disabilities, ethnic minorities, HIV-positive people, orphans, refugees, migrants, and displaced persons	Transfers	Pensions	Equal rights for minorities; programs to promote tolerance in the workplace

Source: own elaboration based on Piotrowska, 2018, pp. 214–215.

One should also note that social protection is a guaranteed human right. It appears in international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When an individual's life becomes threatened, this right guarantees a minimum standard of living, not necessarily income (Norton, Conway, & Foster, 2002, p. 541). Another document is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN members in 2015. It sets 17 goals, including those that commit states to pursue policies that ensure social protection for every social group and create conditions enabling everyone to benefit from economic achievements.

Social Protection in Poland

The social protection system in Poland is regulated by the Act of March 12, 2004, on social assistance (Journal of Laws of 2004, No. 64, item 593, as amended). The state and local government authorities organize social assistance together. Article 3(1) specifies its tasks as follows: "Social assistance supports individuals and families in their efforts to meet essential needs and enables them to live in conditions consistent with human dignity." Article 7 of the Act stipulates who is eligible for social assistance. Accordingly, the state provides assistance to individuals and families in the following situations: poverty; orphanhood; homelessness; unemployment; disability; long-term or severe illness; domestic violence; the need to protect victims of human trafficking; the need to protect motherhood or large families; helplessness in caregiving and household management, especially in single-parent or large families; difficulties in integrating refugees; difficulties in adapting to life after release from prison; alcoholism or drug addiction; accidents and crisis situations; and natural or ecological disasters. The assistance that those in need can receive includes:

– cash benefits such as: permanent allowance, periodical allowance, purpose-specific benefit, special purpose-specific benefit, benefit and loan for economic empowerment, assistance in empowerment and continuing education, cash benefits for living and expenses connected with learning the Polish language for foreigners, and remuneration granted by the court to the guardian for providing care (Article 36(1));
– non-monetary benefits such as: social work, credit ticket, health insurance contributions, social security contributions, material assistance, funeral arrangements, specialist counselling, crisis intervention, shelter, meal, necessary clothing, specialist care services, stay and services at a social welfare facility, assistance in obtaining appropriate housing conditions, assistance in obtaining employment, assistance in kind for the development of people who are becoming independent (Art. 36(2)).

The Act divides these tasks between the state and the local government bodies.

3. Social Protection in Europe: Empirical Research

Which systems are more effective? What kinds of social protection systems operate in the EU countries? The present article aims at addressing these questions. How does one assess the actions taken by different states regarding the effectiveness of social policy, including social protection? The effectiveness in question needs measurement by the social policy's effects in various areas of human life, not by expenditure on social protection. One should pay attention to indicators describing the situation on the labor market, with particular focus on the groups of younger and older people. The indicators of risk or exclusion and those related to medical care and housing situation are also important. Social protection expenditure remains inextricably linked to the assessment of the social policy quality. The evaluation and comparison of the situation in the analyzed countries needs a measurement metric created using a set of variables considered when assessing the phenomenon. Building this measure allows for the assessment and comparison of the situation in the surveyed European countries. It also becomes possible to check whether the states appropriately spend their social assistance funds, and thus to assess the effectiveness of social policy. Based on substantive and formal criteria, we proposed the following variables for the study:

X1 – Percentage of people at risk of poverty: the percentage of people whose equivalized disposable income – after social transfers – is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, that is, 60 percent of the national median equivalized disposable income after considering social transfers. This indicator does not measure wealth or poverty but low income compared to other inhabitants of a country, which does not necessarily mean a low standard of living.

X2 – Inequality of income distribution: the ratio of the total income received by 20 percent of the population with the highest income to the total income received by 20 percent of the population with the lowest income. Here, income means equivalized disposable income.

X3 – Long-term unemployment rate: this indicator expresses the number of long-term unemployed people aged 15–74 as a percentage of the economically active population at that age. Long-term unemployed people (12 months and more) include people who are over 15 years of age, do not live in collective households, will remain unemployed in the next two weeks, will be able to start work in the next two weeks, and either have actively been looking for a job in the last four weeks or have already found a job that can start later.

X4 – Unemployment rate among people up to 24 years old.

X5 – Average relative income of older people: quotient of the median equivalized disposable income of people aged 65 and over to the median equivalized disposable income of people aged 0–64.

X6 – Housing cost overburden rate: the percentage of the population living in a household where the total housing costs excluding housing benefits constitute more than 40 percent of the household's total disposable income excluding housing benefits.

X7 – Total replacement ratio: average gross individual pension income of the population aged 65–74 compared to the median individual gross earnings from work of the population aged 50–59, excluding other social benefits.

X8 – Healthy Life Years (HLY) for people aged 65: an indicator measuring the number of years of remaining in good health for a person aged 65, calculated separately for women and men.

X9 – Percentage of people reporting dissatisfaction with the health service related to waiting too long for medical assistance.

X10 – Percentage of children under 18 at risk of poverty or social exclusion. People at risk of poverty are those whose equivalized disposable income remains below the poverty risk threshold, which is 60 percent of the national median equivalized disposable income after considering social transfers. People in severe economic or social deprivation have living conditions severely limited by lack of resources, and experience at least seven of the following 13 elements of deprivation, namely they cannot afford to: i) pay rent or utility bills; ii) keep their home adequately warm; iii) cover unexpected life expenses; iv) eat meat, fish, or equivalent protein every other day; v) spend a week away from home; vi) have access to a car/van for personal use; vii) replace worn-out furniture; viii) replace worn-out clothes; ix) have two pairs of properly fitting shoes; x) spend a small amount of money on themselves every week ("pocket money"); xi) practice sports regularly; xii) meet friends/family for a drink/meal at least once a month; and xiii) have an Internet connection. Persons living in households with very low work intensity are persons aged 0–64 living in households where adults, namely people aged 18–64, worked 20 percent or less of their total work potential in the last year.

X11 – Impact of social transfers on poverty reduction: percentage reduction in the at-risk-of-poverty rate as a result of social transfers, calculated by comparing at-risk-of-poverty rates before social transfers with rates after transfers; this indicator does not take pensions into account.

X12 – Overcrowding rate in households: the percentage of the population living in overcrowded households. An overcrowded household is one that does not have a minimum number of rooms equal to: one room in the household; one room for a couple in the household; one room for each single person aged 18 or over; one room for a pair of single same-sex people aged 12–17; one room for each single person aged 12–17 not included in the previous category; one room for a pair of children up to 12 years of age. One presents this indicator by gender.

X13 – Gini coefficient: the ratio of the cumulative shares of the population ordered by the level of equivalized disposable income in relation to the cumulative share of the equivalized total disposable income they receive.

X14 – Pensioners' at-risk-of-poverty rate: the percentage of pensioners whose equivalized disposable income is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

X15 – Percentage of young people who are neither employed nor participating in education or training within this age group, namely the percentage of the population aged 15–29 who are neither employed nor participating in education or training.

X16 – Percentage of people in severe economic or social deprivation who meet at least seven of the following 13 conditions of deprivation, namely they cannot afford to: i) pay rent or utility bills; ii) keep their home adequately warm; iii) cover unexpected life expenses; iv) eat meat, fish, or equivalent protein every other day, v) spend a week away from home; vi) have access to a car/van for personal use; vii) replace worn-out furniture; viii) replace worn-out clothes; ix) have two pairs of properly fitting shoes; x) spend a small amount of money on themselves every week ("pocket money"); xi) practice sports regularly; xii) meet friends/family for a drink/meal at least once a month; and xiii) have an Internet connection. The indicator relies on the Statistics on Income, Social Inclusion, and Living Conditions (EU-SILC).

We built a measure for the assessment of social situation (SSA) in the selected European countries. The choice stemmed from the availability of statistical data obtained from the Eurostat database. We examined 26 countries for the years 2015 and 2021. To assess the social situation, we used multidimensional comparative analysis tools: the Technique for Order Preference by Similarity to an Ideal Solution (the TOPSIS method). When selecting the research method, the focus was on the ability to analyze individual factors influencing social protection, and the ability to compare countries both over time and with one another.

Determining the measurement metric consisted of five stages: selection of indicators, normalization of features, establishing a system of weights for features, determining the coordinates of model units – pattern and anti-pattern, and calculating the value of a synthetic feature. In the first stage, we verified the set of potential diagnostic variables due to the variables' discriminatory ability and information potential (Panek, 2009, pp. 19, 23). The verification due to the discriminatory ability and the rejection of variables with low differentiation relied on the classic coefficient of variation. The verification in terms of the information potential followed the inverted correlation matrix method. The second stage was the normalization of features using the zeroed unitarization method. The use of unitarization formulas provided the standardized feature values with a differentiated arithmetic mean and standard deviation but a constant range (Wysocki, 2010). The third stage established a system of weights for the features. We determined weight factors for each feature using the CRITIC method – Criteria Importance Through Intercriteria Correlation (Wysocki, 2010, pp. 156–157). The fourth stage involved determining the coordinates of the model units: the A^+ pattern and the A^- anti-pattern:

$$A^+ = \left(\max_i(x_{i1}), \max_i(x_{i2}), \ldots, \max_i(x_{iK})\right) = (x_1^+, x_2^+, \ldots, x_{1K}^+)$$

$$A^- = \left(\max_i(x_{i1}), \max_i(x_{i2}), \ldots, \max_i(x_{iK})\right) = (x_1^-, x_2^-, \ldots, x_{1K}^-)$$

Then, we calculated the Euclidean distances (d_i^-, d_i^+) of each assessed commune from the $A+$ pattern and the $A-$ anti-pattern. The fifth stage was the calculation of the synthetic feature's value:

$$SSA_i = \frac{d_i^-}{d_i^+ + d_i^-}, \quad i = 1, 2, \ldots, 26$$

The smaller the distance of a given commune from the pattern, and therefore the greater the distance from the anti-pattern, the closer the value of the synthetic feature is to 1.

We determined synthetic measures for each of the studied countries and then compared them with social protection expenditure. The following variables served this purpose:

W1 – Pension expenditure as a percentage of GDP, namely the sum of social benefits: disability pension, early retirement due to limited work capacity, retirement pension, expected retirement, partial pension, survivors' pension, the early retirement due to the labor market.

W2 – Average equivalized net income per capita in the purchasing power standard (PPS).

W3 – Social assistance expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

W4 – Social security revenues as a percentage of GDP.

W5 – Average social protection expenditure in euros per capita.

W6 – GDP per capita in PPS.

We determined correlation coefficients between the designated measures and the W1–W6 variables for the years under study.

4. Research Findings

The established measure allowed for the assessment of social protection in the European countries in the years 2015 and 2021. As a result of the analysis, we obtained the following ranking of the selected European countries, presented in Table 3. A higher SSA rating indicates better social protection.

Table 3. Ranking of Countries in Terms of Social Protection Rating

Year: 2015		
Rank position	Member state	SSA
1	France	0.729
2	Luxembourg	0.689
3	Netherlands	0.685
4	Denmark	0.679
5	Austria	0.666
6	Germany	0.646
7	Finland	0.635
8	Belgium	0.635
9	Spain	0.587
10	Ireland	0.579
11	Portugal	0.568
12	Slovenia	0.562
13	Malta	0.552
14	Czechia	0.550
15	Cyprus	0.535
16	Italy	0.532
17	Hungary	0.515
18	Poland	0.488
19	Greece	0.480
20	Slovakia	0.453
21	Lithuania	0.433
22	Estonia	0.419
23	Romania	0.405
24	Croatia	0.396
25	Bulgaria	0.372
26	Latvia	0.337

Year: 2021			
Rank position	Member state	SSA	Change of rank position compared to 2015
1	France	0.709	0
2	Luxembourg	0.686	0
3	Finland	0.674	4
4	Austria	0.672	1
5	Belgium	0.661	3
6	Germany	0.648	0
7	Denmark	0.645	-3
8	Spain	0.629	1
9	Netherlands	0.616	-6
10	Slovenia	0.615	2
11	Ireland	0.612	-1
12	Czechia	0.594	2
13	Italy	0.586	3
14	Cyprus	0.577	1
15	Malta	0.575	-2
16	Hungary	0.574	1
17	Portugal	0.559	-6
18	Poland	0.510	0
19	Slovakia	0.491	1
20	Greece	0.489	-1
21	Estonia	0.420	1
22	Lithuania	0.417	-1
23	Bulgaria	0.379	2
24	Croatia	0.362	0
25	Latvia	0.332	1
26	Romania	0.331	-3

Source: own elaboration.

When comparing the year 2021 with 2015, one should note that the situation in the studied countries was at a similar level and had not changed much compared to other countries under study. Both in 2015 and 2021, the best social protection system existed in France and Luxembourg. The leaders were: Finland, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands, while the lowest-ranking countries included Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Lithuania.

The analysis of the above scores shows that the greatest decline took place in the Netherlands and Portugal, by as many as six positions. In 2021, compared to 2015, both in the Netherlands and Portugal, there was a decrease in percentage terms (X11) in the social transfers aimed to reduce poverty and an increase in the percentage of retirees and pensioners whose equivalized disposable income was below the poverty risk threshold (X14). However, the largest increase occurred in Finland, by as many as four positions, and in Belgium and Italy, by three positions, where there was an increase in social transfers aimed to combat poverty.

Poland ranked 18th both in 2021 and 2022. In 2015, the impact of social transfers on poverty reduction was much lower than the average in other countries (X11), and the overpopulation rate in households (X12) was higher than the average in the remaining countries. Also, the percentage of people reporting dissatisfaction with the health care system due to lengthy waiting periods in Poland (X9) was higher than the average levels of patients' dissatisfaction in other surveyed countries. In turn, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for pensioners (X14) and the percentage of people in significant economic or social deprivation (X16) in Poland exceeded the average in other countries. Figure 1 illustrates the comparison of Poland's remaining variables with the average in the surveyed countries in 2015.

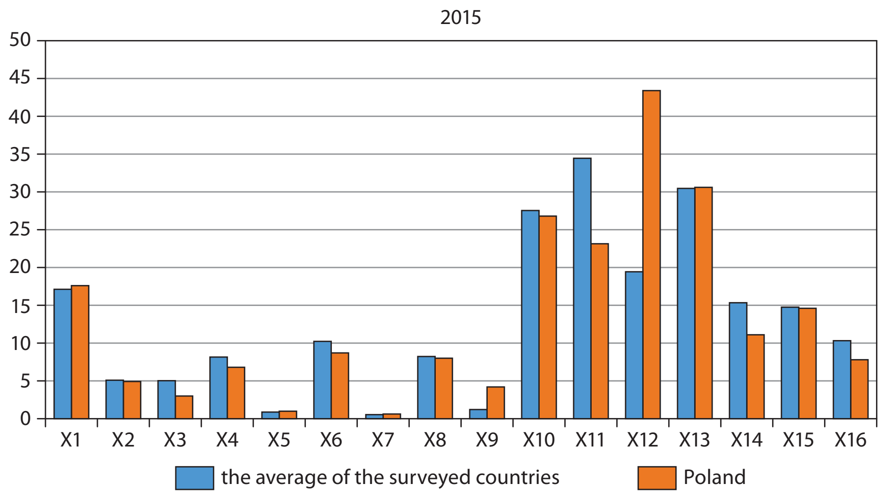


Figure 1. Comparison of Variables for 2015

Source: own elaboration.

In 2021, indicators such as household overcrowding (X12), the percentage of young people who are neither employed nor participating in education or training in general in this age group (X15), the percentage of people reporting dissatisfaction with the health care services due to lengthy waiting periods (X9), were also higher in Poland than the average in the other surveyed countries. Moreover, the percentage of people in severe economic or social deprivation (X16), the impact of social transfers on poverty reduction (X11), the percentage of people at risk of poverty (X1), and the percentage of children under 18 years of age at risk of poverty or social exclusion (X10) were much lower than the average for other countries. The comparison of all Polish variables with the average for the other surveyed countries for 2021 appears in Figure 2.

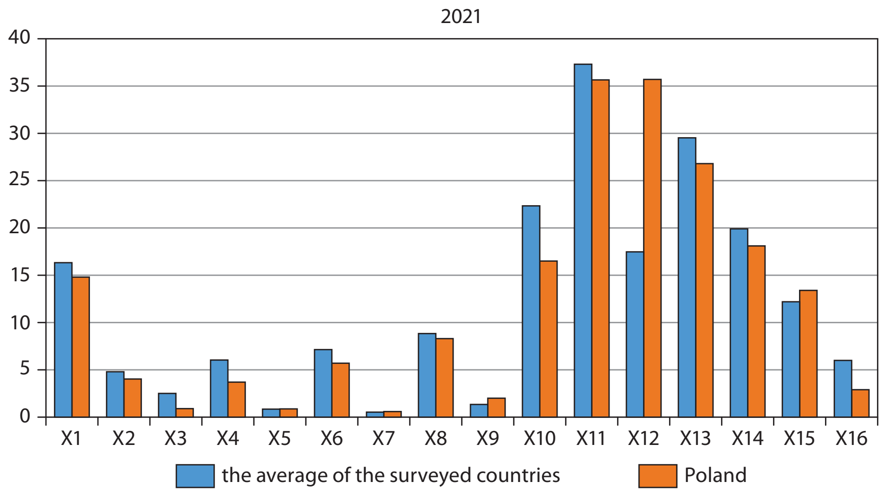


Figure 2. Comparison of Variables for 2021

Source: own elaboration.

When comparing the examined variables in Poland, one clearly notices that the value of the following indicators increased in 2021 in relation to 2015: the impact of social transfers on poverty reduction (X11), the percentage of people reporting dissatisfaction with the health care services due to lengthy waiting periods (X9), and the percentage of young people who are neither employed nor participating in education or training in general in this age group (X15). The value of the other indicators decreased. The comparison appears in Figure 3.

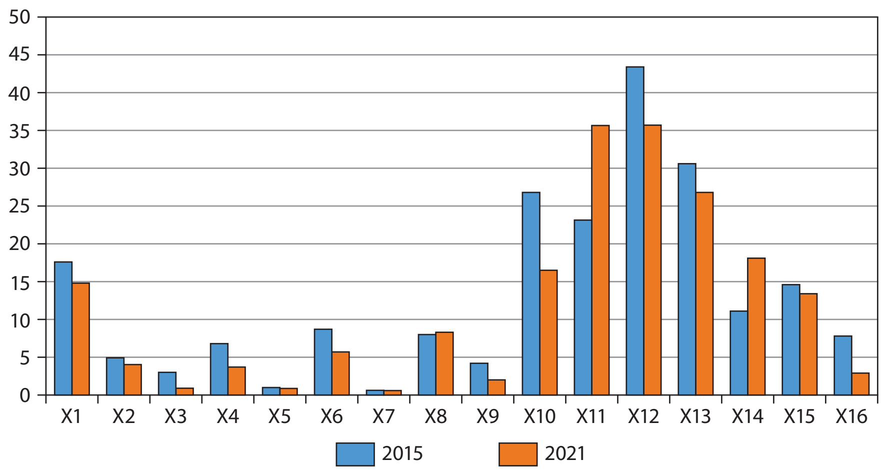


Figure 3. Comparison of Variables in Poland for 2015 and 2021

Source: own elaboration.

By examining the relationship between the social protection assessment represented by the SSA measure and pension expenditure as a percentage of GDP, average equivalized net income per capita in the PPS, social assistance expenditure as a percentage of GDP, social security expenditure as a percentage of GDP, average social protection expenditure in euros per capita and GDP per capita in PPS, we obtained the following correlation coefficients as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation Coefficients Between SSA and Variables W1–W6

	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6
2015	-0.05661	0.876292	0.111826	0.757988	0.857596	0.623683
2021	-0.0434	0.745044	0.068042	0.57035	0.750406	0.547212

Source: own elaboration.

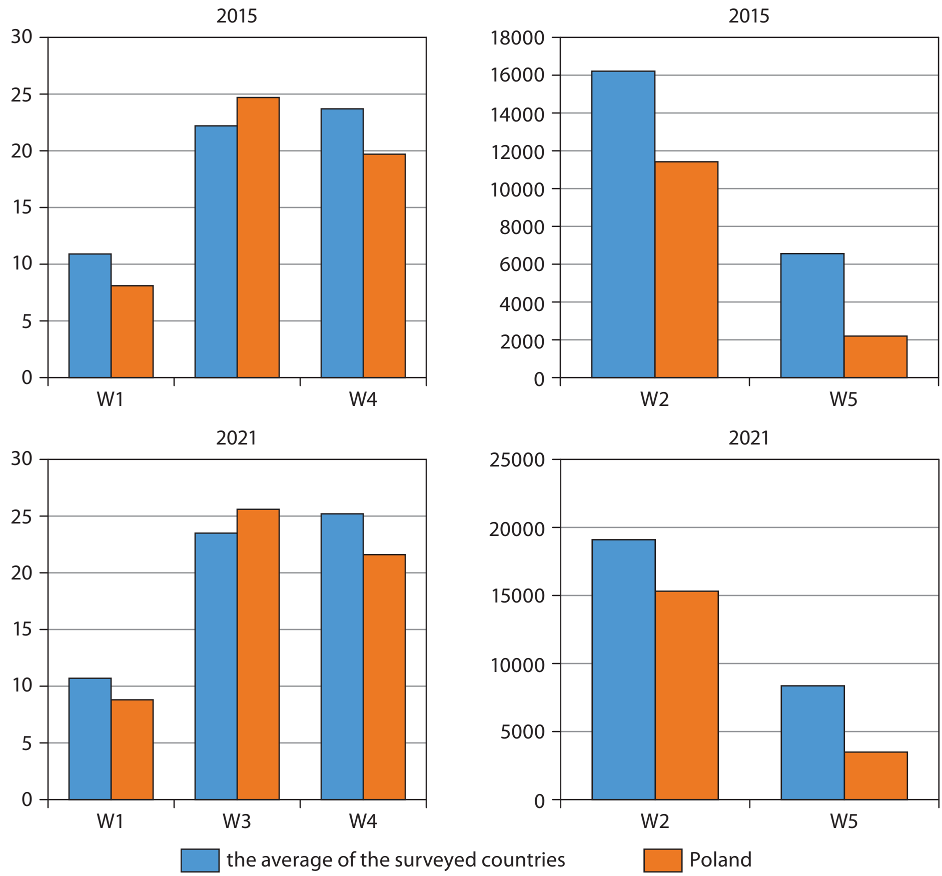


Figure 4. Comparison of Social Protection Expenditure in Poland With Other European Countries in 2015 and 2021

Source: own elaboration.

In Poland, pension expenditure as a percentage of GDP (W1), average equivalized net income per capita in PPS (W2), social assistance expenditure as a percentage of GDP (W3), social security expenditure as a percentage of GDP (W4), average social protection expenditure in euros per capita (W5) and GDP per capita in PPS (W6) were at a similar level in 2021 as in 2021 when compared to other countries. Social assistance expenditure as a percentage of GDP (W3) was higher than the average value of this indicator for other countries, while other indicators were lower. The comparison appears in Figure 4.

The research has shown a strong relationship between the social situation assessment and the average equivalized net income per capita in the PPS, as well as the average social protection expenditure in euros per capita. The relationship between the social situation assessment and the impact on social insurance as a percentage of GDP, as well as GDP per capita in the PPS, is also significant. However, there is no connection between the assessment and pension expenditure as a percentage of GDP and social assistance expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

5. Conclusions

Social protection is an important element of the state's activities, but its level largely depends on the allocated funds. The countries that top the ranking are those which have higher GDPs. The research confirmed the correlation of both GDP and average net income per capita with the synthetic measure built for assessing the studied phenomenon. This relationship remains strong, although it decreased in 2021 compared to 2015.

The evaluation of social protection in Poland for 2015 was low when compared to other European countries. Poland took the 18th position in the ranking among the 26 countries surveyed. Despite large social transfers, this assessment has not changed significantly in 2021 and remains low in comparison to the other countries. In 2021, Poland still ranked 18th. The analysis of the social system in Poland provokes the question whether the significant increase in social transfers, including the 500+ program, had a significant impact on improving the quality of the social system in Poland. We believe that such an assessment is possible by comparing the effectiveness of the social system in Poland with similar systems in other countries. The analysis provided in the article proves justified. Despite improvements in most indicators, Poland's ranking position has not changed. The high costs incurred for social transfers did not improve its position when compared to other countries. Therefore, further research is worthwhile to determine whether the high level of social transfers weakens other social protection measures, such as the construction of nurseries or kindergartens, or improvements in health care quality.

The results of the analyses indicate that social transfers are worthy of continuation. However, they should proceed with different strengths and in different forms. These activities should target various social groups and lead to the independence of people, especially those in difficult life situations. The structure of social assistance should serve to eliminate negative phenomena and not to reinforce them. It is advisable to utilize solutions that have proved effective in the countries that top the presented ranking, while considering the specific cultural and social circumstances in Poland.

It is of utmost importance to use social transfers in the most cost-effective and efficient manner possible. This is essential to gain the public's acceptance and willingness to finance the system by paying taxes and social contributions (Bierbaum & Schmitt, 2022, p. 24).

The article proposes an indicator for assessing the quality of social protection. Since social protection is a multidimensional concept, its evaluation remains difficult. We have proposed a wide range of variables associated with social protection. Naturally, this group of variables can expand depending on the changing economic and political environment and unforeseen circumstances such as wars or pandemics. The developed metric measure allows one to compare the country's position with others, and to compare policies in order to improve them. Comparing social systems in different countries provides valuable information, such as the application of proven solutions from other states. Importantly, social protection may be influenced by the electoral calendar or by modifications in social policy resulting from changes in political options (Lavers, 2022, p. 8), so the analysis should cover the longest period possible.

The costs of social protection are very high, so it is important to assess its effectiveness. One needs to verify the good use of the funds allocated for this purpose. Thus, the construction of a measure enabling the assessment of social protection is crucial. The article proposes an evaluation model using the TOPSIS method, but the model has certain limitations. Those result from the availability of data and the omission of qualitative variables that are difficult to measure and are not widely available. Therefore, it seems justified to conduct further research leading to the identification of an effective model of social protection.

References

Bierbaum, M., & Schmitt, V. (2022). *Investing better in universal social protection: Applying international social security standards in social protection policy and financing*. ILO Working Paper 43.

Esping-Andersen, G. (2010). *Trzy światy kapitalistycznego państwa dobrobytu*. Difin SA.

Golinowska, M. (2018). *Modele polityki społecznej w Polsce i Europie*. Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego. https://www.batory.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Modele-polityki-spolecznej.pdf

Księżopolski, M. (1999). *Modele polityki społecznej*. Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych. Instytut Polityki Społecznej UW.

Lavers, T. (2022). *The politics of distributing social transfers*. Oxford University Press. https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/58141

Midgley, J. (2022). *Advanced introduction to social protection*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Mitręga, M. (2017). *Jakie państwo opiekuńcze?* In M. Gruszczyk, L. Krzyżanowski, & M. Skrzypek (Eds.), *Europa XX–XXI wieku: społeczno-polityczne konsekwencje kryzysów* (pp. 379–392). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego. https://rebus.us.edu.pl/bitstream/20.500.12128/11343/1/Mitrega_Jakie_panstwo_opiekuncze.pdf

Norton, A., Conway, T., & Foster, M. (2002). Development policy review. *Social Protection: Defining the Field of Action and Policy*, *20*(5), 541–567.

Panek, T. (2009). *Statystyczne metody wielowymiarowej analizy porównawczej*. Szkoła Główna Handlowa w Warszawie – Oficyna Wydawnicza.

Piotrowska, M. (2008). Znaczenie ochrony socjalnej dla efektywności gospodarczej. *Nierówności społeczne a wzrost gospodarczy*, *12*, 211–222. https://www.ur.edu.pl/files/ur/import/Zeszyty/zeszyt-12/16.pdf

Titmuss, R. M. (1974). *Social policy: An introduction*. Routledge.

Wilensky, H. L., & Lebeaux, C. N. (1958). *Industrial society and social welfare*. Free Press.

Wysocki, F. (2010). *Metody taksonomiczne w rozpoznawaniu typów ekonomicznych rolnictwa i obszarów wiejskich*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczego w Poznaniu.

Yemtsov, R., Honorati, M., Evans, B., Sajaia, Z., & Lokshin, M. (2018). *Measuring the effectiveness of social protection: Concepts and applications*. World Bank Publications.

About the Authors

Aleksandra Jasińska*, Ph.D.
Faculty of Economic Sciences, Department of Entrepreneurship and Innovation
Academy of Applied Sciences
Aleje Wolności 38, 33–300 Nowy Sącz, Poland
e-mail: ajasinska@ans-ns.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-0374-5484
* Corresponding author.

Marek Jasiński, Ph.D.
Faculty of Economic Sciences, Department of Administration
Academy of Applied Sciences
Aleje Wolności 38, 33–300 Nowy Sącz, Poland
e-mail: mjasinski@ans-ns.edu.pl
ORCID: 0009-0005-1346-4351

Authors' Contributions

A.J., M.J.: conceptualization; A.J., M.J.: writing, original draft preparation; A.J., M.J.: writing, review, and editing; A.J., M.J.: supervision.
All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

None reported.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland

Ministry of Education and Science
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.

Social Entrepreneurship Review
2024, Vol. 2

OPEN ACCESS

10.15678/SER.2024.2.02

Digitization of Social Welfare Entities and Its Importance for the Effective Implementation of Social Services in the Public Management System

Aldona Frączkiewicz-Wronka, Anna Kozak, Karolina Szymaniec-Mlicka

Abstract: **Background:** For almost a decade, before the Covid-19 pandemic forcefully highlighted the importance of this area, the digital future of Europe had been the main focus of European Union politicians and senior officials. In February 2020, the European Commission published the communication "Shaping Europe's Digital Future," which outlines the European Union's digital transformation strategy.
Research objectives: This article aims to identify the information and communication technology tools used by a public entity providing social services such as a Social Assistance Centre (SAC). The SAC is the basic organizational entity implementing social policy goals in the social welfare subsystem, functioning in every municipality in Poland.
Research design and methods: The research method used in this article was a case study.
Results: The implementation of digital tools into the OPS enabled the entity to identify problems in real time and respond to them faster, make more accurate decisions faster and more efficiently, and access a huge amount of data that improved the analyses carried out.
Conclusions: The use of modern technologies in organizations providing social services contributes to a better use of available resources. In the broader perspective of city, regional, or national governance, the use of ICT provides new evidence for the design of community-based public policies and their adaptation to new realities, enables reforming the operation of public organizations, and increases the transparency of public sector activities.
Keywords: public governance, social policy, information and communication technologies, digitization
JEL Codes: H75

Suggested citation:
Frączkiewicz-Wronka, A., Kozak, A., & Szymaniec-Mlicka, K. (2024). Digitization of social welfare entities and its importance for the effective implementation of social services in the public management system. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, *2*, 26–38. https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2024.2.02

1. Introduction

For almost a decade, before the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of this area, Europe's digital future had been the main focus among politicians and senior officials in the European Union. In February 2020, the European Commission published the Communication "Shaping Europe's Digital Future," which outlines the EU's digital transformation strategy. The Commission aims to achieve digital transformation in a way that benefits everyone – citizens, businesses, and the environment – and to build a digital society that respects the European values of openness, fairness, diversity, democracy, empowerment, personal development, and social engagement (Shaping Europe's Digital Future, 2020). The outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic has significantly changed the world around us, radically modifying the role and perception of digital transformation and accelerating the process. Digital technologies are now essential to access most societal services, from health care to culture. This finds reflection in the "2030 Digital Compass: The European Way for the Digital Decade," published by the European Commission in 2021, which sets out the EU's goals for digital transformation by 2030. Digital transformation has the potential to become a key enabler of rights and freedoms, including social services. It can also activate a society in which people are able to participate in democratic life regardless of their geography, social position, or community-specific barriers (2030 Digital Compass, 2021). Therefore, the aim of this article is to identify the information and communication technologies (ICT) used by a public institution providing social services, such as a Social Assistance Centre (SAC). The SAC is the basic organizational unit that implements social policy goals in the social assistance subsystem, and it functions in every municipality in Poland.

We observe the growing importance of social services in the EU's approach to socio-economic development. Such a statement finds confirmation in the content of recent EU strategies and the directions and financial expenditures in the EU programming perspectives 2014–2020 and 2021–2027. It is difficult to define the concept of social services in science and practice. The way of their provision, the groups, and the scope stem both from the legal solutions adopted by EU countries and from the social policy traditions and welfare state models practiced in each country (Grewiński, 2021). In general, as a specific type of public service related to the maintenance of social infrastructure, social services refer to the creation of foundations that are essential for the sustainability of an entity such as the state, and they target meeting human needs. Social services shape the conditions of social life and affect the quality of life of individuals and the society as a whole. They mainly concern areas of government activity such as the provision of public education, culture, recreation, social housing, social care, public safety, and health care (Rogoziński, 2000). Scholars define social services as all activities directed at people, aimed at shaping and enriching their physical and intellectual resources, and resulting in the creation of human capital (Janoś-Kresło, 2002). Collective – that is, publicly financed – consumption meets the human needs which have a positive impact on the quality and utility of human capital, thus contributing to economic development and civilizational progress (Sochacka-Krysiak & Małkowska, 2003).

Grewiński (2021) emphasizes that social services relate to the direct satisfaction of an individual's needs, are person-centered, and aim to have a positive impact on their users. However, although the direct satisfaction of human needs is the primary function of social services, this does not distinguish them significantly from services in general, whose mission is also the satisfaction of their recipients' needs. What distinguishes social services from other services, such as commercial services, is that by satisfying basic human needs, the consumption of social services creates a stock of value in the human being, referred to as human capital, therefore contributing to the stimulation of social development, economic growth, and civilizational progress, and thus to the creation of social capital. Consequently, scholars see social services as having not only individual value but also significant value for groups, communities, and, ultimately, the society as a whole (Evers, 2005). This means that they serve socially useful purposes (Janoś-Kresło, 2002) and create public value (Ćwiklicki, 2023; Frączkiewicz-Wronka, 2014; Moore, 1995).

Grewiński (2021) classifies services by type into labor market services, social activation and integration services, social assistance services, education services, and health services; and by their recipients into services for families, people with disabilities, older people, and children and young people. In general, social services should be either universal or selective and targeted at different social groups according to their individual and collective needs. The recipients of social services should be not only marginalized groups or groups at risk of social exclusion, but also groups belonging to the middle and upper classes. The approach proposed by this author strongly emphasizes the active role of social services and their importance in achieving socio-economic development goals. Effective provision of social services is essential for the proper functioning of societies and economies, as it forms a source of benefits for all members of the community (Iwankiewicz-Rak, 2012).

Currently, the dominant public management paradigm fundamentally aims to economize the service sector, so it is important to analyze the results of digital solutions implementation in the social welfare sector, which provides social services. Such an analysis aims to identify the factors that influence the efficiency of public funds management and, in particular, the social welfare system, within which citizens receive a significant number of social services.

The social welfare system within which the provision of social services takes place is one area of scientific reflection and practical action of social policy. The literature on the subject, despite emphasizing the diversity of social policy (Kurzynowski, 2006; Supińska, 1991; Szarfenberg, 2008), points to its specific duality. On the one hand, social policy provides support to those who, for various reasons, whether culpable or not, are unable to meet their subsistence needs and fulfil the legal conditions for receiving social assistance. On the other hand, social policy has the potential of an active instrument for shaping human and social capital. In both the first and the second sense, social policy will only achieve its objectives through a system which can effectively serve citizens. In the context of practice, social policy, including its sub-discipline of social assistance, exists in the realm of public policies and programs that affect people's well-being (Midgley, 2009) and is therefore an area of enrichment for public management practice.

Public governance as a practical activity has existed since the dawn of statehood. For many centuries, however, it was a marginal practice because of the social functions of the state, although one should remember that there was always bread and games, with lions eating the victims. The dynamic development of public administration began after the First World War, and in the last decades of the twentieth century it became an important area of state activity for maintaining social order. In order to carry out its welfare functions, the state creates the public sector by defining the limits of interventions and the tasks of the bodies carrying them out, and feeds that system by defining the sources of funding for its activities. The role of the public sector is growing in all developed countries. Kleer (2005) emphasizes this fact, stating that the modern democratic state as an organization plays a special role in the socio-economic development of subordinate societies. Salamon (2002) adds that a wise and far-sighted state supports and programs active development by creating numerous instruments necessary to move toward prosperity. A statist state, centered on power elites and short-sighted, acting in an economically inefficient way to extract incremental political rents, and using the instruments of political entrepreneurship under the guise of supporting citizens, will inhibit the move toward prosperity (Salamon, 2002).

In supporting or hindering development, the state can employ many instruments typical of the times in which the state functions. One aspect typical of our times is the embedding of the activities of the various market actors in the ICT reality, with all its opportunities and risks. This applies to all areas of socio-economic life, and the public sector is no exception. Thus, the importance and use of the opportunities offered by new technologies in the delivery and management of social services is increasing (Meijer, 2013).

Due to the rapid digitization of everyday life, coupled with the increasing computing power of computers and current cost-cutting policies, one expects ICTs to enable the involvement of different stakeholders and ensure their greater contribution to the effective delivery of social services (Linders, 2012; Clark, Brudney, & Jang, 2013). This is a consequence of the fact that information networks, where people collect and share information at scale, can both reduce the scale of bureaucracy and provide opportunities for faster and more effective communication (Lember, 2018). One can also employ ICT tools to enable public sector organizations to increase their capacity to collaborate with civil society and allow market sector actors to deliver social services effectively (Cordella & Paletti, 2018).

The contemporary challenges resulting from digitization, globalization, and social, economic, and demographic changes create new conditions for the functioning of public organizations. These new conditions have led to the implementation of different ways of action than before, directed at the development of society and the state, so that they support the knowledge economy and respond to contemporary social, economic, and demographic challenges, as well as to the challenges resulting from globalization and digitization (Ziemba, 2018).

The way in which the public sector, especially local government units, functions and organizes itself has also changed following Poland's accession to the EU and the need to empower local communities and pursue the objectives of the European Social Model (Rosati, 2009; Auleytner, 2018). The essence of the change is the move toward a focus on new manufacturing and service specializations, new forms of education and competence building, and new lifestyles in local communities appreciating the multi-sectoral social policy paradigm (Evers, 1995; Esping-Andersen, 2010; Grewiński, 2021), which means the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in the process of shaping well-being as a consequence of the effective delivery of public services, including social services (Jenson, 2015; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2020). Improving the efficiency of service delivery is also a consequence of the impact on social systems of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, often referred to as Industry 4.0 (Choudhury, 2014).

2. Literature Review: Digitization in the Public Sector

The implementation of the Industry 4.0 concept has changed the management practices, the structure and characteristics of the jobs created, and the business models. The observed practice reveals many new applications outside the context of the manufacturing industry, for example in urban management, public and social services, and social and health care systems (Chute & French, 2019).

In the public sector, the effort to improve operational efficiency by modern technology applies not only to the actions of individual organizations that choose to do so, but also to entire areas of public service delivery, including social services through the implementation of relevant central or regional programs, thereby realizing the drive to transform the public sector toward Government 4.0 (Naqvi & Munoz, 2020). The transition toward Government 4.0 was not a single and short-term implementation of a specific technology. Rather, it is a long-term, evolutionary process of transforming the public sector to focus on the services delivered to citizens (Walencik, 2018), taking place in the following stages: (1) digitization – implementing

ICTs to improve internal processes and structures, e.g. launching websites; (2) transformation – implementing ICTs together with carrying out an organizational and process modification within the administration itself, without changes in relations with stakeholders, e.g. e-government; (3) engagement – the use of ICTs to support both the internal processes and the communication and relations of the public administration with stakeholders, e.g. e-processes, e-public services, e-governance; (4) contextualization – the impact of ICT use in public administration on the whole public sector and its stakeholders (Janowski, 2015).

The areas of digitization related to public administration concern different areas of socio-economic life. With the dynamic development of increasingly sophisticated ICTs, they are becoming alternatives to or replacements for the existing solutions. The main area of digitization expansion in public institutions is the creation of public e-services as a front office, which supports the interaction between the customer and the public institution, and the implementation of information systems as a back office, which sustains the back-end and internal processes in public institutions (Ziemba & Papaj, 2023). Moreover, the state coordinates digitization with the goals and tasks set by the eGovernment Action Plan and, above all, the closely related Operational Programme Digital Poland (OPDP) (Ziemba & Papaj, 2023).

Table 1. Digitization of the Public Sector in Operational Programs

Program	Activities
Operational Programme Digital Poland 2014–2020	Priority axis II. E-government and open government, including four measures: Measure 2.1 High accessibility and quality of public e-services; Measure 2.2 Digitization of back office processes in government administration; Measure 2.3 Digital accessibility and usability of public sector information; Measure 2.4 Creation of services and applications using eServices and public sector information.
European Funds for Digital Development 2021–2027	Continuation of projects implemented in OPDP 2014–2020. Priority axis II. Advanced digital services activities, such as: 2.1 High quality and accessibility of public e-services with emphasis on the improvement of e-State and e-Health services; 2.2 Strengthening the national cyber security system; 2.3 Digital accessibility and reuse of information; 2.4 Digital cross-sectoral cooperation (cooperation for digital solutions to socio-economic problems) with an emphasis on digitization areas such as health, energy, environment, entrepreneurship, agriculture, and maritime economy; 2.5 Support for digital skills, primarily advanced digital competences in data analytics and machine learning, robotics and sensors, e-commerce, cyber security, the Internet of Things, quantum computing or IT management and Industry 4.0.

Source: own elaboration based on Ziemba & Papaj (2023).

Digitization serves various purposes; above all, as already indicated, its aim is to improve the delivery of public services to citizens and the interactions of public institutions with business and citizens, and to achieve the empowerment of citizens through access to information or more efficient government management. Well-implemented digitization enables citizens, businesses, and organizations to interact with public institutions easier, quicker, and cheaper (Loberg, 2021). The pillars of digitization are: (a) *E-processes* (*e-processes*) – the use of ICTs to improve and enhance internal processes in public entities; (b) *E-public services* (*e-public services*) – the use of ICTs to provide public services and the delivery of public e-services to citizens, businesses, and public institutions; (c) *E-democracy* (*e-democracy*) – the use of ICTs to increase transparency, public participation, and democratic decision-making in public institutions and public governance; and (d) *E-governance* (*e-governance*) – the use of ICTs for networking, namely establishing partnerships between public institutions and citizens, or businesses and NGOs (Ziemba & Papaj, 2012). The use of ICTs in the public sector continuously improves the process of delivering public services, including social services, to citizens. One instrument employed for this purpose is the Central Statistical Application (CAS).

3. Research Method and Material

The empirical material presented in this article results from using qualitative methods, including a descriptive case study that enables an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon and allows for a more profound understanding of complex processes and relationships. The case study is a widely employed methodology in the field of management sciences, where scholars scrutinize specific organizations or projects to comprehend their functioning and derive recommendations regarding optimal methods (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). It is an inductive approach that emphasizes a detailed analysis of a selected case rather than statistical generalizations. According to Yin (2014), a case study is a research methodology that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context remain unclear. The applied research method allowed for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon and, due to its elasticity and abundance of data, was able to identify future research directions. However, the case-study method limited the possibility of generalizing the results, and the continuation of the undertaken research on the concept requires the design of a quantitative study.

4. Results and Discussion: Central Statistical Application as an Instrument for the Digitization of Social Assistance

In terms of public management practice, the digitization of the social services sector enables the rapid acquisition, aggregation, synthesis, and eventual use of large amounts of knowledge in the decision-making process. An example of digitization in this sense is the Central Statistical Application (CAS), made available to users on January 1, 2014. The legal bases for its implementation and operation include the provisions of the Act of March 12, 2004 on social assistance: Article 17(1)(17) for municipalities, Article 19(17) for districts (*poviats*), and Article 21(7) for local government. The Act obliges local government units to prepare reports and submit them to the competent voivode in the form of an electronic document using the ICT system.

The CAS is an ICT system that supports reporting in many areas of social policy, including social assistance, family and foster care, family benefits, the maintenance fund, and the care of children up to the age of three. Selected data from field systems supporting the implementation of own and contracted tasks of government and local government administrative units serve to create the information necessary for decision-making and evaluating the results/outputs achieved. The central database collects information from, among others, the assessment of social welfare resources, departmental reports, and individual reports. Thanks to its flexibility, the CAS allows for a rapid creation of new reports and collection of necessary data from the units covered. The circumstances confirmed the functionality of the chosen solution when it proved able to quickly collect and use data during relief operations resulting from the development of the Covid-19 pandemic or the migration crisis caused by the war in Ukraine.

One can access the CAS via a web browser. The range of reports available depends on the type of unit and its position in the reporting pathway. For example, in the case of the MRiPS-06 report, which concerns the institutional and human resources of social welfare units, the Voivodeship Office collects data from municipalities and districts and, after verification, transfers them to the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy (MRiPS). During the assessment of social welfare resources, the Regional Center for Social Policy replaces the Voivodeship Office in the reporting pathway. The CAS also enables receiving and sending messages from/to other users of the system. This is an independent communication channel that constitutes an internal communicator (Intranet) of the social policy units, thus overcoming several limitations of traditional e-mail, such as the number of messages sent at the same time or the susceptibility to spam filters. Moreover, the CAS allows user account integration with traditional e-mail, so that CAS messages – such as information about the publication of a report – can reach a personal account as e-mails.

A useful function of the CAS is the creation of summaries with varying degrees of detail. Depending on the access level, it is possible to generate tables containing data from individual municipalities and districts, one voivodship, all voivodships, or the entire country. Then, one can export a defined summary to an .xls file for further processing in a spreadsheet or specialized statistical analysis software. A significant role in the use of CAS belongs to detailed documentation, available both from the application itself and as a PDF file, as well as the data correctness verification system operating within it, consisting of rules whose task is to verify the logical and mathematical correctness of the information provided. The set contains hard, conditional, and soft rules. When hard rules apply, the user is able to transmit the report only after a correct verification. Regarding conditional rules, their non-fulfilment enables report transmission only upon entering a justification for the inconsistency that has occurred (Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, 2014). Soft rules draw attention to places where a potential error may have occurred, but they do not prevent report submission. The solutions used are quite effective in preventing the submission of erroneous data but do not eliminate such risks altogether.

The CAS provides the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy, as the body that defines and implements social welfare tasks, with access to a large amount of up-to-date and reliable information, which enables the Ministry to monitor the situation in many areas of social policy and to design future measures. The benefits of the CAS exceed the reporting resulting from the need to update reports. The data collected in Social Welfare Centers, Social Service Centers, and District Family Support Centers find application in the day-to-day work of these institutions, while the information aggregated at the voivodeship and national level makes it easier to compare the situation in one's own area with the values for other local government units or for Poland as a whole. The standardization aspect is also important: a common system for all voivodships makes it possible to obtain comparable data and facilitates the exchange of experience or staff training for local and regional users. Although the system does not directly benefit the clients of social assistance, the information it provides streamlines the optimal use of resources by effectively directing them to the places and communities that need them the most at a time.

The digitization of Social Welfare Centers was not uniform due to the conditions of financing the development of infrastructure and the purchase of equipment. The social welfare field received the system free of charge, but securing hardware and system requirements and Internet access was the financial responsibility of individual units.

Another example of implementing digital solutions in the practice of providing social services by a Social Welfare Center is the use of the POMOST system provided by Sygnity S.A., used in the Municipal Social Assistance Center in Sosnowiec. The POMOST system effectively supports the implementation of municipal and district tasks resulting from the Social Welfare Act and related legal acts. Thus, since the beginning of 2010, POMOST has been supporting the process of issuing decisions and their implementation in the unit. Initially, the system was accessible mainly to the employees of the Benefits Unit. Based on field family interviews conducted by social workers and submitted together with the documents collected during the administrative proceedings, the unit's employees entered the data into the system. Then, they created a family/individual file, recorded an application for assistance and an interview, including data on the personal, family, and income situation, identified needs and expectations, assessed the situation and the worker's conclusions, and devised a support and action plan for the person or family.

The system used by the unit had a sophisticated notification mechanism: for example, when entering data, the system sent a message if identical family data already existed, thus avoiding duplication of files for the same family/person; it also checked the accuracy of the citizen ID (PESEL) entered. Moreover, the system calculated the total family income, the income per person, and the income criterion for the person/family. It also suggested the amount of cash benefits according to the current criteria stipulated in the catalog of the Act on social assistance. Other functionalities of the system included the creation and printing of templates and draft decisions, and generating lists of cash benefit payments with the possibility of bank transfers, postal transfers, reporting on planned, paid, or realized benefits, and generating other information relevant to the center's workers. The system also ensured the generation of departmental reports required by the Ministry, currently submitted through the CAS.

Improvements in the functionality and updating of the system accompanied increased access to EU funding for the development of public sector digitization. The development and implementation of Emp@tia – a social security communication platform project, co-funded by the EU through the European Regional Development Fund – was a further step toward improving the functionality of field systems. The measures taken included the establishment of the Central Social Security Information System (CSIZS) and the Central Beneficiary Database (CBB), and the launching of an information and service portal (PIU Emp@tia). Among other things, the portal enables effective submission of assistance applications. The CSIZS is a communication platform in the field of social security and family, which provides access to and services for the comprehensive exchange of information via the Internet. The services in question cover the beneficiaries of social assistance, family benefits, alimony funds, and education allowances; they also support internal and external ICT systems, such as field systems or the systems used in other ministries and institutions.

The CSIZS enabled social workers to check the data of a beneficiary and their family members through a domain system after registering an assistance application. The new solutions proposed by the Emp@tia project coincided with the implementation of a project co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the 2007–2013 Śląskie Regional Operational Programme (WSL ROP). The project in question was "Rozwój Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego w Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim – Gmina Sosnowiec" (Development of Information Society in the Dąbrowa Basin – Sosnowiec Municipality), and it concerned the design and implementation of construction works for a municipal broadband ICT network in Sosnowiec. In other words, the project provided the local offices of the Municipal Social Welfare Center in Sosnowiec with access to ICT networks. The newly built broadband network offered the technical capacity to carry out secure connections, allowing the integration of the local offices into the Center's IT system and enabling social workers to use the POMOST field system.

The legal changes in 2016 made it possible to fill in the field family interview questionnaire electronically using an ICT system. Consequently, Sygnity developed an ICT system solution called WYWIAD Plus in agreement with the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy. The solution forms the Domain System Module (MSD) of POMOST and was made available to users on December 13, 2016. In 2017, the company started the training process for using the WYWIAD Plus module. In the Municipal Social Welfare Center in Sosnowiec, the large-scale development of the IT infrastructure began in 2018–2019, when the Centre's offices gained access to the Municipal Broadband Network and thus to the POMOST system. At the same time, from January 2018 to the end of June 2019, Sosnowiec implemented the project "Working for the People and by the People," which reorganized the Center's work. The project's financing was entirely external and came from the European Social Fund, Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014–2020, Priority II. Effective public policies for the labor market, economy and education, Measure 2.5. Effective social assistance.

The project's implementation aimed at increasing the professionalism and effectiveness of the Municipal Social Assistance Center as an institution of social integration in solving the problem of social exclusion by implementing organizational improvements which separated administrative work from social work and social services. Thanks to this project, the Center acquired, among other things, 24 laptops intended as mobile terminals for social workers, and installed WYWIAD Plus on those computers. As a result of the measures taken, by 2020 all the social workers of the Decision Benefits Unit working in the five environmental assistance sections had received devices with the WYWIAD Plus module installed, enabling them to prepare and update field interviews on the spot. Access to both the POMOST system and the WYWIAD Plus module requires the assignment of appropriate system rights and individual access passwords. The mobile terminals feature additional encryption software to protect against unauthorized disclosure of personal data and to provide a higher level of security for the sensitive data processed. The additional security of mobile devices is particularly important due to the high sensitivity of the data stored on them.

5. Conclusions

The role of ICT in the design and implementation of social policies is undeniable (van Gerven, 2022). One of the key areas where the role of digital solutions will grow is social welfare systems, which aim to promote social inclusion and cohesion. The creation of active multi-sectoral social policies, including the social assistance system, should rely heavily on data and digital technologies used to process entitlements to benefits and social services. The ongoing process of digitization increases access to ICT tools for the social assistance staff and enables continuous improvement of system functionality on the ground. Digitization is also advantageous to the beneficiaries because it increases the unit's organizational efficiency. The use of ICT tools by social welfare units (a) improves communication within the unit and streamlines the exchange of information between social welfare units and other institutions and organizations; (b) facilitates the rapid verification of data in the field system and improves the quality and reliability of the procedures carried out; (c) enables the collection of data in electronic form, improves their security, and more effectively protects personal data; (d) reduces the time a beneficiary has to wait for a decision; (e) minimizes errors in the collection of data; (f) reduces the time and cost of handling procedures through the collection of data; (g) minimizes errors in the calculation of income, criteria, or amounts of benefits; (h) simplifies benefit implementation and limits the possibility of sending a transfer or transferring the granted benefit to persons deceased before decision implementation; (i) through the reporting module built into the field system, ensures quick access to a wide catalogue of data necessary to monitor the unit's tasks and prepare departmental reports; and (j) ensures efficient, effective implementation of the benefit granting process.

The use of modern technology in organizations providing social services, such as social welfare centers, improves both the delivery of these services to citizens and the use of available resources. Upon analyzing the results of digitization in the discussed social welfare centers, we observed that it enabled the identification of problems in real time and faster reaction to them; faster and more effective decision-making and taking more accurate decisions; and access to a huge amount of data, which improved the analyses conducted in the centers. In the broader perspective of city, regional, or national governance, the use of ICTs provides new insights for the design and adaptation of public policies implemented in local communities to the new reality, enables reforming the operation of public organizations, and increases the transparency of public sector activities. And by creating new channels of communication and thus improving the flow of information, it supports the active participation of citizens. Modern technology enables the simulation and optimization of social welfare, the forecasting of social expenditure, the detection of social welfare fraud and social risks, and the support of social workers (Naqvi & Munoz, 2020).

In conclusion, digitization is a means to achieve certain benefits, also in the context of social assistance. An example of digitization understood in this way is the Central Statistical Application (CAS) – an ICT system that handles reporting from different areas of social policy. Thanks to many useful solutions, it allows the collection of a large amount of reliable information in a short period – a functionality confirmed during the Covid-19 pandemic or the immigration crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. Owing to the CAS, the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy is able to monitor the situation in the country and plan appropriate measures. The data available in the system can also serve bodies operating at the municipal, district, and provincial level, enabling them to compare the situation in their area with the provincial or national average. Although social welfare clients do not benefit directly from the system, the information it collects allows for optimal use of resources by targeting more effectively the places and communities with the greatest needs.

From the research material obtained, future research directions emerge. In our opinion, it seems particularly important to address efficiency assessment regarding the provision of social services in the public management system via the use of digitization tools. It is also essential to identify the forces supporting and limiting the digitization process in the public sector.

References

2030 Digital Compass: The European way for the Digital Decade. (2021). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0118

Act of March 12, 2004 on social assistance. Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2021, item 2268 and 2270; of 2022, item 1, 66, 1079, 1692, 1700, 1812, 1967, 2127, 2140, and 2754; and of 2023, item 185.

Auleytner, J. (2018). Presja trwałego rozwoju – w kierunku modelu polskiego państwa inwestycji społecznych. In A. Durasiewicz (Ed.), *W edukacyjnej służbie człowiekowi* (pp.15–24). WSP im. J. Korczaka.

Clark, B. Y., Brudney, J. L., & Jang, S. G. (2013). Coproduction of government services and the new information technology: Investigating the distributional biases. *Public Administration Review*, *73*(5), 687–701. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12092

Choudhury, N. (2014). The World Wide Web and its journey from Web 1.0 to Web 4.0. *International Journal of Computer Science and Information Technologies*, *5*(6), 8096–8100.

Chute, C., & French, T. (2019). Introducing care 4.0: An integrated care paradigm built on industry 4.0 capabilities. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *16*(12), 2247–2264.

Cordella, A., & Paletti, A. (2018). ICTs and value creation in public sector: Manufacturing logic vs service logic. *Information Policy*, *23*(2), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.3233/IP-170061

Ćwiklicki, M. (2023). Tworzenie wartości publicznej jako cel zarządzania publicznego. In A. Frączkiewicz-Wronka & M. Ćwiklicki (Eds.), *Zarządzanie Publiczne. Perspektywa teorii i praktyki* (pp. 64–86). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach.

Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*(1), 25–32.

Esping-Andersen, G. (2010). *Społeczne podstawy gospodarki postindustrialnej*. Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej TWP Warszawa.

Evers, A. (1995). Part of the welfare mix: The third sector as an intermediate area. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations*, *6*(2), 159–182.

Evers, A. (2005). Mixed welfare systems and hybrid organizations: Changes in the governance and provision of social services. *International Journal of Public Administration*, *28*(9–10), 737–748.

Frączkiewicz-Wronka, A. (2014). *Zarządzanie usługami społecznymi. Studium partnerstw publiczno-społecznych*. Difin.

Frączkiewicz-Wronka, A. (2023). Zarządzanie publiczne: istota, definicje, rozwój modeli i uwarunkowania podejmowania decyzji. In A. Frączkiewicz-Wronka, & M. Ćwiklicki (Eds.), *Zarządzanie Publiczne. Perspektywa teorii i praktyki* (pp. 9–38). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach.

Grewiński, M. (2021). *Usługi społeczne we współczesnej polityce społecznej. Przegląd problemów i wizja przyszłości*. Elipsa.

Iwankiewicz-Rak, B. (2012). Usługi społeczne: kryteria wyboru miejsca i formy konsumpcji. *Ekonomiczne Problemy Usług*, *95*, 25–35.

Janoś-Kresło, M. (2002). *Usługi społeczne w procesie przemian systemowych w Polsce*. Szkoła Główna Handlowa.

Janowski, T. (2015). Digital government evolution: From transformation to contextualization. *Government Information Quarterly*, *32*, 221–236.

Jenson, J. (2015). Proces przebudowy systemów obywatelskich po neoliberalizmie – w kierunku inwestycji społecznych. In N. Morel, B. Palier, & J. Palme (Eds.), *Polityka społeczne jako inwestycja* (pp. 62–92). Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej TWP Warszawa.

Kleer, J. (2005). Identyfikacja dóbr wytwarzanych przez sektor publiczny. In J. Kleer (Ed.), *Sektor publiczny w Polsce i na świecie. Między upadkiem a rozkwitem* (pp. 9–57). CeDeWu.

Kurzynowski, A. (2006). Polityka społeczna – Podstawowe pojęcia i zakres. In A. Kurzynowski (Ed.), *Polityka społeczna* (pp. 9–21). Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH.

Lember, V. (2018). The increasing role of digital technologies in co-production and co-creation. In T. Brandsen, T. Steen, & B. Verschuere (Eds.), *Co-production and co-creation: Engaging citizens in public services* (pp. 115–127). Routledge.

Linders, D. (2012). From e-government to we-government: Defining a typology for citizen coproduction in the age of social media. *Government Information Quarterly*, *29*(4), 446–454. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.06.003

Loberg, I. B. (2021). Efficiency through digitalization? How electronic communication between frontline workers and clients can spur a demand for services. *Government Information Quarterly*, *38*(2). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2020.101551

Meijer, A. J. (2013). Co-production in an information age. In V. Pestoff, T. Brandsen, & B. Verschuere (Eds.), *New public governance, the third sector and co-production* (pp. 193–208). Routledge.

Midgley, J. (2009). The definition of social policy. In J. Midgley, & M. Livermore (Eds.), *The handbook of social policy* (pp. 3–21). SAGE.

Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej. (n.d.). *Emp@tia – Portal Informacyjno-Usługow*y. https://empatia.mpips.gov.pl/web/piu/dla-urzednikow/systemy-it/cas

Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej. (2014). *Centralna Aplikacja Statystyczna – Podręcznik użytkownika*.

Moore, M. (1995). *Creating public value: Strategic management in government*. Harvard University Press.

Naqvi Al., & Munoz, J. M. (2020). *Handbook of artificial intelligence and robotic process automation: Policy and government applications*. Anthem Press.

Nelson, K., Nieuwenhuis, R., & Yerkes, M. (Eds.) (2022). *Social policy in changing European societie*s. Elgar. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802201710

Rogoziński, K. (2000). *Usługi rynkowe*, Academy of Economics in Poznań.

Rosati, D. (2009). *Europejski Model Społeczny. Doświadczenia i przyszłość*. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne.

Salamon, L. M. (2002). The new governance and the tools of public action. In L. M. Salamon (Ed.), *The tools of government: A guide to the new governance* (pp. 1–48). Oxford University Press.

Shaping Europe's digital future. (2020). Publications Office of the European Union. https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-02/communication-shaping-europes-digital-future-feb2020_en_4.pdf

Sochacka-Krysiak, H., & Małkowska, R. (2003). Usługi społeczne w gminie. In H. Sochacka-Krysiak (Ed.), *Zarządzanie gospodarką i finansami gminy* (pp. 239–267). Szkoła Główna Handlowa.

Supińska, J. (1991). *Dylematy polityki społecznej*. Instytut Polityki Społecznej, Uniwersytet Warszawki.

Szarfenberg, R., (2008). Definicje, zakres i konteksty polityki społecznej. In G. Filrit-Fesnak & M. Szylko-Skoczny (Eds.), *Polityka społeczne* (pp. 34–54). Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Taylor-Gooby, P., Heuer, J-O., Chung, H., Leruth, B., Mau, S., & Zimmermenn, K. (2020). Regimes, social risks and the welfare mix: Unpacking attitudes to pension and childcare in Germany and the UK through deliberative forum. *Journal of Social Policy*, *49*(1), 61–79.

van Gerven, M. (2022). Studying social policy in the digital age. In K. Nelson, R. Nieuwenhuis, & M. Yerkes (Eds.), *Social Policy in Changing European Societies* (pp. 251–264). Edward Elgar. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802201710.00025

Walencik, K. (2018). Zastosowanie rozwiązań e-government w jednostkach samorządu terytorialnego. *Studia Ekonomiczne*, 368, 205–222.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). SAGE.

Ziemba, E. (2018). The ICT adoption in government units in the context of the sustainable information society. *Proceedings of the 2018 Federated Conference on Computer Science and Information Systems FedCSIS* (pp. 725–733). https://doi.org/10.15439/2018F116

Ziemba, E., & Papaj, T. (2012). E-government application at the regional level in Poland: The case of SEKAP. *Proceedings of the Federated Conference on Computer Science and Information Systems* (pp. 1047–1054).

Ziemba, E., & Papaj, T. (2023). Cyfryzacja w zarządzaniu publicznym. In A. Frączkiewicz-Wronka & M. Ćwiklicki (Eds.), *Zarządzanie Publiczne. Perspektywa teorii i praktyki* (pp. 358–389). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach.

About the Authors

Aldona Frączkiewicz-Wronka, Prof. Dr Habil.
Department of Public Management and Social Sciences
University of Economics in Katowice, Poland
1 Maja 50, 40-287 Katowice
e-mail: afw@ue.katowice.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-7077-1068

Anna Kozak, Ph.D.
Department of Public Management and Social Sciences
University of Economics in Katowice
1 Maja 50, 40-287 Katowice, Poland
e-mail: anna.kozak@edu.uekat.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-8903-444x

Karolina Szymaniec-Mlicka, Ph.D.*
Department of Public Management and Social Sciences
University of Economics in Katowice
1 Maja 50, 40-287 Katowice, Poland
e-mail: karolina.szymaniec-mlicka@uekat.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-7500-4925
* Corresponding author.

Authors' Contributions

A.F.W., A.K., K.Sz.M.: conceptualization; A.F.W., A.K., K.Sz.M.: writing, original draft preparation; A.F.W., A.K., K.Sz.M.: writing, review, and editing; A.F.W., A.K., K.Sz.M.: supervision.
All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

Article funded by the research project Digital Economy – a model approach to supporting the inclusion of cyber-excluded older people in the use of social services provided in a post-pandemic world by public management entities with the use of ICT. Head: Prof. Dr Habil. Aldona Frączkiewicz-Wronka. Project funded by the University of Economics in Katowice (Beyond Barriers competition).

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright and License

Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland

Ministry of Education and Science
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.

Social Entrepreneurship Review
2024, Vol. 2

10.15678/SER.2024.2.03

Care Farm as a Chance for Social Services for the Silver Generation

Karolina Jarosz

Abstract: **Background:** The article presents results of my research on the state of knowledge and people's readiness to run a care farm.

Research objectives: The article scrutinizes care farm as forms of providing social services in rural areas as well as preparing people and institutions to conduct this type of activity. The text stems from a fragment of own research commissioned by Poland's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2022. The study aimed to provide knowledge about the demand for advisory and training services for people running care farms in Poland and people planning to start this type of business.

Research design and methods: I conducted the study using a survey. I prepared three survey questionnaires and addressed them to people running or intending to establish a care farm (78), Agricultural Advisory Centers (190), regional social policy centers, and social economy support centers (18). Apart from the groups indicated above, the study included local government units (social welfare centers, district family assistance centers, district labor office), Agricultural Advisory Centers in part relating to care farms, people engaged in activities other than agricultural (agritourism farm with the potential to run a care farm, horse riding and hippotherapy activities, family social welfare home), and a social enterprise.

Results: The main results show the problem of an insufficient number of entities providing care services (61.1% of respondents). However, a care farm can successfully provide social services, including care services (94.4% of respondents), and 88.9% of respondents indicated their significant role in the deinstitutionalization of social services.

Conclusions: Respondents expectations concern support in the form of training on topics related to the creation and operation of care farms, running and managing this type of institution, care services, and an elderly caretaker course. In turn, the advice should concern searching for financing sources and legal aspects of the care farms functioning – which is consistent with the support offered by Agricultural Advisory Centers – submitting offers in public procurement, and concluding contracts for the provision of services. Further barriers arise from the poor level of knowledge about care farms among more than half of the surveyed Regional Centers for Social Policy and Social Economy Support Centers as well as low or no knowledge of the GROWID project in this group of respondents.

Keywords: social farming, care farm, elderly people, deinstitutionalization
JEL Codes: A13, L31, J14, Q10

Suggested citation:
Jarosz, K. (2024). Care farm as a chance for social services for the silver generation. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, *2*, 39–55. https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2024.2.03

1. Introduction

Social farming is becoming an opportunity for the development of rural areas in Poland, due to several factors. Firstly, it allows farms to diversify their activities by incorporating new functions, which helps address challenges related to limited access to social services, which is a common issue in many rural locations. These problems are a serious threat in the context of the growing phenomenon of aging of the population. Secondly, contact with nature, the qualities of the rural environment and the therapeutic effect of green provide the basis for creating high-quality services that will have a real impact on the quality of life of the people who use them. By supporting community development, social farming will also be available at community locations and result in proper communication. At this point, I must also highlight the financial aspect of developing one form of social service provision, namely care farms. Apart from fulfilling the primary social service function, they aim to support diversification and contribute to economic sustainability.

The article will present a care farm as one of the forms of providing social services in rural areas and preparing people and institutions to conduct this type of activity based on a fragment of my research commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2022. I aimed to provide knowledge about the demand for advisory and training services for people running care farms in Poland and people who are just planning to start this type of business. The study supported the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in improving access to social and health services in rural areas, addressing current demographic challenges. The study results served during the implementation of the care farm model into the legal system, which directly translated into the area of social services deinstitutionalization. The results of the study also served during work under the Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy for 2023–2027 (LEADER measure), which provides financial support for activities related to the creation of care farms (Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi, n.d.).

2. Care Farms: General Approach

Social farming involves activities that utilize agricultural resources, such as plants and animals, to deliver social services in rural or suburban areas. These services include rehabilitation, therapy, care, social and professional reintegration. The aim is to create conditions within the farm that will enable people with special needs to participate in everyday activities on the farm to ensure their development and progress and improve their well-being (Sikora, 2018, p. 3). In 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) defined social farming in its opinion as an innovative approach combining two concepts – multifunctional agriculture and social services/health care at local level (2013/C 4/07). Recommended activities include rehabilitation, therapy, sheltered workplaces, lifelong learning, and other activities contributing to social integration. Thus, the farm creates conditions that enable people with special needs to participate in everyday activities on the farm to ensure their development and progress and improve their well-being. The Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, one of the national promoters of this movement, provides a similar definition: Social farming is an innovative approach to agriculture, the essence of which is its multifunctionality, understood as the ability to meet not only production and market needs on a farm, but also environmental, cultural, economic, and social needs (Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, Branch in Krakow, 2017, p. 4).

A care farm is a special type of social farm. Here, care means taking care of someone, keeping an eye on someone, and providing help to people in need, i.e., those who, for various reasons, are temporarily or permanently in a difficult life situation. This idea combines agriculture with care for people who require such support.

The Polish definition of a care farm appeared in the studies of the Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, which deals with the issue of green care. A care farm is a form of support in the field of care and social integration implemented as part of a farm conducting agricultural activity. In turn, J. Król notes that a care farm is "a form of management that combines agricultural activity with care for people in need of support. An important element in a care farm is the use of farm resources to conduct therapeutic, caring, and integration activities (Król, 2017, p. 13).

Due to the challenges in defining the exact scope of social farming and the diversity of its activities, it is difficult to clearly establish the relationship between different forms of non-agricultural farm activities, such as agritourism and social farming. Noteworthy, the topic of care farms appeared in Polish literature relatively recently. The first attempts to create care farms came in the years 2002–2004 in Podkarpacie and the Lublin region. However, only thanks to EU funds in 2016 was it possible to execute the idea in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. Hence the lack of a single definition of a care farm. In European literature, we call activities social farming, but we may also encounter synonyms as care farming, green care, farming for health, or green therapies (Leck, Evans, & Upton, 2014, p. 313).

As Kamiński states, the beginnings of care farms date back to the second half of the nineteenth century, when authorities sent people with intellectual and sometimes physical disabilities to special care institutions located in closed areas on the outskirts of large cities (e.g., parks) and in villages as such people constituted a shameful social problem and authorities had to isolate them from the rest of society (Kamiński, 2015, p. 109). Consequently, people observed that the natural surroundings had a calming effect on such patients, and participation in agricultural work had a therapeutic effect.

According to Manintveld (2014, p. 8), we may trace back the development of care farms to the 1970s, although in the initial stage they developed slowly in terms of quantity. However, the development of this type of activity was under the influence of the change in the financing of the care system in the mid-1990s. An additional stimulus for the development of care farms was the concept of the American Corporation for Independent Living (CIL), which assumed equipping disabled people with the means to enable them to function as best as possible with their disability, i.e., providing them with individualized care (van Haaster et al., 2012). In the Netherlands, this led to a change in the financing of care services and the creation of the Personal Budget (PGB) in 1995, which provided funds for people who had previously received a positive opinion from the Care Indications Center (CIZ). Thus, care became individually tailored to personal needs and living conditions. This modification resulted in increased access to care services and the possibility to take advantage of the farms' offers. People running care farms in the Netherlands treat their work as a mission that, apart from the financial dimension, gives the feeling of doing something good for others (Maarse & Jeurissen, 2015). They see the beneficial impact that contact with nature, proximity to animals, being in a group, and everyday duties of simple work on the farm have on people with various disabilities.

In 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) defined social farming as an innovative approach combining two concepts, i.e., multifunctional agriculture and social services/health care at the local level (2013/C 4/07). Recommended activities include rehabilitation, therapy, sheltered workplaces, lifelong learning and other activities contributing to social integration. Therefore, the farm enables people with special needs to participate in everyday activities on the farm to ensure their development and progress and improve their well-being.

In Poland, we may find activities for social farming indicated in sectoral program documents regarding the development of rural areas, as well as in the Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020 (with a perspective until 2030), where supporting the development of the social function of farms by combining agriculture with services social is one of the intervention directions (Krzysztofik-Pelka, 2022, p. 112).

Some European countries stand out from the rest due to their relatively high level of development of social agriculture (Figure 1). In most cases, the care farms operating there are quite numerous, and there are various initiatives, both grassroots and more formal, that promote "green" care at the national and regional level.

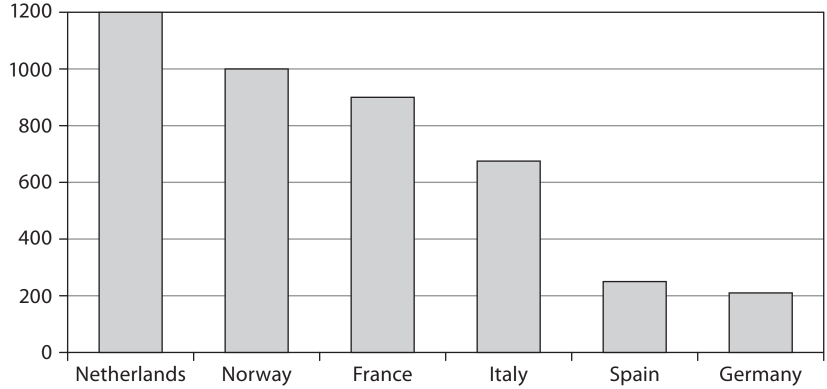


Figure 1. Care farms in Europe

Source: own elaboration.

A special feature of care farms is the use of the farm's potential to conduct therapeutic activities. In such a household, care means taking care of someone, keeping an eye on someone, and providing help to people in need, i.e., those who, for various reasons, are temporarily or permanently in a difficult life situation. Potential target groups for this type of farms are people who require special support, including the mentally disabled, people with mobility limitations, the unemployed, the burnt-out, the elderly, the addicted, children, and young people with special educational needs, as well as the so-called difficult youth. A care farm focuses on the development of high-quality, individualized services at the family and local community level, which intends to enable a person in need of help to remain in their home environment for as long as possible, and thus prevent these people from being placed in stationary institutions, in accordance with the deinstitutionalization idea.

3. Deinstitutionalization Process

The term "deinstitutionalization" appeared in the context of social policy and social services in the 1970s in the United States. At that time, it referred to social services, especially long-term care, therapy and isolation for the elderly, disabled, mentally ill, and criminals. According to Zbyrad (2016, pp. 43 et seq.), in the context of social services (including social work), the American literature on the subject defines deinstitutionalization as preventing unnecessary or excessive placement in social welfare facilities or long-term separation. It involves creating appropriate alternatives in local communities for the accommodation, therapy, training, education, and rehabilitation of people who do not need to stay in such facilities. Deinstitutionalization should contribute to improving the living conditions and therapy of people requiring support. This concept is about ensuring that a person requiring support or care can function in the local social environment, not in institutions (Grewiński & Lizut, 2021, p. 20).

According to various definitions, deinstitutionalization means prioritizing the retention of individuals with special needs in their home environment to maintain optimal mental and physical well-being. However, in the context of deinstitutionalization, we should pay attention to demonopolization, i.e., sharing responsibilities and tasks in the area of social services between the local government and entities of the non-governmental and private sectors. In social services, demonopolization offers benefits such as increasing the possibility of choosing services from different suppliers, leading to a diversified selection of services, incred competition, improved quality and price, and income increase and diversification for local entrepreneurs, including social economy entities.

Observing the focus of social agriculture in Europe, we can notice the diversity of social services that entieties from various sectors provide in this area (Figure 2).

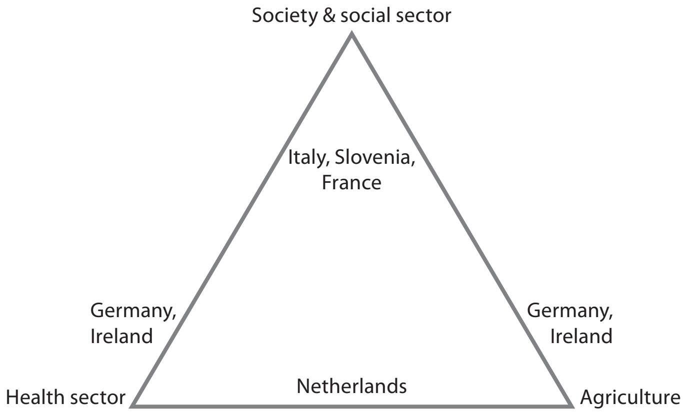


Figure 2. Orientation of Social Farming in Europe

Source: "Supporting policies for Social Farming in Europe Progressing Multifunctionality in Responsive Rural Area," Di Iacovo & O'Connor, 2009, p. 33.

In the case of Slovenia, Italy, and France, social farming activities concentrate in the third sector. Meanwhile in Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands, healthcare entities and farms dominate. In turn, following the example of Scandinavian countries (e.g., Norway), seeking support from more professional (and therefore more expensive) facilities and organizations – long-term care entities – should take place after using cheaper, non-investment opportunities to obtain support. These possibilities include care farms. For years, authorities have provided institutional care for seniors in villages, mainly in social welfare homes, daycare and social assistance homes operated mainly in cities (Konieczna-Woźniak, 2020, p. 39). The idea of social farming constitutes a part of the deinstitutionalization process, which includes the priority of social services provided in the local community before stationary services. The development of individualized social services provided in the local community, including preventive services, will reduce the need for institutional care.

We may find the confirmation for this thesis in the respondents' answers obtained as part of my research regarding the possibility of providing social services (including care) by care farms and the role of care farms in the deinstitutionalization process.

4. The Polish Model of a Care Farm

Developed countries are facing the problem of an aging population, i.e., a long-term decline in birth rates with a simultaneous increase in the lifespan the elderly. For many years, Poland has been among the top thirty demographically old countries in the world with 112 seniors per 100 young people.

The process of demographic aging of the Polish population is a big challenge not only in terms of the aging of the labor force and the functioning of the pension system but also in the context of ensuring decent care in the last phase of seniors' lives. According to the Statistics Poland forecast, in 2035 people aged 65 and over will constitute 24.5% of the Polish population, in 2050 already 32.7%, while in 2018, it was approximately 18.2% (Statistics Poland, 2014).

The phenomenon of older adults living alone is increasingly noticeable. According to Statistics Poland forecasts, in 2030, people aged 65 or older will lead 53.3% of single-person households, and people aged 80 or older will lead 17.3% (Statistics Poland, 2010). However, from the point of view of the health and independence of seniors, the most important thing is the dynamically progressing process of the population's double aging, i.e., an increase in the percentage of people aged 80 and over. In 2050, the percentage of these people will be over 10.4% (Statistics Poland, 2016).

The aging of the population means that the number of people of working age is decreasing, and therefore there is an increase in social spending directed at older people. The pension system is becoming more burdened and the demand for certain services is growing, e.g., in the field of health care and social care. The family structure is changing, the outflow of young people from rural areas causes an increase in the number of single-person households run by older people. The main problem that seniors will face in the future will be the excess free time and problems with using it. It is important for seniors to manage their time, use their professional and life experience, and their willingness to be useful. Among the basic needs of older people, there are the needs to perform socially useful activities, a sense of social belonging, social acceptance, and maintaining social relationships and mental and mental stimulation (Dyczewski, 1994, pp. 110–112). Their unpaid socially useful activities, both towards the family (benefits for children and grandchildren) and towards third parties, make people feel needed in their family or the wider community.

Documents such as the "Social Policy for Older People 2030: Safety-Participation-Solidarity" (2018; M.P. item 1169), the "Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Rural Areas, Agriculture, and Fisheries 2030" (M.P. item 1150), and the "National Social Economy Development Program until 2023: Social Solidarity Economy" (M.P. item 214) highlight the need to create and develop care farms in Poland. They also point to the development and promotion of care professions, improving the competencies of those providing care, and shaping entrepreneurial attitudes, especially among young people through the development of the social economy sector.

Care farms can become an alternative to nursing homes. There is a growing demand for care services for the elderly on the market. The use of new functions of agriculture, such as social farming, will help solve problems related to the care and social exclusion of older people, as well as achieve the goals of social policy towards older people, such as social integration and participation in social life, individualization, i.e., adapting the benefits provided to real the needs of the individual, or providing them with subjectivity and independence appropriate to their level of life skills (Szweda-Lewandowska, 2011, p. 113).

According to my research conducted in August 2022 among people running or intending to create a care farm (78), representatives of Agricultural Advisory Centers (190), Regional Social Policy Centers and Social Economy Support Centers (18), which are representatives of all voivodeships, the number of entities providing services care is insufficient. The respondents indicated that there was a significant lack of care farms in their area or they did not know that such facilities existed. The research result regarding this area suggests that there is a demand for care services, to which care farms may be the answer. Care provided on a care farm is a solution that will contribute to improving the quality of life of people using it, as well as to the increase in care services in rural areas. A respondent's statement confirms it:

> Care farms can contribute to increasing income on farms and will also strengthen position of farmers in local communities. Moreover, direct contact with nature has a beneficial effect on the health and condition of people staying on this type of farm (own study).

Polish authorities developed the care farm model as a part of the project "GROWID: Care Farms in the Development of Rural Areas in the Face of Demographic challenges," implemented by a consortium that included the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Jagiellonian University, the Agricultural University of Krakow in Krakow and the Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, Branch in Krakow. The model indicates that a care farm is a service provided on a farm in the field of daycare and/or social integration for individuals and families to improve their functioning (Stępnik, 2020, p. 3). An agricultural farm is an agricultural land with forest land, buildings, or their parts, equipment, and livestock, if they (may) constitute an organized economic whole, including rights and obligations of running an agricultural farm (Stępnik, Nowak, & Adamska, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, the care farm constitutes an extension and complementation to agricultural activities that uses the farm's potential.

The care farm provides social services (mandatory package) in the following areas:

- agrotherapy for participants, which involves implementing a program of therapeutic and activation activities based on the agricultural potential of the farm,
- group classes for participants,
- assistance in dealing with participants' everyday matters,
- assistance in hygiene activities,
- serving meals and drinks to participants.

Furthermore, care farms can provide services that extend and complement mandatory services in the field of:

- free transport of participants from and to their place of residence, and in connection with assistance provided in dealing with everyday matters,
- organizing integration activities for participants' families and the local community members.

Care farms' services can serve people who require support in carrying out basic life activities, hygiene care, ensuring contacts with the environment, support in the field of integration and social activation. Thus, this group includes older people, people with disabilities, and people with special needs – i.e., people who, due to their external or internal characteristics, or due to the situation they find themselves in, must take additional actions or take additional measures to overcome the barrier to participate in various spheres of life on an equal basis with others.

According to the model's assumptions, daycare on a care farm can encompass up to eight participants at the same time, and no more than 24 participants in the week. The scope of support must be individually determined for the wards in the form of an individual support plan that follows the idea of deinstitutionalization and considers the client's personal needs.

Moreover, the model indicates a minimum infrastructure standard, i.e., the need to have farm buildings, agricultural crops and residential premises that will serve for care activities. A care household should have a room for spending time together in the form of a common room with a table uniting all participants, a separate room with a bed for rest, a kitchen with equipment, rooms for hygiene activities equipped with a shower cabin, a washbasin, a toilet bowl and a washing machine, as well as the necessary facilities to conduct particular forms of agrotherapy.

The care farm model does not specify the number of people providing care for the participants, but one caregiver working at a given time is enough to ensure the safety of the people staying on the farm, and the care household should have at least two people capable of performing the caregiver's function, in case one of them cannot carry out the duties. Caregivers may be members of the farm household working on its behalf or external persons with whom an employment relationship has been established. The model does not specify the level or type of education required of the caregiver. However, it indicates mandatory completion of a training program enabling obtaining or renewing a certificate issued by the Agricultural Advisory Center. If it is necessary to provide care farm participants with specialized support that goes beyond the competences of the care farm staff, the farm should establish cooperation in the form of subcontracting specialized people or external entities.

As already mentioned, care farms operate successfully in many countries in Europe and around the world, but they differ, among others, in structure, target group, and financing.

Italy was one of the first European countries to adopt social farming, which aims to support existing initiatives and regulate their activities more precisely.

The act adopted the definition of social farming as an activity conducted by agricultural entrepreneurs, in the form of a sole proprietorship or company, and by social cooperatives, aimed at the professional reintegration of people with disabilities or those in particularly vulnerable situations. According to the act, social farming provides services and activities for local communities, supports medical and rehabilitation therapy, and uses zootherapy and horticultural therapy. Care farms aim to aid people with various types of problems, most often people with disabilities, the unemployed in difficult life situations, children and youth, prisoners and former prisoners, people with addictions. Meanwhile, Italy listed seniors as the tenth group (Giarè et al., 2017, p. 37).

According to the definition of CIVAM (Centre for Initiatives Supporting Agriculture and the Rural Environment), in France, a care farm directs its services to young or adult people whose life, educational or professional situation leads to conflict or a break in contact with the surrounding society (FNCIVAM. 2011, p. 3). These people also include older people who can benefit from individualized medium- or long-term stays or from individual or group daycare (FNCIVAM, 2014). In France, there is no uniform legal framework defining and regulating activities of care farms. Therefore, the legal forms of activity conducted by care farms are very diverse and change depending on the circumstances in which care activity on a farm begins. The factors determining the choice of legal form are, e.g., the service recipients' type, the planned length of stay, and the type of contract that can be concluded directly with the service recipient or with the facility that takes care of the person. French care farms offer activities such as home activities (cooking, cleaning, spending time with children and family), animal care, education, DIY, gardening, walks, and sports activities. Therefore, according to this definition, care farms focus on the rehabilitation and reintegration into society of people who, as a result of a difficult life situation, have been pushed to the margins of society.

The Polish welfare farm model considers the experience of countries that are more advanced in developing social agriculture, i.e., the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Italy and Norway. I chose these countries, because in each of them social farming develops based on different regulations and it is possible to learn about various solutions important from the point of view of implementing care farms in Poland. Noteworthy, there are no comparative models; the Polish model is dedicated exclusively to seniors.

Preparing People and Institutions to Provide Social Services in the Form of a Care Farm

The care farm model does not specify the education level or type required for caregivers, which is further supported by the absence of legal education requirements for staff in daycare homes. Therefore, I attempted to examine the preparation of people and institutions for running a care farm and their needs in terms of training and consulting. The presented study complements those existing ones. Thus far, research has investigated attitudes, needs, and expectations of Poles towards aging, with particular emphasis on residents of rural areas, surveys aimed at learning the opinions of older people (60+) regarding the need for innovative social and care services.

5. Research Methodology

I conducted the study in 2022 and aimed to provide knowledge in terms of the demand for advisory and training services for people running care farms in Poland and people who are just planning to start this type of business. I used surveys to collect empirical material and sent them to the institution. For technical reasons, I had to prepare three survey questionnaires, i.e., dedicated to people running or intending to establish a care farm, representatives of Agricultural Advisory Centers, and representatives of Regional Social Policy Centers and Social Economy Support Centers.

Table 1. Survey Respondents

Total	N = 286	All respondents
People running or intending to create a care farm	N = 78	People intending to run a care farm = 34 People running a farm = 12 Local government units = 11 ODR = 7 Care farms = 5 Other activity = 6 Social enterprise = 2 Other = 1
Agricultural Advisory Centers	N = 190	
Regional Social Policy Centers/Social Economy Support Centers	N = 18	

Source: own elaboration.

In addition to the groups indicated above, the study included local government units (social welfare centers, district family assistance centers, district labor office), Agricultural Advisory Centers in the part relating to care farms, people engaged in non-agricultural activities (agritourism farm with the potential to run a farm care, horse riding and hippotherapy activities, family social welfare home), and a social enterprise. I classified one answer in the category "Other." Noteworthy, the representatives of all voivodeships participated in the study.

6. Research Results

I asked the representatives of Agricultural Advisory Centers and Regional Social Policy Centers and Social Economy Support Centers about the functioning of care farms in their area, the actual provision of care services and the possibility of providing these services by care farms (Figure 3 and 4).

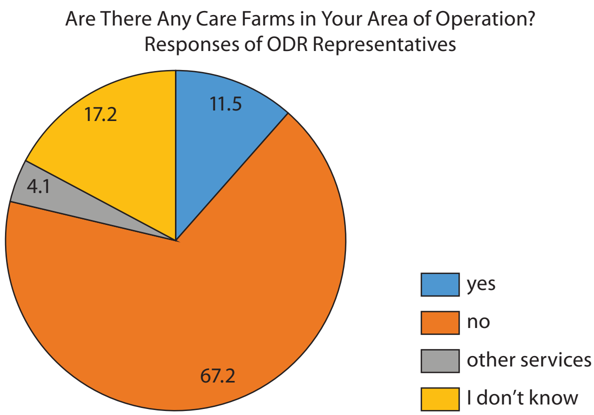


Figure 3. Knowledge of Representatives of Agricultural Advisory Centers

Source: own elaboration.

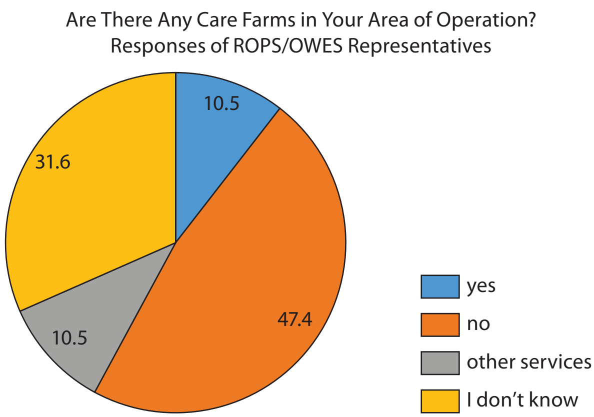


Figure 4. Regional Social Policy Centers/Social Economy Support Centers on the Functioning of Care Farms

Source: own elaboration.

In total, 61.1% of respondents found the number of entities providing care services insufficient. No respondents indicated the answer "sufficient." The respondents indicated that there was a significant lack of care farms in their area or they did not know that such facilities existed. The research result in this area indicates that there is a demand for care services, to which care farms may be the answer. The aim of social policy towards older people is, among others:

– social integration and participation in social life;
– individualization, i.e., adapting the services provided to actual needs units;
– improving the standard of living of older people through the system of material benefits and services;
– ensuring their subjectivity and independence appropriate to their fitness level;
– promoting inter- and intra-generational integration (Szweda-Lewandowska, 2011, p. 113).

Care on a care farm improves the quality of life for users and increases care services in rural areas, as confirmed by the respondent: "Care farms can contribute to increasing income on farms and will also strengthen position of farmers in local communities. Moreover, direct contact with nature has a beneficial effect on the health and condition of people staying on this type of farms." This idea is part of the deinstitutionalization process, which includes the priority of social services provided in the local community before stationary services. The development of individualized social services provided in the local community, including preventive services, will reduce the need for institutional care.

We may find the confirmation for this thesis in respondents' answers regarding the possibility of providing social services (including care) by care farms and the role of care farms in the deinstitutionalization process.

Respondents emphasized that the topic of creating care farms is very interesting and could play an important role in the era of an aging society and in the deinstitutionalization of social services. However, this requires legislative changes, i.e., clear legal conditions, financing methods, etc. These are necessary to develop a model enabling the permanent and continuous provision of services on care farms (respondents' responses). Social economy can play a significant role here, e.g., by creating – with the support of the Social Economy Support Center – social enterprises/social economy entities on farms to develop care for people who need support in everyday functioning, and also as an alternative form of obtaining external funds for implementing care and social services.

The Agricultural Advisory Center and other Agricultural Advisory Units should educate rural residents, especially representatives of local government units, regarding the possibilities of cooperation with care farms. Their cooperation is recommended here both with government institutions (including the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, Agricultural Social Insurance Fund, State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons) and local government institutions (Regional Social Policy Centers, social service centers), other social welfare units, as well as the non-governmental sector (including Social Economy Support Centers).

Among the surveyed representatives of Regional Social Policy Centers/Social Economy Support Centers, more than half (55.6%) had little knowledge about care farms, and nearly three fourths did not know the GROWiD project or its details. Employees of Agricultural Advisory Centers should play an important role in transferring knowledge, including practical knowledge on green care, to representatives of local governments, and the third sector.

The potential of both Agricultural Advisory Centers and Social Economy Support Centers should be combined, because the knowledge of the employees of these institutions – complementary and adequate to issues related to green care – will ensure that care farms become an alternative form of care in the local environment and use the potential of both the farm and the social economy sector.

Most care farm owners and those planning to run a care farm have higher education or training in fields such as rehabilitation, public health, gastronomy and dietetics, pedagogy, elderly care, medical caregiving, disability caregiving, first aid, therapy, and hippotherapy.

Nearly three fourths of respondents had experience in providing care, e.g., for a family member (Figure 5).

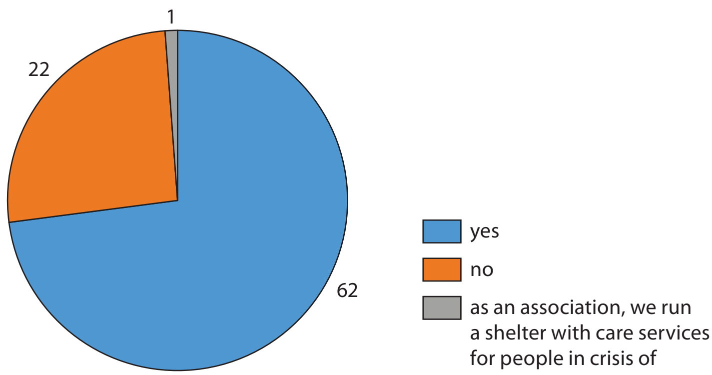


Figure 5. Respondents' Experience in Providing Care

Source: own elaboration.

People who have experience in caring for family members are much more interested in running a daycare home than others (Dąbrowski, Stępnik, & Król, 2017, p. 36).

At the time of conducting this study, Agricultural Advisory Centers could offer support to those running/intending to run care farms, primarily in the field of establishing and operating care farms, searching for sources of financing, running a business/non-agricultural activity and legal aspects of the operation of a care farm. In turn, representatives of care farms and those interested in running this type of activity indicated areas in which training and consulting are necessary (Figure 6 and 7).

First of all, in the case of training, respondents pointed to issues related to the creation, operation, and management of care farms, care services, and the course for an elderly person's caregiver. These last two indications deserve attention because the respondents had experience in providing care for family members (69.6%), but nearly one third had no qualifications. Nearly one fourth of the respondents also indicated training in creating agrotherapy programs and conducting workshops for participants of the care farm (e.g., handicrafts). Knowledge in these areas is crucial because the care farm will offer required agrotherapy services, including therapeutic and activation activities based on the farm's agricultural potential, along with group activities.

When it comes to consulting, the respondents mainly specified issues related to searching for sources of financing, legal aspects of the functioning of a care farm or its management. Respondents also noted the importance of advice on submitting offers for public procurement and competitions, which helps diversify funding sources, and guidance on preparing for inspections, relevant to the future certification system.

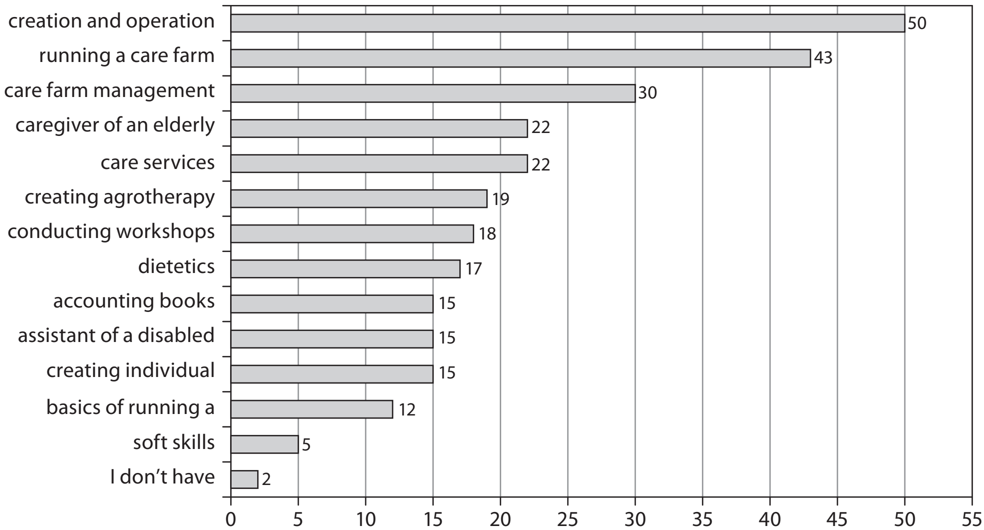


Figure 6. Scope of Knowledge in the Form of Training Needed to Supplement or Acquire to Operate a Care Farm

Source: own elaboration.

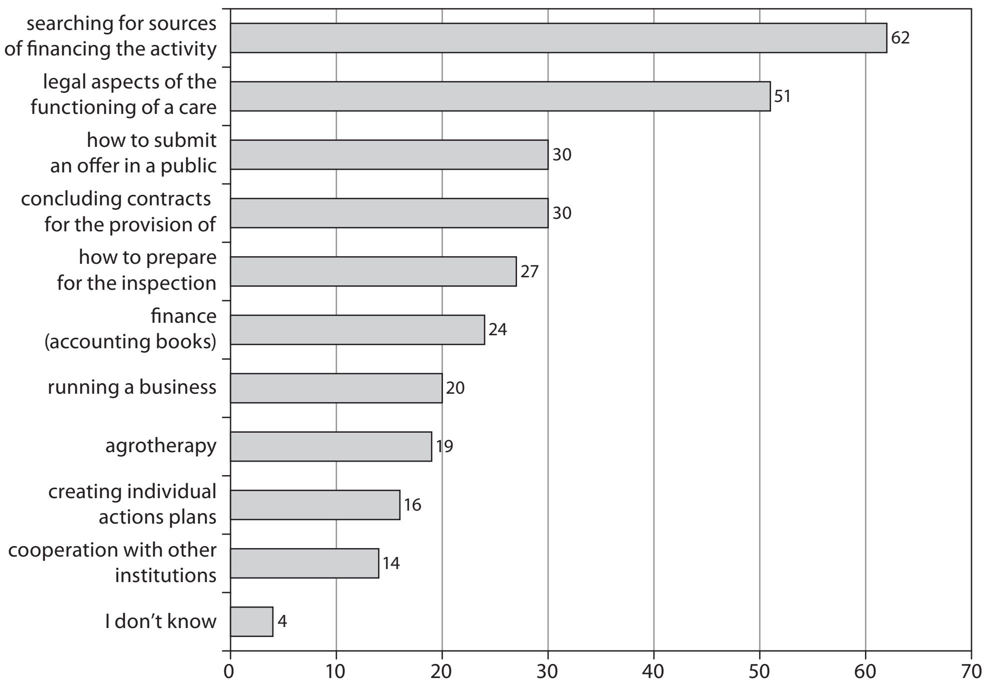


Figure 7. Scope of Knowledge in the Form of Consulting Needed to Supplement or Acquire to Operate a Care Farm

Source: own elaboration.

The care farm model indicated that starting a care farm operation is possible, among others, after completing training and passing the Agricultural Advisory Center's certification process. In provincial Agricultural Advisory Centers, it should be mandatory to create positions of specialists whose sole task will be to support people planning to create and run care farms and people implementing other forms of social farming. The Agricultural Advisory Center should establish a section to implement training programs for care farm operators and caregivers, as well as to verify their competencies. The section will also provide training for people working with care farms, such as social welfare employees. Care farms will undergo periodic evaluations.

7. Conclusions

Old age is a natural stage of human life that we can neither stop nor postpone. However, we can survive this time in good physical and mental condition. The topic of care farms is relatively new but future-proof. It requires preparation for new tasks related to the development of social agriculture. Care farms, which can provide a range of care, nursing, support and other services, are becoming an important entity in the deinstitutionalization of social services from the point of view of the increasing need to share responsibility for the implementation of social tasks at local levels with various stakeholders. The developed model of a care farm will allow for increasing the availability of social services, activating the environment, and developing local communities in rural areas.

To sum up, we can point to aspects related to the problem of old age that justify the need to create care farms:

- demographic changes – aging of society;
- projected increase in spending on health care/senior policy;
- singularization of old age;
- deinstitutionalization of the social assistance system (creation of new forms of assistance provided by alternative entities at the local level).

The importance of green care results from changes in regulations at the European and national levels, as well as from the experiences of other countries in this area.

Key conclusions:

- Care farms in Poland require support of municipal governments that are responsible for providing care services to people who need them. Therefore, care farms should be part of the deinstitutionalization process of social services.
- Local government should become a natural partner for care farms in minimizing social problems.
- An important aspect of implementation activities should be the education of both potential care farm operators and local government officials – mainly decision-makers – conducted primarily in the language of benefits.
- The Agricultural Advisory Center and other Agricultural Advisory Units should educate rural residents, especially representatives of local government units, regarding the possibilities of cooperation with care farms. I recommend their cooperation with the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, Regional Social Policy Centers, Social Economy Support Centers, social welfare centers/social service centers, and other social welfare units.
- Farms should strengthen the promotion of green care and care services.
- Cooperation of Agricultural Advisory Centers with Regional Social Policy Centers/Social Economy Support Centers should allow for a holistic approach and meet the needs in the

field of training and consulting for care farms or people intending to run such activities. Farmers can operate a care farm as a business or as a social economy entity. The Social Economy Act allows a social economy entity to gain social enterprise status, which provides access to additional financial support.

– Due to the provision of care services on farms, employees of Agricultural Advisory Centers should possess appropriate knowledge. To ensure a professional approach to the issue, I recommend, following the model, creating job positions for specialists whose sole task will be to work with people planning to create a care farm and those running care farms or establishing inter-sectoral cooperation.
– I recommend that Agricultural Advisory Centers and Social Economy Support Centers collaborate on training and consulting to provide complementary support for care farm operators and share knowledge in this area.

I propose that future research directions should focus on preparing farms to provide social services, considering architectural accessibility. The study should analyze and verify the current conditions on each farm and recommend adaptations for rooms intended for care services. It should also assess the need for technical infrastructure to ensure farms are fully equipped to support older adults, people with disabilities, those with special needs, or individuals at risk of social exclusion.

References

Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, Branch in Krakow. (2017). *Care farms: Building a cooperation network*. https://cdrkrakow.pl/images/wydawnictwa/gospodarstwa_opiekuncze.pdf

Dąbrowski, A., Stępnik, K., & Król, J. (2017). *Welfare farms – Building a cooperation network*. Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, Branch in Krakow. https://cdrcourses.edu.pl/cdr/images/wydawnictwa/Gospodarstwa_raport.pdf

Di Iacovo, F., & O'Connor, D. (Eds.). (2009). *Supporting policies for Social Farming in Europe: Progressing multifunctionality in responsive rural areas*. Agenzia Regionale per lo Sviluppo. https://www.umb.no/statisk/greencare/sofarbookpart1.pdf

Dyczewski, L. (1994). *Old people and old age in society and culture*. KUL Publishing House.

FNCIVAM. (2011). *L'Accueil Social à la Ferme*. https://docplayer.fr/3692325-L-accueil-social-a-la-ferme.html

FNCIVAM. (2014). *Le Guide des réseaux CIVAM et Accueil Paysan: Pratiquer l'accueil social à la ferme et au milieu rural*. Retrieved from www.civam.org

Giarè, F., Borsotto, P., De Vivo, C., Gaito, M., Pavoncello, D., & Innamorati, A. (2017). *Rapporto sull'agricoltura sociale in Italia*. https://www.oasisociale.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/AgricolturaSociale_2017_DEF_web.pdf

Grewiński, M., & Lizut, J. (2021). *Deinstitutionalization in social policy: Opportunities and threats*. WSP Korczaka.

Haaster, H. van, Janssen, M., & Wijnen, A. van. (2012). *Persoonsgebonden budget eigen regie en empowerment*. Retrieved from IGPB www.igpb.nl, AdSearch www.adsearch.nl, and Website Visie in Uitvoering www.visieinuitvoering.nl

Kamiński, R. (2015). *Care farms as an alternative path of development of agritourism farms*. Kujawsko-Pomorski Agricultural Advisory Center in Minikowo.

Konieczna-Woźniak, R. (2010). Places and spaces supporting inclusion and social participation in old age: Proposal for care farms. *Adult Education*, *2020*(1).

Król, J. (2017). The idea of developing social agriculture, including care farms in the world. Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, Branch in Krakow. http://www.teraz-wies.pl/pliki/rolnictwo-g-o-doradcy-v3.pdf

Krzysztofik-Pelka, M. (2022). On the legal issues of providing care services on farms. *Przegląd Prawa Rolnego*, *1*(30) (June), 107–124. https://doi.org/10.14746/ppr.2022.30.1.8

Manintveld, K. (2014). *Care farms in the Netherlands. In Care farms in the Tuchola Forest and the Dutch experience*. Kujawsko-Pomorski Agricultural Advisory Center in Minikowo.

Maarse, J. A. M., & Jeurissen, P. (2015). The policy and politics of the 2015 long-term care reform in the Netherlands. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0168851016000282

Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi. (n.d.). *Plan Strategiczny dla Wspólnej Polityki Rolnej na lata 2023–2027* (*PS WPR 2023–2027*). https://www.gov.pl/web/rolnictwo/plan-strategiczny-dla-wspolnej-polityki-rolnej-na-lata-2023-27

Leck, C., Evans, N., & Upton, D. (2014). Agriculture – who cares? An investigation of "Care Farming" in the UK. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *34*, 66–75.

Statistics Poland. (2016). Residential population forecast for Poland for 2015–2050. Statistics Poland.

Sikora, K. (2018). Care farms. Lower Silesian Agricultural Advisory Center.

Stępnik, K., Nowak, P., & Adamska, J. (2020). *Care farm model: Care farms in the development of rural areas in the face of demographic challenges* (*GROWID*).

Szweda-Lewandowska, Z. (2011). Social policy towards old age and older people. In P. Szukalski & Z. Szweda--Lewandowska (Eds.), *Elements of social gerontology* (pp. 111–134).

Zbyrad T. (2016). From institutionalization of care towards deinstitutionalization. Social policy challenges and development opportunities. In A. Furmańska-Maruszak, & A. Wójtewicz (Ed.), *Social policy in the face of challenges demographic and social changes* (pp. 31–48). Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne AKAPIT.

About the Author

Karolina Jarosz*, Ph.D.
Institute of Management and Social Affairs
University of the National Education Commission, Krakow
os. Stalowe 17, 31-922 Krakow, Poland
e-mail: karolina.jarosz@up.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-4619-6139
* Corresponding author.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

Funding: This research received no external funding. Informed Consent Statement: Written and informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Data Availability Statement: Qualitative data are available by contacting the author.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright and License

Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland

Ministry of Education and Science
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.

Social Entrepreneurship Review
2024, Vol. 2

OPEN ACCESS

10.15678/SER.2024.2.04

Exploring the Mindset of Social Entrepreneurs Towards Failure: Evidence From Focus Group Interviews

Martyna Wronka-Pośpiech

Abstract: **Background:** Failure is a common aspect of entrepreneurship due to high uncertainty. This study examines the specific context of social entrepreneurship, which combines profit goals with social missions.
Research objectives: The primary objective is to understand social entrepreneurs' mindsets towards failure.
Research design and methods: The study employs focus group interviews (FGI) with social entrepreneurs, representatives from Social Economy Support Centres, and government delegates in three major Polish cities.
Results: Findings reveal diverse perceptions of failure among social entrepreneurs. They view failure both as a setback and an opportunity for growth. The study identifies financial instability and mission drift as common failure factors, and highlights the profound emotional and social impacts of failure.
Conclusions: Social entrepreneurs' perception of failure is complex, influenced by their dual focus on financial sustainability and social impact. These insights can help develop better support mechanisms for social enterprises, promoting resilience and learning from failure.
Keywords: entrepreneurial failure, social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, focus group interview
JEL Codes: L26, L31, O35, D91, P36

Suggested citation:
Wronka-Pośpiech, M. (2024). Exploring the mindset of social entrepreneurs towards failure: Evidence from focus group interviews. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, *2*, 56–74. https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2024.2.04

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is defined in various ways, encompassing aspects such as opportunity pursuit, business creation, uncertainty, and profit-seeking. These definitions reflect diverse perspectives within the field of entrepreneurship and beyond (Gartner, 1990; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Bennett, 2006). Moreover, entrepreneurship can be viewed as a set of activities that bring about innovations, altering existing production factors in both industrial and service delivery sectors (McGrath, 1999). Others define entrepreneurship as "a process of learning" (Minniti & Bygrave, 2001). The definitions of entrepreneurship may vary, but a common and essential characteristic is the willingness to take risks, which inherently involves the possibility of failure (Carroll, 2017). Furthermore, due to the substantial level of uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in the entrepreneurial process, failure is a prevalent phenomenon (Politis, 2008; Sarasvathy, 2001).

Entrepreneurial failure (EF) impacts all entrepreneurs, regardless of their sector. This paper focuses specifically on the context of social entrepreneurship, a field that has attracted growing attention in recent literature. As highlighted by Czakon et al. (2022), this focus is both timely and innovative, given that prior research on social entrepreneurship has largely concentrated on its positive, ethical, and social dimensions (Gupta et al., 2020), with limited exploration of failure. Moreover, Dacin et al. (2010) emphasize that a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial failure would significantly enrich social entrepreneurship research. Addressing the gap in academic and case-based studies on failed social enterprises, this paper seeks to examine attitudes toward failure and provide insights into its potential benefits for current and future social entrepreneurs. This objective was pursued by analyzing statements gathered during focus group interviews (FGI) with key stakeholders in the social economy sector, including social entrepreneurs.

The paper is structured into three main sections. First, it reviews the existing academic literature on entrepreneurial failure. Second, it presents the empirical research methodology and provides an interpretation of the findings. Finally, it highlights the theoretical and practical implications derived from the research and suggests avenues for future investigations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Entrepreneurial failure

Entrepreneurial failure has garnered significant research interest since McGrath's (1999) seminal work, which highlighted failure as an intrinsic aspect of entrepreneurship. Since then, knowledge in this area has expanded considerably (e.g., Mitchell, Mitchell, & Smith, 2008; Justo, DeTienne, & Sieger, 2015; Dias & Teixeira, 2017; Klimas et al., 2020; Lattacher & Wdowiak, 2020). This interest extends to grey literature, where internet data has become integral to scientific research, providing valuable insights for analysis. Google Trends (GT) is currently the most widely used tool for leveraging internet data, allowing for the reverse engineering of user search data to gather information, particularly about interest in entrepreneurial failure. Google Trends is a freely accessible online tool that tracks trending topics based on Google search queries, offering various analytical capabilities (Mavragani & Ochoa, 2019). The methodology follows Mavragani and Ochoa's (2019) guidelines for selecting appropriate keywords, regions, time periods, and categories. The data collected from GT is normalized for analytical purposes. In the search query, a high level of interest is represented by a score of 100, whereas a score of 0 indicates either a lack of interest or insufficient data. GT segments data by geographical locations, such as countries, territories, and cities, and allows users to define a custom time range for analysis.

Despite significant advancements, uncertainties and ambiguities persist in our understanding of entrepreneurial failure (DeTienne, 2010; Singh, Corner, & Pavlovich, 2007; Jenkins et al., 2014; Jenkins & McKelvie, 2017). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "failure" encompasses several meanings, including a lack of success, business failure, deficiency, fracture, inability to perform, or an abrupt cessation of normal functioning. While these definitions suggest that failure marks the end of an endeavor, it can also signify the beginning of a journey toward success when well-understood and effectively utilized. Generally, failure refers to a condition in which the desired goal is not achieved (Cannon & Edmondson, 2001). However, capturing the essence of failure is challenging because it can occur at both organizational and individual levels (Cardon, Stevens, & Potter, 2011) and can be measured either objectively or subjectively.

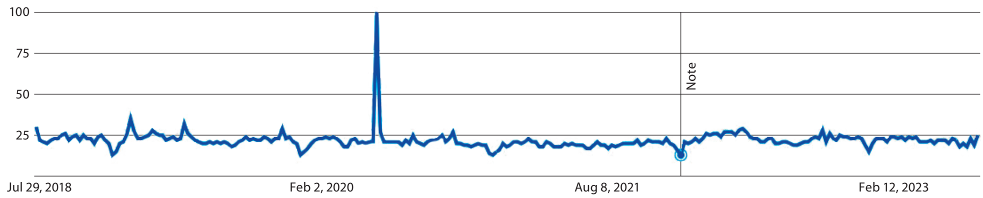


Figure 1. Global Interest in the Term "Failure" in the "Science" Category, Trendline, Last 5 Years

Source: Own compilation using Google Trends.

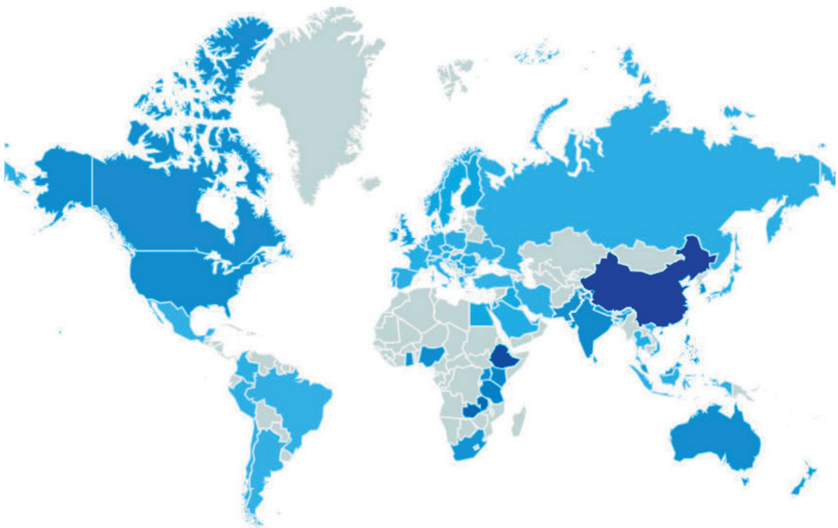


Figure 2. Global Interest in the Term "Failure" in the "Science" Category, by Region, Last 5 Years

Source: Own compilation using Google Trends.

In the context of business or entrepreneurship, failure specifically refers to the cessation of a company's operations when its performance fails to meet its objectives (McGrath, 1999; Politis & Gabrielsson, 2009).

To be more specific, from a financial standpoint, a company is deemed to have failed when its earnings decline and/or costs increase to the point where the company becomes insolvent. As a result, it becomes unable to secure new borrowing or equity financing and, consequently, cannot continue operating under its current ownership and management (Shepherd, 2003). According to Cope (2011), entrepreneurial failure occurs when a company fails to achieve its goals and meet the expectations of key shareholders, ultimately resulting in its termination. Nonetheless, an entrepreneur may experience failure in a venture that is later taken over and successfully managed by someone else. Conversely, the venture itself may fail, but the entrepreneur may continue pursuing other endeavors and ultimately achieve success (Sarasvathy, Menon, & Kuechle, 2013). Therefore, the failure of an organization does not necessarily equate to the failure of the entrepreneur.

Understanding failure is further complicated by the fact that the abandonment of a business venture (entrepreneurial exit) is sometimes conflated with organizational or entrepreneurial failure (Wennberg et al., 2010). Still, entrepreneurs may exit companies for various reasons, such as retirement, capitalizing on their success, or pursuing new business opportunities (DeTienne, 2010; Watson & Everett, 1996), which do not necessarily constitute failure in a strict or broad sense. Additionally, some entrepreneurs are compelled to leave their ventures due to poor financial performance, such as insolvency, yet the exit itself may not signify personal failure. Considering these nuances, Singh and colleagues emphasize that entrepreneurial failure should include at least two dimensions: economic factors, such as bankruptcy or liquidation, and factors pertaining to the entrepreneurs themselves (Singh, Corner, & Pavlovich, 2007). In other words, entrepreneurial failure encompasses not only failures at the enterprise level but also failures at the individual level (Khelil, 2016). Lattacher and Wdowiak (2020) emphasize that fully understanding the concept of entrepreneurial failure requires three levels of interpretation. These levels are: first, failure as the disappearance of the firm from the market; second, failure in organizational terms; and third, failure as defined by the entrepreneur's personal perception (Lattacher & Wdowiak, 2020).

As evident from the above, the definition of entrepreneurial failure encompasses various dimensions and is relatively ambiguous. Some dimensions are evaluated from the perspective of personal failure experienced by entrepreneurs, while others focus on corporate failure. Certain definitions combine these aspects to provide a more comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurial failure. Entrepreneurs, as the primary human resources in new ventures, serve as both owners and managers (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001). This dual role makes it difficult to separate entrepreneurs from the companies they establish. As a result, entrepreneurial failure should not be regarded as a singular, all-encompassing phenomenon but rather as a multifaceted concept that encompasses a broader range of situations across different levels of analysis (Jenkins & McKelvie, 2017).

2.2. Entrepreneurial Failure in SE

In the context of social enterprises, the matter becomes even more complex due to their specific characteristics. In addition to pursuing profit maximization, these enterprises aim to create job opportunities for individuals at risk of social exclusion and professional marginalization. They also address social, environmental, and economic challenges that may be neglected, inadequately addressed, or ineffectively managed by governments, the private sector, or civil society organizations (e.g., Battilana et al., 2015; Borzaga et al., 2020; Defourny & Nyssens, 2021; Pacut, 2022). Other researchers have highlighted the hybrid nature of social enterprises, which involves blending values and practices from both the commercial and not-for-profit sectors, while emphasizing the creation of social value (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Ebrahim Battilana, & Mair, 2014; Defourny, Nyssens, & Brolis, 2021).

Given these distinctive characteristics, failure in social enterprises is not only examined from organizational and individual perspectives but also has a profound impact on a diverse range of stakeholders, including those whose well-being relies on the social value generated by the enterprise (Laurisz, 2019). Researchers have linked failure in social enterprises to financial difficulties or a deviation from their core mission in favor of self-interest, commonly referred to as "mission drift" (Dart, 2004; Bielefeld, 2009). While financial failure, often stemming from an inability to meet financial obligations, is a prevalent challenge for social enterprises, research on this aspect remains limited.

Additionally, the increasing demand for innovative solutions to social problems places significant pressure on social enterprises to demonstrate effectiveness and achieve success (Wronka-Pośpiech, 2018; Ćwiklicki & Pacut, 2023). However, while success stories frequently capture attention, the literature on social entrepreneurs has been criticized for idealizing them (Zietsma & Tuck, 2012) and for overestimating the scale and impact of their activities (Lumpkin et al., 2013).

Among the research conducted to date, the work of Scott and Teasdale (2012) stands out for its focus on failing social enterprises. Their study examines the differences in failure between social and conventional entrepreneurship. In conventional enterprises, failure is predominantly associated with financial challenges, often measured through quantitative metrics such as bankruptcy or the inability to meet financial targets. However, Scott and Teasdale (2012) emphasize that social enterprises, beyond financial failure, are also susceptible to "mission drift," which occurs when the pursuit of self-interest leads to a departure from the organization's original mission (Dart, 2004). Bielefeld (2009) defines mission drift as a situation in which activities aimed at achieving financial objectives start to overshadow or alter the enterprise's social mandate. Other researchers (Fowler, 2000; Jones, 2007) also confirm that certain social enterprises, particularly third-sector non-profit organizations, are at high risk of mission drift. However, deviation from the mission is less common in clustered business social enterprises (Ebrahim, Battilana, & Mair, 2014).

The social entrepreneurship literature frequently portrays social entrepreneurs as heroic figures, emphasizing inspiring and impactful success stories of individuals who appear to be saving the world. This strong focus on success leaves little space for exploring failure, as reflected in the limited research addressing failure within social entrepreneurship (Dacin et al., 2010; Low & Chinnock, 2008; Chmelik, Musteen, & Ahsan, 2015; Mordaunt & Cornforth, 2004; Wronka-Pośpiech, 2018). Much like entrepreneurial failure in general, the concept of failure in social entrepreneurship is difficult to define. While financial failure can be measured quantitatively, the social mission often takes precedence over financial outcomes (Dart, 2004). This distinction fundamentally differentiates social entrepreneurship from commercial entrepreneurship. As a relatively emerging area of research, studies focusing specifically on failure in social entrepreneurship remain scarce. Nonetheless, recognizing and examining failure in this context is essential for a holistic understanding of the field.

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to explore and analyze the mindset towards failure among social entrepreneurs. Specifically, the research aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How is failure perceived?

RQ2: Does the perception of failure differ depending on the actors in the social economy sector?

RQ3: What are the consequences of failures?

RQ4: Does the perception of the consequences of failures differ depending on the actors in the social economy sector?

3. Research Method and Material

This qualitative descriptive study (Sandelowski, 1993) employed Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) conducted in three major Polish cities: Warsaw, Poznań, and Katowice. The FGIs included key stakeholders representing all major actors in the social economy sector, such as social entrepreneurs, representatives from Social Economy Support Centres (OWES), and delegates from government agencies, including Regional Centres for Social Policy and the Department of Social Economy at the Ministry of Family and Social Policy. The primary objective of these FGIs was to explore and analyze participants' perspectives on failure. The development of focus group questions was guided by practical recommendations from Patton (2002) and Rubin and Rubin (1995). While the questions were not piloted prior to data collection, they were iteratively refined with input from researchers specializing in qualitative methods, entrepreneurship, and social entrepreneurship.

During the focus groups, participants were asked to explore various interpretations of failure and how it is perceived and discussed. They reflected on the challenges and failures faced by social enterprises, the underlying causes of these failures, and their consequences. Moreover, participants shared their views on how the failure of a social enterprise differs from that of a conventional enterprise. The interviews were conducted using an open-ended format, providing participants the flexibility to bring up any relevant issues or concerns.

The participants of the FGIs were selected for their expertise in social entrepreneurship, ensuring that the discussions were both well-informed and analytically rich. A purposive sampling approach was adopted to ensure a diverse range of perspectives from key stakeholders in the social economy sector. Prospective participants underwent a screening and consent process, during which they were provided with detailed information about the study's objectives, their rights as participants, and the confidentiality protocols. Only those who provided informed consent were included in the study. The FGIs comprised a total of 13 participants, with the distribution of representation across disciplines and sectors detailed in Figure 3.

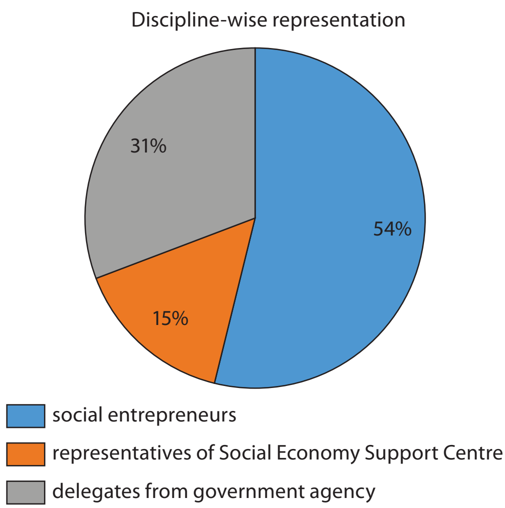


Figure 3. Discipline-wise Representation in the Three FGIs

Source: own elaboration.

The focus group interviews were conducted between February and June 2020 in Polish and took place in dedicated laboratories, facilitated by a trained moderator. Each session lasted between 90 minutes and two hours. The three FGIs provided an opportunity to capture diverse perspectives and achieve data saturation. One of the FGIs was observed by the author of this paper through a one-way mirror. The coding method used to reference focus group participants in the quoted statements is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding of Statements

FGI	Respondent	Coding symbol
FGI in Poznań (FGI 1)	Respondent 1 – representative of OWES Respondent 2 – delegate from, government agency, regional level Respondent 3 – social entrepreneur Respondent 4 – social entrepreneur Respondent 5 – social entrepreneur	FGI-P-1 FGI-P-2 FGI-P-3 FGI-P-4 FGI-P-5
FGI in Warsaw (FGI 2)	Respondent 1 – social entrepreneur Respondent 2 – delegate from, government agency, national level Respondent 2 – delegate from, government agency, national level Respondent 4 – social entrepreneur	FGI-W-1 FGI-W-2 FGI-W-3 FGI-W-4
FGI in Katowice (FGI 3)	Respondent 1 – representative of OWES Respondent 2 – delegate from, government agency, regional level Respondent 3 – social entrepreneur Respondent 4 – social entrepreneur	FGI-K-1 FGI-K-2 FGI-K-3 FGI-K-4

Source: own elaboration.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by an experienced transcriptionist. The data reduction process was conducted in several steps to ensure a comprehensive analysis. Initially, the focus was on identifying two primary categories within the data: the various meanings of failure and their associated consequences.

To identify these categories, an open coding methodology, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), was employed. Multiple rounds of coding were conducted, during which the data were segmented into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared to identify patterns, similarities, and differences. The coding process was carried out meticulously to ensure the development of a consistent and reliable coding framework.

Next, axial coding was conducted to identify relationships between codes and refine them into broader categories. This process facilitated the examination of consistencies, differences, and complementarities across the FGI interviews. Particular attention was given to understanding the meanings of failure, the reasons for failure, and its consequences, leading to the identification of several themes within these categories.

To ensure the robustness of the analysis, Creswell's (2007) recommendations for maintaining data validity in qualitative research were followed. Although a single coder carried out the coding process, it was iterative and involved regular consultations with other researchers to discuss and validate the emerging themes and categories.

Through this rigorous coding and analysis process, a comprehensive understanding of failure was developed by exploring the interplay between the various meanings of failure, the reasons behind them, and their consequences.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Various Meaning of Failure

In recent years, the entrepreneurial community has become increasingly open to discussing failure, with social entrepreneurs even being encouraged to embrace their setbacks. Events and discussions centered on sharing failure stories highlight that encountering failure is an inevitable aspect of addressing complex social issues. As a result, social entrepreneurs often find themselves navigating a continuous cycle of successes and setbacks.

In this evolving narrative, failure is frequently portrayed as a valuable learning experience and an opportunity for personal and professional growth. However, the significant challenges and personal toll that failure imposes on social entrepreneurs are less frequently acknowledged. While current discussions often celebrate failure, they tend to overlook the reality that not all failures result in positive outcomes or learning opportunities.

In this section, I present the different perspectives on failure that emerged from the FGIs. One social entrepreneur describes it as follows:

> …in the case of a social enterprise, there must be two objectives; otherwise, it is not a social enterprise. There has to be financial stability, but it cannot be more important than the mission objective. In other words, there must be a balance between the two, and neither can take precedence over the other; otherwise, it would not be considered a social enterprise, but rather just entrepreneurship. That's okay too, but then it wouldn't be categorized as a social enterprise. The inability to maintain this balance is this failure for the social entrepreneur. (FG-K-3)

Another interviewee emphasizes:

> …the mission is more important, but if there is financial stability, then we can effectively carry out the mission – they are interconnected. To fulfill the mission, having some financial security is necessary, so we don't have to constantly search for funding to ensure our existence. (FG-K-1)

One respondent also drew attention to the social entrepreneur himself, stressing that:

> …in fact, such an entrepreneur probably has even more to deal with than a regular entrepreneur. He or she contends with various other challenges, and yet we quite consciously sit here and expect an extraordinary amount from them. (FG-P-5)

According to the respondents, managing a social enterprise requires balancing the dual objectives of generating income and creating social impact. Lower performance in business indicators may result from prioritizing social impact over profit maximization. Conversely, an increased emphasis on income generation, often described as "mission drift" in the literature, is perceived as compromising the enterprise's original mission and is regarded as a form of failure. Traditional markers of success, such as high revenue, substantial scale, and resilience, may sometimes obscure deeper organizational shortcomings.

One interviewee, however, highlights an important point:

> …we should also remember that the concept of failure is very broad and ambiguous. For example, I met with a few people who ran a social enterprise for a while and then had to close it down because it didn't generate enough money. But these individuals didn't have a sense of failure at all, for instance. Their enterprises lasted 2–3 years, during which time they achieved some kind of goal, and as a result, they successfully reintegrated the individuals they employed. However, at some point, they made the right decision that it wasn't worth keeping it running at all costs and creating problems for themselves, such as taking additional loans to save the enterprise. They simply decided that this was the moment to close it down. (FG-K-1)

Indeed, some social entrepreneurs described failure as "a step back but also a step forward" (FG-P-3) and as "a chance to try something again, but with more experience" (FG-P-5), while others referred to it as "wasted time and resources" (FG-W-4) or even a "devastating emotional experience" (FG-K-4). Importantly, failure does not have to be a last resort, as a representative of the Regional Centre for Social Policy underscores:

> We have several examples on the regional market where social enterprise did not survive, while the people who were involved in it later fared much better on the labor market – they succeeded in the commercial market or just went into business of their own. So, we can say that this effect of activation both socially and professionally came true. (FG-K-2)

As the various perspectives mentioned above demonstrate, the interpretation of failure is subjective and depends on the operating context and the individuals involved. Respondents emphasized that short-term, intentional experiments differ significantly from ambitious projects that fail due to mismatches among people, processes, and resources (Table 2).

Table 2. Various Meanings of Failure

Perspective	Description	Exemplary source
Balancing Objectives	Failure due to inability to balance financial stability and mission objectives	"…there must be a balance between the two, and neither can take precedence over the other; otherwise, it would not be considered a social enterprise" (FG-K-3) "…the mission is more important, but if there is financial stability, then we can effectively carry out the mission – they are interconnected. To fulfill the mission, having some financial security is necessary, so we don't have to constantly search for funding to ensure our existence" (FG-K-1)
Personal Toll	Failure resulting from the fact that social entrepreneurs face more challenges and are expected to deliver extraordinary results	"…such an entrepreneur probably has even more to deal with than a regular entrepreneur" (FG-P-5) "…I face the pressure every day as a leader who is financially responsible. I have this feeling that if things go the wrong way, it's on me and there's a million zlotys at stake… well, so there is this financial pressure for me – that's one thing. But what's even worse is the pressure connected with my employees. For some of them, this job is a matter of survival. I can handle the pressure, find a way for myself to cope with it" (FG-W-1)
Mission Drift	Failure due to prioritizing income generation over social impact, which is viewed as compromising the original mission	"…the mission is more important, but if there is financial stability, then we can effectively carry out the mission – they are interconnected. To fulfill the mission, having some financial security is necessary, so we don't have to constantly search for funding to ensure our existence" (FG-K-1) "…there has to be financial stability, but it cannot be more important than the mission objective. In other words, there must be a balance between the two, and neither can take precedence over the other; otherwise, it would not be considered a social enterprise, but rather just entrepreneurship. That's okay too, but then it wouldn't be categorized as a social enterprise. The inability to maintain this balance is this failure for the social entrepreneur" (FG-K-3).

Perspective	Description	Exemplary source
Learning Opportunity	Failure as a step back but also a step forward, providing a chance to try again with more experience	"…failure as 'a step back but also a step forward' (FG-P-3) 'a chance to try something again but with more experience" (FG-P-5)
Negative Emotional Impact	Failure as wasted time, resources, and a devastating emotional experience	"wasted time and resources" (FG-W-4) "devastating emotional experience" (FG-K-4) "the front-runner certainly gets hit over the head hard. But there are others – the employees, actors inside that is, the main beneficiaries – and it's crucial to provide them with opportunities and help them overcome difficult situations" (FG-W-4)
Long-term Positive Impact	Failure as something that may lead the individuals involved to do better in the future.	"…social enterprise did not survive, but the people involved later fared much better" (FG-K-2) "…we should also remember that the concept of failure is very broad and ambiguous. For example, I met with a few people who ran a social enterprise for a while and then had to close it down because it didn't generate enough money. But these individuals didn't have a sense of failure at all, for instance. Their enterprises lasted 2–3 years, during which time they achieved some kind of goal, and as a result, they successfully reintegrated the individuals they employed. However, at some point, they made the right decision that it wasn't worth keeping it running at all costs and creating problems for themselves, such as taking additional loans to save the enterprise. They simply decided that this was the moment to close it down" (FG-K-1)

Source: own elaboration.

Respondents highlighted the chronic underfunding of social enterprises, points out an essential correlation:

> Rightly or wrongly, social enterprises are sometimes associated with low quality. But it is usually the case that if the investment budget is low, the quality is also low, because you don't buy a table for PLN 1,000, but for PLN 100. Unfortunately, in our case, there have been cost-cutting measures on accounting, and we opted for the cheaper option. Our first accountant made mistakes with the PFRON [Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych – State Fund for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled] grant and also encountered issues with filling in the forms. As a result, we missed out on the opportunity to receive a lot more money for several months. Our situation is quite complex as we are connected to the foundation, the restaurant, and PFRON. Therefore, it is essential to have an accountant who truly knows her stuff, as knows how to manage the combination of business with the foundation. (FG-W-1)

Interestingly, most interviewees repeatedly emphasized the importance of selecting a competent accountant and highlighted the mistakes that can arise in this process. They also pointed out that mismatches can occur with individuals contracted to provide services for the social enterprise, as reflected in the following statement:

> …we used marketing consulting, that is, we found specialists ourselves and OWES financed it for us. Consequently, we ended up paying someone who was very experienced in creating an online image and related to electronic products like blogs, media, and fan page contact. However, our product is more related to the cosmetics market, specifically beard care products. So, we wasted time and

> money because the person we hired didn't know how to address our actual problems related to the cosmetics market. (FG-W-4)

However, when discussing mismatches among people, respondents frequently highlighted the haphazard manner in which social enterprises are often established. As one participant expressed:

> I have witnessed many cooperatives set up in this way – from the so-called "roundup," where people were simply rounded up to create an enterprise because there are projects that need to be saved. These individuals may have some kind of disability or somehow fit into the criteria. (FG-P-2)

Another respondent shares a similar opinion, stating:

> There are situations where incompetent support institutions gather people just to fulfill certain indicators, even though there is a lot of speculation that these people, in one or two years, will not survive as an enterprise. There is no accountability, and these individuals end up in a worse situation than if they hadn't set up this enterprise at all. (FG-W-2)

In the short term, embracing failure as an opportunity for learning was perceived as difficult, particularly when dealing with financial losses. A social entrepreneur described it this way:

> The whole idea was to be able to provide services for children and parents, simply. But these come with enormous costs. I understand that because I myself had problems organizing funding for my son's rehabilitation trips. So, I wanted our foundation to be an organization that supports this, and we needed money for that purpose. Unfortunately, there was no funding, and we had to cover various expenses ourselves. That's how we managed to stay afloat. However, last year was very challenging, really very tough. The only reason we survived was that I come from a corporate background, not so long ago I worked in a bank, and I had many friends and connections, including CEOs of various other organizations, and they helped us to pull through. (FG-P-4)

The consequences of bad financial decisions also resonate in other statements:

> As a result of bad business decisions at the beginning we are constantly struggling to maintain liquidity. One year has passed, and now we're entering the second year, still struggling with liquidity. At any point, the landlord can terminate our tenancy due to six months of rent arrears… Can you imagine that I am currently on sick leave, trying to reduce the costs of maintaining my employment… shame and sorrow… (FG-W-1)

Receiving unfavorable news and negative feedback, often tied to the process of "failure," can be difficult to accept immediately following a setback. Analyzing failures requires time, and for those responsible for leading their organization and delivering social value, shifting focus to identify flaws and weaknesses can be especially challenging. In many instances, the notion of failure as simply a step toward success proves inadequate, as it overlooks the broader consequences and costs of failure, which extend beyond the experiences of the individual social entrepreneur.

4.2. Consequences of Failures

The consequences of failure are far-reaching and can profoundly affect a wide range of stakeholders. Employees, their families, customers, and suppliers are among those directly impacted. Additionally, the effects extend to the broader ecosystem in which social enterprises operate. Potential issues include diminished confidence in the organization's management, scrutiny over why the failure was not anticipated or addressed earlier, and a loss of trust in the brand, which can impede long-term growth. As one social entrepreneur explains:

> I face the pressure every day as a leader who is financially responsible. I have this feeling that if things go the wrong way, it's on me, and there's a million zlotys at stake… well, so there is this financial pres-

> sure for me – that's one thing. But what's even worse is the pressure connected with my employees. For some of them, this job is a matter of survival. I can handle the pressure, find a way for myself to cope with it, but take Anna (name of an employee), for instance – she's been through three transplants and is losing her eyesight. Where will she find another job? (…) After all, there are also my employees, whom I hire, and for whom this work is of utmost importance. When they sense any uncertainty in my voice, the whole team immediately becomes anxious, thinking that something is going wrong, that the boss isn't confident anymore, and they start questioning: Boss, will this job still be here? (FG-W-1).

Another social entrepreneur adds:

> …the public figure, the front-runner, certainly gets hit over the head hard. But there are others – the employees, actors inside, that is, the main beneficiaries – and it's crucial to provide them with opportunities and help them overcome difficult situations. We had a woman whom we rescued from a chaotic lifestyle, really pulled her out of a tough spot – she couldn't distinguish between a wine glass and a vodka glass… And when we explained to her the difference between a cake fork and a regular fork, she looked at us as if we were fools – but why? Sometimes she used a regular fork to serve cake. For her now, going back to that small village, to a life with just chickens, after experiencing working in a team with us, well, that's a tragedy! She simply can't imagine it! (FG-W-4)

Given the implications of failure, it is understandable that addressing this challenging topic is difficult. Our discussions frequently underscored concerns about the potential harm failure could inflict on the leader personally or on the organization's reputation, potentially limiting future opportunities for partnerships and funding. Moreover, participants highlighted the broader impact on other stakeholders. This sentiment is reflected in the following words:

> For example, if I were to terminate the foundation, which includes the kindergarten and nursery services, I would also have to terminate the contract with a small family company that provides catering. This would result in a significant decrease in revenue for that supplier, amounting to thousands of zlotys per month. (FG-P-4)

While the impact on customers is generally viewed as less significant, one of the interviewees mentioned a particular concern:

> I know some places that have become deeply rooted in the local community, where people come to talk and connect… places important especially for older individuals who find meaning and purpose in their lives through these interactions. If we were to close down such places, these people would lose their gathering spot. (FG-W-2)

This point of view is consistently echoed regardless of where the FGI is conducted:

> I wouldn't forget the local community. These social enterprises are deeply rooted somewhere within the local community. Most often, if not always, they begin their operations in a close-knit environment. When such an enterprise has already established itself and become a part of this local community, and then suddenly collapses, there can be a sense of loss and regret that it didn't succeed. (FG-K-2)

Entrepreneurial failure can also impact government agencies, as reflected in the opinion of a representative from the Regional Centre for Social Policy, who sees such failure as having implications related to ineffective social policy:

> …because, in principle, it looks like this – we support the SE, and if, for some reason, the SE collapses and we can't pinpoint the reasons, then it has further implications because funds have been invested in this enterprise. (FG-P-2)

On the other hand, a delegate from governmental agencies emphasizes a different perspective:

> …of course, if such an enterprise ceases its activities, I personally feel regret. However, it also depends on the individual employee, official, or person involved. Let's be honest, in our line of work, no one will be forced to leave their position due to this particular event… these are independent entities operating in the market. It's not as if we have direct connections or dependencies on each other. (FG-W-3)

An interesting aspect is also presented by respondents representing the Social Economy Support Centres (OWES), which play an important role in strengthening the social and solidarity economy sector. According to the National Program for the Development of Social Economy, their task is to assist in creating and developing social economy entities, including social enterprises. This is how one of the representatives from OWES talks about it:

> We, at the Center for the Support of the Social Economy, are on the front line when it comes to failure. We find out first, and social entrepreneurs ask us to help them, rescue them, and solve their problems. (FG-P-1)

As noted by another representative:

> …because if this, let's call it a permanent 'failure,' occurs, for example, even after the grant period has ended, it becomes a real problem for us – as OWES – since then, the marshal's office may request the return of the grant. So, it poses a significant challenge for us (…) we haven't actually encountered such a situation, but I know that other organizations have faced such issues. It's crucial for OWES and the funded entity to share a common interest in avoiding such situations. And if problems do arise, the goal is to minimize their impact somehow, isn't it? (FG-K-1)

The above statements confirm the multidimensionality of failure in relation to social entrepreneurs.

As respondents were asked about whether failure also affects the organization's environment at the national level, it is worth examining their viewpoints:

> I believe that these institutions, the higher up they are, have a greater responsibility to reflect on whether the support they provide and the concepts they devise are right and effective. This is especially crucial at the national level – were the legal provisions and laws enacted good enough to facilitate the best possible and smoother development of social entrepreneurship, or were some mistakes made there? (FG-K-2)

A representative from one OWES adds in the same vein:

> …at the central level, it is important to assess certain indicators, especially those for which we are held accountable by the European Commission. Then, the question arises: What conclusions are drawn from this? For example, if something is not successful, is it because – and I'm speaking somewhat subjectively now – these OWES are not coping, or is it because the formal and legal environment, the system itself, is more of a hindrance than a help? In my opinion, sometimes there is too much focus on various types of indicators and elements for national institutions, which may be more important to them than genuinely reaching out and helping these people. (FG-K-1)

Lastly, respondents also point out less obvious stakeholders who might be affected by such a failure:

> …it still occurs to me that there could also be a negative impact on the entire social group that was reintegrated through the activities of the social enterprise. That is, for example, stereotypes are perpetuated, such as the belief that it's not possible to work with the homeless, that it is impossible to work with addicts, that it is impossible to work with women for some reason. (FG-P-3)

What is more, respondents also recognize the fact that

> …it is disheartening to observe that some of the social groups that were meant to be empowered through the projects become discouraged by the idea of cooperatives. At times, when we attempt to

> introduce the concept of forming a cooperative, they reject it, claiming that it won't work at all, and they view it as a mere waste of time. (FG-P-1)

Such perspectives appear particularly concerning given that social entrepreneurship is tasked with supporting marginalized individuals in integrating into society, overcoming challenges, and improving their professional and social competencies.

5. Conclusions

Although failure can have significant negative consequences, such as financial, psychological, and physiological difficulties (Byrne & Shepherd, 2015), it also presents a valuable opportunity for learning (Boso et al., 2019; Dias & Teixeira, 2017). Entrepreneurs are encouraged to view failure not as the end of their entrepreneurial journey nor as proof of their unsuitability for entrepreneurship (Lafuente et al., 2019). The findings reveal a wide range of perspectives on how failure is perceived. Social entrepreneurs often view failure as both a setback and an opportunity for growth, while others regard it as wasted time and resources or a deeply emotional experience. The perception of failure is subjective, shaped by individual circumstances and roles within the social economy sector. Among these, social entrepreneurs are the most intensely affected, experiencing failure with the greatest personal impact.

By presenting the various perspectives on failure that emerged from the FGIs, this study contributes to the understanding of entrepreneurial failure within the context of social entrepreneurship. Social enterprises are fundamentally characterized as double-bottom-line organizations, striving to achieve both financial success and social impact. A recurring theme in the discussions was the dependence of social entrepreneurs on funding from diverse sources, including governments, wealthy individuals, and private corporations.

Over the past two decades, the funding landscape for social enterprises has undergone a significant transformation. Historically, these organizations relied heavily on direct grants from the government. However, there has been a noticeable shift toward a more diversified funding model, with social enterprises increasingly generating earned revenue from a broader range of sources. This change reflects the sector's evolving emphasis on financial sustainability. Despite this progress, the persistence of "grant dependency" remains a critical concern, as it continues to pose a risk of failure or bankruptcy if funding support is withdrawn.

Another recurring theme in the debate on social enterprises, which is also evident in the opinions of respondents, pertains to the tensions between values. Social enterprises are inherently associated with conflicting goals, values, norms, and identities. Managing these elements simultaneously not only leads to tensions and competing demands but also becomes crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of social enterprises. Additionally, the social enterprise sector must develop the capability to analyze, understand, and even anticipate market and social needs as expressed by consumers, beneficiaries, the government, and other stakeholders. This requirement presents an even greater challenge for social enterprises, given their dual focus on financial viability and social impact.

Social enterprises can encounter failures stemming from inadequate integration, a complex and continuous process that requires sensitivity, openness, and significant time and energy dedicated to fostering strong relationships within the team. Effective integration is a critical investment in the success of social enterprises. Similarly, socialization is an ongoing effort that extends well beyond the initial months of membership in a social enterprise. It should be nurtured through a blend of formal and informal social activities to strengthen cohesion and collaboration. Furthermore, enhancing the qualifications of social enterprise members is essential for their growth. It not only increases work efficiency but also improves their standing and reputation in the market, further contributing to the enterprise's overall success and sustainability.

The consequences of failures are far-reaching, impacting a wide range of stakeholders, including employees, their families, customers, suppliers, and the broader community. These effects can manifest as a loss of confidence in management, questions about organizational effectiveness, and diminished trust in the brand. Social entrepreneurs themselves face significant emotional and financial pressures because of these failures. The perception of these consequences varies among different actors in the social economy sector. Social entrepreneurs often concentrate on the immediate and personal effects, such as financial strain and emotional burden. In contrast, representatives from Social Economy Support Centres (OWES) and government agencies tend to emphasize the broader implications, focusing on social policies and the effectiveness of support systems in mitigating the impact of such failures.

As an exploratory study, our objective was to illuminate entrepreneurial failure within the context of social entrepreneurship. To achieve this, we adopted an inductive approach, utilizing FGIs to explore and analyze attitudes toward failure and to provide insights into the potential benefits of openly discussing failure for both current and future social entrepreneurs.

Naturally, this study has certain limitations, primarily stemming from the chosen methodology. FGIs, by their nature, involve a limited number of participants, which may not fully represent the broader population being studied. Additionally, group discussions can be affected by dominant participants or group dynamics, potentially resulting in some perspectives being overemphasized or overlooked. Another limitation lies in interpretation bias, as analyzing FGI data requires interpreting participants' responses, a process that can be subjective and influenced by researchers' preconceptions and biases (Hines, 2000). Recognizing and addressing these limitations is essential for contextualizing the findings and guiding future research.

Another notable limitation of this study relates to its timing. The data was collected before the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, which has since significantly affected Poland and other countries. This crisis likely altered perceptions of failure and increased skepticism toward entrepreneurial opportunities in general. Follow-up studies could investigate how these changes have influenced social entrepreneurs.

While the contributions of social entrepreneurs are not new, the current momentum and growing interest in this movement provide a strong foundation for future research. Understanding the reasons behind the failure of social enterprises is essential to ensure that the efforts and experiences of these entrepreneurs are not wasted. This knowledge is vital for preventing others from encountering similar frustrations and discouragement. Developing resilience to manage and overcome failure is particularly important during the early stages of a social enterprise, yet not all entrepreneurs possess this skill.

Given that social enterprises are deeply influenced by cultural, social, and community factors, expanding research to include other countries is critical. Additional empirical studies, such as case studies conducted in varied contexts, would provide deeper insights into the phenomenon. Furthermore, there remains a gap in understanding the cognitive processes and coping strategies that social entrepreneurs use when confronting potential failure and exit. Further exploration in these areas is both necessary and valuable for advancing the field.

References

Alvarez, S. A., Busenitz, L. W. (2001). The entrepreneurship of resource-based theory. *Journal of Management*, *27*(6), 755–775. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920630102700609

Battilana, J., & Lee, M. (2014). Advancing research on hybrid organizing – Insights from the study of social enterprises. *Academy of Management Annals*, *8*(1), 397–441. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2014.893615

Battilana, J., Sengul, M., Pache, A.-C., & Model, J. (2015). Harnessing productive tensions in hybrid organisations: The case of work integration social enterprises. *Academy of Management Journal*, *58*(6), 658–1685. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0903

Bennett, R. (2006). Business lecturers' perceptions of the nature of entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, *12*(3), 165–188. https://doi.org/10.1108/13552550610667440

Bhardwaj, R., Weerawardena, J., & Srivastava, S. (2023). Advancing social entrepreneurship research: A morphological analysis and future research agenda. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 1–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/19420676.2023.2199748

Bielefeld, W. (2009). Issues in social enterprise and social entrepreneurship. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *15*(1), 69–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2009.12001544

Borzaga, C., Galera, G., Franchini, B., Chiomento, S., Nogales, R., & Carini, C. (2020). *Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Comparative synthesis report*. European Commission. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from: https://europa.eu/!Qq64ny

Boso, N., Adeleye, I., Donbesuur, F., & Gyensare, M. (2019). Do entrepreneurs always benefit from business failure experience? *Journal of Business Research*, *98*, 370–379. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.01.063

Byrne, O., & Shepherd, D. A. (2015). Different strokes for different folks: entrepreneurial narratives of emotion, cognition, and making sense of business failure. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, *39*(2), 375–405. https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12046

Cannon, M. D., & Edmondson, A. C. (2001). Confronting failure: Antecedents and consequences of shared beliefs about failure in organizational work groups. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *22*(2), 161–177. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.85

Cardon, M. S., Stevens, C. E., & Potter, D. R. (2011). Misfortunes or mistakes? Cultural sensemaking of entrepreneurial failure. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *26*(1), 79–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2009.06.004

Carroll, J. J. (2017). Failure is an option: The entrepreneurial governance framework. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, *6*(1), 108–126. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEPP-04-2016-0013

Chmelik, E., Musteen, M., & Ahsan, M. (2016). Measures of performance in the context of international social ventures: An exploratory study. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, *7*(1), 74–100. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19420676.2014.997781

Cope, J. (2011). Entrepreneurial learning from failure: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *26*(6), 604–623. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2010.06.002

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Ćwiklicki, M., & Pacut, A. (2023). The effectiveness of public support for social enterprises: Evidence from Poland. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/19420676.2023.2205414

Czakon, W., Klimas, P., Tiberius, V., Ferreira, J., Veiga, P. M., & Kraus, S. (2022). Entrepreneurial failure: Structuring a widely overlooked field of research. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, *14*(3), 951–984. https://doi.org/10.1515/erj-2021-0328

Dacin, P. A., Dacin, M. T., & Matear, M. (2010). Social entrepreneurship: Why we don't need a new theory and how we move forward from here. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *24*, 37–57.

Dart, R. (2004). Being business-like in a non-profit organisation: A grounded and inductive typology. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *33*(2), 290–310. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764004263522

Defourny, J., Nyssens M., & Brolis, O. (2021). Testing social enterprise models across the world: Evidence from the "International Comparative Social Enterprise Models (ICSEM) Project". *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *50*(2), 420–440. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764020959470

Defourny, J., & Nyssens, M. (2021). *Social enterprise in Central and Eastern Europe: Theory, models and practice*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429324529

DeTienne, D. (2010). Entrepreneurial exit as a critical component of the entrepreneurial process: Theoretical development. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *25*(2), 203–215. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2008.05.004

Dias, A., & Teixeira, A. A. C. (2017). The anatomy of business failure: A qualitative account of its implications for future business success. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, *26*(1), 2–20. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-07-2017-001

Ebrahim, A., Battilana, J., & Mair, J. (2014). The governance of social enterprises: Mission drift and accountability challenges in hybrid organisations. *Research in Organisational Behavior*, *34*, 81–100. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2014.09.001

Fowler, A. (2000). NGDOs as a moment in history: Beyond aid to social entrepreneurship or civic innovation? *Third World Quarterly*, *21*(4), 637–654. https://doi.org/10.1080/713701063

Gartner, W.B. (1990). What are we talking about when we talk about entrepreneurship? *Journal of Business Venturing*, *5*(1), 15–28. https://doi.org/10.1016/0883-9026(90)90023-M

Gupta, P., Chauhan, S., Paul, J., & Jaiswal, M. P. (2020). Social entrepreneurship research: A review and future research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, *113*, 209–229. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.032

Hines, T. (2000). An evaluation of two qualitative methods (focus group interviews and cognitive maps) for conducting research into entrepreneurial decision making. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *3*(1), 7–16. https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750010310406

Jenkins, A. S., Wiklund, J., & Brundin, E. (2014). Individual responses to firm failure: Appraisals, grief, and the influence of prior failure experience. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *29*(1), 17–33. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2012.10.006

Jenkins, A., & McKelvie, A. (2017). Is this the end? Investigating firm and individual level outcomes post-failure. *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, *8*, 138–143. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbvi.2017.10.002

Jones, M.B. (2007). The multiple sources of mission drift. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *36*(2), 299–307. https://doi.org/10.1177/089976400730038

Justo, R., DeTienne, D. R., & Sieger, P. (2015). Failure or voluntary exit? Reassessing the female underperformance hypothesis. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *30*(6), 775–792. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2015.04.004

Khelil, N. (2016). The many faces of entrepreneurial failure: Insights from an empirical taxonomy. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *31*(1), 72–94. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2015.08.001

Klarin, A., & Suseno, Y. (2023). An integrative literature review of social entrepreneurship research: mapping the literature and future research directions. *Business and Society*, *62*(3), 565–611. https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503221101611

Klimas, P., Czakon, W., Kraus, S., Kailer, N., & Maalaoui, A. (2020). Entrepreneurial failure: A synthesis and conceptual framework of its effects. *European Management Review*, *18*(1), 167–182. https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12426

Lafuente, E., Vaillant, Y., Vendrell-Herrero, F., & Gomes, E. (2019). Bouncing back from failure: entrepreneurial resilience and the internationalisation of subsequent ventures created by serial entrepreneurs. *Applied Psychology*, *68*(4), 658–694, https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12175

Laurisz, N. (2019). The role of stakeholders in development of social economy organizations in Poland: An integrative approach. *Administrative Sciences*, *9*(4), 74. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci9040074

Lattacher, W., & Wdowiak, M. A. (2020). Entrepreneurial learning from failure. A systematic review. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, *26*(5), 1093–1131. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-02-2019-0085

Low, C., & Chinnock, C. (2008). Governance failure in social enterprise. *Education, Knowledge and Economy*, *2*(3), 203–212. https://doi.org/10.1080/17496890802426212

Lumpkin, G. T., Moss, T. W., Gras, D. M., Kato, S., & Amezcua, A. S. (2013). Entrepreneurial processes in social contexts: How are they different, if at all? *Small Business Economics*, *40*(3), 761–783. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-011-9399-3

Mavragani, A., & Ochoa, G. (2019). Google Trends in infodemiology and infoveillance: methodology framework. *JMIR public health and surveillance*, *5*(2), e13439. https://doi.org/10.2196/13439

McGrath, R. G. (1999). Falling forward: Real options reasoning and entrepreneurial failure. *The Academy of Management Review*, *24*(1), 13–30. https://doi.org/10.2307/259034

Minniti, M., & Bygrave, W. (2001). A dynamic model of entrepreneurial learning. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, *25*(3), 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/104225870102500301

Mitchell, R. K., Mitchell, J. R., & Smith, J. B. (2008). Inside opportunity formation: Enterprise failure, Ccognition, and the creation of opportunities. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, *2*, 225–242. https://doi.org/10.1002/sej

Mordaunt, J., & Cornforth, C. (2004). The role of boards in the failure and turnaround of non-profit organizations, *Public Money & Management*, *24*(4), 227–234. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9302.2004.00424.x

Pacut, A. (2022). Social enterprise. In S. Idowu, R. Schmidpeter, N. Capaldi, L. Zu, M. Del Baldo, & R. Abreu (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Sustainable Management*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02006-4_374-1

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage Publications.

Politis, D. (2008). Does prior start-up experience matter for entrepreneurs' learning? A comparison between novice and habitual entrepreneurs. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, *15*(3), 472–489. https://doi.org/10.1108/14626000810892292

Politis, D., & Gabrielsson, J. (2009). Entrepreneurs' attitudes towards failure: An experiential learning approach. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, *15*(4), 364–383. https://doi.org/10.1108/13552550910967921

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: the art of hearing data*. Sage Publications.

Sandelowski, M. (1993). Theory unmasked: The uses and guises of theory in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing & Health*, *16*(3), 213–218. https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.4770160308

Sarasvathy, S. D., Menon, A. R., & Kuechle, G. (2013). Failing firms and successful entrepreneurs: Serial entrepreneurship as a temporal portfolio. *Small Business Economics*, *40*, 417–434. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-011-9412-x

Sarasvathy, S. D. (2001). Causation and effectuation: toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency. *Academy of Management Review*, *26*(2), 243–263. https://doi.org/10.2307/259121

Scott, D., & Teasdale, S. (2012). Whose failure? Learning from the financial collapse of a social enterprise in 'Steeltown.' *Voluntary Sector Review*, *3*(2), 139–55. http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/204080512X649333

Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review*, *25*(1), 217–226. https://doi.org/10.2307/259271

Shepherd, D. A. (2003). Learning from business failure: Propositions of grief recovery for the self-employed. *Academy of Management Review*, *28*(2), 318–328. https://doi.org/10.2307/30040715

Singh, S., Corner, P., & Pavlovich, K. (2007). Coping with entrepreneurial failure. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *13*(4), 331–344. https://doi.org/10.5172/jmo.2007.13.4.331

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications.

Watson, J., & Everett, J. E. (1996). Do small businesses have high failure rates? Evidence from Australian retailers. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *34*(4), 45–62.

Wennberg, K., Wiklund, J., DeTienne, D. R., & Cardon, M. S. (2010). Reconceptualizing entrepreneurial exit: Divergent exit routes and their drivers. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *25*(4), 361–375. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2009.01.001

Wronka-Pośpiech, M. (2018). Exploring failure among social entrepreneurs–Evidence from Poland. *International Journal of Contemporary Management*, *17*(1), 269–286. https://doi.org/10.4467/24498939IJCM.18.015.8394

Zietsma, C., & Tuck, R. (2012). First, Do No Harm: Evaluating Resources for Teaching Social Entrepreneurship. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *11*(3), 512–517. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2011.0027

About the Author

Martyna Wronka-Pośpiech*, Ph.D.
Department of Entrepreneurship and Management Innovation
University of Economics in Katowice
1 Maja 50, 40-287 Katowice, Poland
e-mail: martyna.wronka-pospiech@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-9240-6670
* Corresponding author.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

This topic was addressed by the author within the framework of a research project titled "Identifying the Determinants and Consequences of the Failures of Social Entrepreneurs" (2018/02/X/HS4/01156), funded by the National Science Centre.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright and License

Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland

Ministry of Education and Science
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.

Social Entrepreneurship Review
2024, Vol. 2

OPEN ACCESS

10.15678/SER.2024.2.05

The Practice of Social Responsibility at Polish Universities: A Study of Current Trends

Beata Detyna

Abstract: Background: Multidimensionality, as well as the potential benefits of social responsibility of universities (SRU) described in the literature, prompts in-depth research into the actual implementation of this concept by universities. In Poland, it is only since 2017 that higher education institutions have started to declare the implementation of its principles.

Research objectives: The aim of this article is to present the results of research concerning the practical implementation of the idea of social responsibility at Polish HEIs. The literature review was supplemented with empirical research based on the analysis and evaluation of information on SRU available on HEIs' websites (random selection was used for this purpose). The research was conducted in the period July-September 2023.

Research design and methods: A review of the literature on the subject was supplemented with empirical research. The research was based on the analysis and evaluation of information on SRU available on the websites of higher education institutions. It was conducted in the period July-September 2023, and a random selection of institutions that had signed the *Declaration of Social Responsibility of Universities* between 2017 and 2022 was evaluated.

Results: The research resulted in a list of good practices, as well as recommendations for improvement measures for universities that have formally declared the implementation of SRU principles in practice.

Conclusions: Higher education stakeholders (internal and external), especially management, have a decisive influence on the practical implementation of the SRU concept. It is their awareness and determination that determines whether social responsibility will be developed in a real and tangible way by all university partners.

Keywords: university, social responsibility of the university, quality of education, university management

JEL Codes: I23, I25

Suggested citation:

Detyna, B. (2024). The practice of social responsibility at Polish universities: a study of current trends. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, *2*, 75–91. https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2024.2.05

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the concept of social responsibility within the Polish education market (Pisz, 2009; Piasecka, 2015; Pędziwiatr, Czaplicka-Kotas, & Kulczycka, 2018; Vásquez-Torres & Tavizón-Salazar, 2021). This trend is evidenced, among other factors, by the increasing number of Polish higher education institutions (HEIs) signing the "Declaration of Social Responsibility of HEIs" since 2017 (MNiSW, 2017). By 2022, the group of signatories expanded by 77 additional HEIs, bringing the total to 160 public and private institutions. According to the website of the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, the practical implementation of the Declaration aims to "continuously strengthen the organizational and management capacities of higher education institutions by improving resource efficiency, developing academic staff, and building the prestige of the university as a generator of knowledge and creator of new ideas" (MNiSW, 2017). Universities in Poland voluntarily commit to promoting the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility through their study programs, research initiatives, and management and organizational solutions (Detyna, 2023, pp. 211–214). The implementation and development of social responsibility in universities (SRU) is actively supported by the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, which established a Working Group on Social Responsibility of Universities (WG for SRU) in 2018. This group, of which the author of this article is a member, develops annual Good Practice Catalogues in areas such as ESG (MEN, 2023) and practices related to the information and communication tools employed by universities. The WG for SRU's primary role is to collaborate with the academic community to advance the social responsibility of Polish higher education institutions (HEIs) and to promote the principles of sustainable development as a foundation for higher education (MNiSW, 2017).

Members of the SRU WG (2022–2023) conducted research on good practices in social responsibility among foreign universities. Data for the analysis and evaluation were collected from the websites of 130 universities across 47 countries worldwide. A webinar organized by the SRU WG in May 2023 highlighted, among other findings, that communication is a key element in implementing the concept of social responsibility in universities. However, the research revealed that relatively few foreign universities report on SRU or ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) activities, either on their websites or social media platforms. Only 14% of the universities surveyed explicitly integrate SRU aspects into their vision and mission statements, while dedicated SRU strategies were identified in just 30% of respondents. Additionally, universities seldom provide information on their websites regarding the units or positions responsible for coordinating SRU activities. In summary, the research conducted in recent years points to a relatively low level of implementation of the SRU concept in universities. Key deficits include areas such as student and employee volunteering programs, for example, initiatives promoting healthy lifestyles (Detyna, 2023).

The main objective of this article is to present the results of research on the practical implementation of the concept of social responsibility in Polish universities. The literature review includes an analysis of published research findings on both Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the social responsibility of universities. To achieve this objective, empirical research was conducted, focusing on the analysis and evaluation of information about SRU available on university websites. A random selection method was applied, resulting in a sample of 39 out of 160 Polish universities that had signed the SRU Declaration. The research was carried out between July and September 2023. The article does not disclose the names of the surveyed universities, as consent for such disclosure was not obtained. The primary research tools included a control sheet and a qualitative analysis of the content published on the websites of the selected universities. The sample comprised public universities (84.60%) and private universities (15.49%).

2. Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is nowadays one of the key management concepts, according to which an organization should not only care about its own economic goals, but also about achieving long-term goals for society (Gadomska-Lila, 2012, pp. 41–51; Barcik & Dziwiński, 2016, pp. 21–32; Płoszajski, 2017; Carayannis & Morawska-Jancelewicz, 2022, pp. 3445–3471; Gasparski, 2022). In the literature, CSR is most often referred to business organizations, but more and more often the concept is considered and presented in the context of the operating conditions of non-profit organizations, i.e., public administration units, hospitals or universities (Krodkiewska-Skoczylas & Żarlicka, 2015, pp. 277–295; Jakubiak, 2017, pp. 132–147; Buchta et al., 2018, pp. 22–33; Jastrzębska et al., 2019, pp. 285–297; Santos et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2021, p. 124931; Chumaceiro Hernandez et al., 2022, pp. 51–62; Huerta, Armas, & Sotelo, 2022; Barrera-Rodríguez et al., 2023, pp. 787–809; Vallaeys & Álvarez-Rodríguez, 2022; Detyna, 2023, pp. 208–234; Hudson & Brandenberger, 2023).

An important milestone in popularizing the concept of social responsibility was the publication of H. R. Bowen's book, in which the author defined Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as the entrepreneur's commitment to policies, decisions, and courses of action that align with the goals and values deemed desirable by society (Bowen, 1953, p. 6). The concept was originally directed at the decisions of the entrepreneur himself, whereas it is now linked to the activities of the whole organization (Leoński, 2015, p. 93; Buczkowski et al., 2016; Drzazga, 2019; Bolibok, Kasprzak-Czelej, & Zinczuk, 2022). At the same time, the need for a total (comprehensive, multidimensional) implementation of CSR assumptions into all areas of an organization's functioning is indicated, emphasizing the importance of the environment, customers, employees and investors (Kowalska, 2009; Ebert & Griffin, 2013, pp. 64–65; Ławicka, 2016, pp. 207–220; Latif et al., 2021, pp. 815–829). This idea was summarized by B. Gajdzik, who described CSR as a comprehensive approach to thinking about business in all its aspects (Gajdzik, 2015, p. 16). Similarly, authors K. Davis and R. L. Bloomstrom highlight that CSR is a business concept grounded in the management's responsibility to make decisions and take actions that balance the pursuit of their own interests with the protection and enhancement of social welfare (Davis & Bloomstrom, 1975, p. 6). A socially responsible organization should, therefore, adhere to fundamental economic and legal standards, work to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders, contribute to environmental sustainability, and engage in morally and ethically justified activities. According to M. E. Porter and M. R. Kramer, a key prerequisite for implementing CSR within an organization is its ability to act as a responsible corporate citizen (Porter & Kramer, 2007, pp. 85–87).

A noteworthy model in terms of practical application is the so-called CSR 2.0 model, also referred to as the systemic concept of CSR (Figure 1). This model is founded on five key principles: responsiveness to societal issues, creativity in problem-solving, scalability of socially desirable solutions, globality (addressing both local and global challenges), and circularity (designing actions that are sustainable throughout the entire product or service life cycle) (Bachnik, 2011). The CSR 2.0 model shifts away from a purely philanthropic or PR-driven approach toward a more interactive framework that incorporates the voices and needs of stakeholders. Furthermore, this model emphasizes leveraging new technological advancements, such as social media, primarily as tools for dialogue and engagement. Building relationships and addressing the needs of diverse stakeholder groups are central to the CSR 2.0 approach (CSR 2.0, 2012).

According to the European Commission, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept through which organizations voluntarily integrate social and environmental concerns into their operations, engaging collaboratively with stakeholders. The sustainable success of an organization is built on ongoing dialogue with its environment, addressing aspects such as environmental protection and the development of social capital (Huang et al., 2014, pp. 68–84; Schaefer, Terlutter, & Diehl, 2019, pp. 1–20; Castro, 2022, pp. 48–55; Wirba, 2023; Fatima

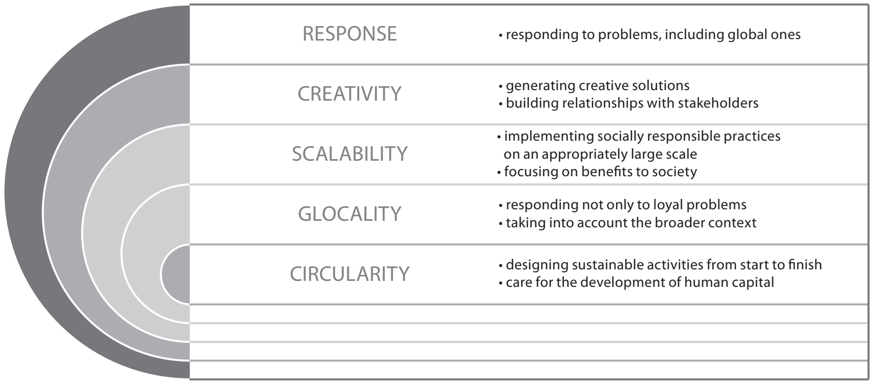


Figure 1. CSR 2.0 Model

Source: own elaboration based on data sourced from Bachnik, 2011; CSR 2.0, 2012.

& Elbanna, 2023, pp. 105–121; Hahn et al., 2023, pp. 1–23). According to the PN-ISO 26 000 Standard (ISO 26 000, 2013; Encyklopedia ESG, n.d.), CSR is an organization's responsibility for the impact of its decisions and actions on society and the environment ensured by transparent and ethical behavior that contributes to sustainable development, including: well-being and health of society (Luty-Michalak & Kotowska-Wójcik, 2016; Cichowicz & Nowak, 2018, pp. 7–19), takes into account the expectations of stakeholders (Buglewicz, 2018; Wolak-Tuzimek, 2019), complies with applicable law and is consistent with international standards of conduct (Waliszewski, 2018), and is integrated into the organization's operations and practised in its relationships (Kotowska-Wójcik & Luty-Michalak, 2016; Khoo et al., 2023, pp. 716–763). According to the standard, the seven key areas of CSR include organizational governance, human rights, labor practices, the environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, and community engagement and development (ISO 26 000, 2013; Krodkiewska-Skoczylas & Żarlicka, 2015, p. 280; Meftah Gerged et al., 2023). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development defines the social responsibility of an organization as an ongoing commitment to ethical behavior and contributing to sustainable economic development. This involves improving the quality of life for employees and their families, as well as enhancing the well-being of the local community and society as a whole (Zinczuk et al., 2020).

A common denominator in the various ways of defining Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the principle that any organization – regardless of its area of activity – should aim to be both pro-social and pro-environmental in its operations. It is worth emphasizing that socially responsible practices today encompass not only adherence to ethical standards in relationships with employees, competitors, and customers (in the case of universities, this includes students, employees, research institutions, etc.), but also increased investments in human resources, community development, and environmental protection (Hawken, 2007, pp. 210–221; Marek & Białasiewicz, 2011, pp. 98–99; Detyna, 2023, pp. 208–234). Well-executed CSR implies that managers are attuned to the issues impacting the lives of the people with whom they live and work and understand the societal conditions they influence, aiming to have a positive impact (Gustafson, 2007, pp. 191–192). In this context, university managers should consistently consider the social implications of their decisions, as these affect diverse societal groups, including stakeholders and the environment. Consequently, they must analyze, in a socially responsible manner, not only the objectives – whether strategic, tactical, or operational – set by the university but also the methods employed to achieve these goals.

We can define the social responsibility of a university as a strategic and systemic approach to university management, fostering collaboration and dialogue with stakeholders that contributes to sustainable development, shaping the values and attitudes of civil society, promoting academic values and the creation of new ideas, and sustaining and developing scientific and teaching competencies that enhance business efficiency and innovation (MNiSW, 2017). In this context, it is worth emphasizing that the principles of the SRU Declaration apply to all areas of the university's operations: teaching activities, research, internal organization, and engagement with all stakeholder groups (Detyna, 2018). The practical implementation of these principles should be reflected in the university's commitment to promoting sustainability and social responsibility through its educational programs, research initiatives, management, and organizational practices.

At this point, it is worth quoting the provisions of the SRU Declaration, which has been signed by Polish universities. Its preamble emphasizes the role of the university as a hub for creating and transmitting knowledge about the surrounding reality, incorporating and applying the principles of social responsibility across all areas of its activities, and promoting these principles among its stakeholders. The signatories of the SRU Declaration commit to the practical implementation of the principles of sustainable development, ensuring high-quality research and education, and fostering the comprehensive development of the academic community by undertaking the following:

1. Uphold the academic values outlined, among other sources, in the Code of Ethics for Academic Staff, particularly values such as conscientiousness, objectivity, independence, openness, and transparency (PAN, 2024).
2. Cultivate the social and civic attitudes of future elites, encouraging community building, creativity, openness, communication, social sensitivity, and a culture of professionalism.
3. Promote equality, diversity, tolerance, and the respect and protection of human rights within the academic community and its broader environment.
4. Expand curricula to include topics such as ethics, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and social innovation.
5. Implement projects that apply the principles of social responsibility, particularly in areas such as diversity management in the workplace, employee volunteering, ethics promotion, intersectoral collaboration, and socially engaged marketing.
6. Undertake research and implementation projects, in partnership with other academic centers worldwide, the business sector, public administration, and non-governmental organizations, to address significant social challenges.
7. Foster inter-university, national, and international cooperation to adapt and reinforce best practices in university social responsibility.
8. Strengthen the organizational governance of universities by basing management practices on the principles of social responsibility, embedding these principles in strategic documents and related activities to support the comprehensive development of the academic community and effectively fulfill the university's mission.
9. Ensure transparency in the university's operations by, among other actions, measuring outcomes, promoting and disseminating results, and designating a person or team to coordinate these efforts.

10. Minimize the negative environmental impact of activities conducted by the academic community and its stakeholders in all dimensions.
11. Engage in dialogue with stakeholders to determine the priorities of the university's social responsibility policy and communicate the outcomes.
12. Adhere to principles of ethics and responsibility in teaching and research to create optimal conditions for stakeholders to benefit from the knowledge, intellectual capital, and achievements of the university (MNiSW, 2017).

The importance and usefulness of such enshrined pro-social principles is evidenced by the relatively large number of SRU Declarations signed by Polish HEIs. This number accounts for approximately 45% of all higher education institutions operating in Poland. According to the Central Statistical Office, there were 359 of them in the 2022/2023 academic year.

To summarize, the literature provides numerous definitions and references to the concept of social responsibility in relation to competitive value (Detyna, 2024b, pp. 65–83), management approaches, ethics (PAN, 2024), and the necessity for universities to address economic challenges, including labor market needs. Social responsibility is also linked to the creation of social relationships, innovation, quality of education (Grudowski & Lewandowski 2007; Wiśniewska & Grudowski, 2016; Tutko, 2016; Piasecka, Ludwiczak, & Tutko, 2021; Khan et al., 2022; Yeh et al., 2021), and initiatives supporting sustainable development (Detyna, 2023, pp. 208–214; Detyna, 2024c, pp. 65–72).

3. Research Method and Material

The practical implementation of the concept of social responsibility in Polish higher education institutions (HEIs) required the adoption of an appropriate research methodology. A literature review on the subject was complemented by empirical research. This research involved the analysis and evaluation of information about SRU available on the websites of HEIs. Conducted between July and September 2023, it focused on a randomly selected sample of institutions that had signed the Declaration of Social Responsibility of Universities between 2017 and 2022, totaling 39 universities out of 150 (24.37%). The article does not include a list of the surveyed universities, as their consent for disclosure was not obtained. The research group comprised both public (84.60%) and non-public (private – 15.49%) HEIs, including universities with scientific categories and those offering practical, vocational training profiles. In presenting the research findings, the author drew on her practical experience as the Rector's Plenipotentiary for Social Responsibility of HEIs and as a member of the Working Group on Social Responsibility of HEIs at the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy.

Figure 2 shows the structure of the surveyed universities by type (profile). The largest groups were universities (30.77%), vocational universities (23.08%) and universities of technology (17.95%). The surveyed universities also included universities of economics (10.25%), universities of natural sciences (10.25%) and medical universities (7.70%).

The survey encompassed 14 out of 16 provinces in Poland. The largest groups of surveyed universities were in three provinces, accounting for a total of 16 universities (41.03%): Mazovian (17.95% – 7 universities), Lower Silesian (12.82% – 5 universities), and Lublin (10.26% – 4 universities). In five additional provinces – Podlaskie, Silesian, Pomeranian, Greater Poland, and Lesser Poland – three universities were surveyed in each province, totaling 15 universities (38.46%). Each of these provinces represented 7.69% of the surveyed institutions. In the West Pomeranian (5.14%) and Kuyavian-Pomeranian (5.14%) provinces, two universities were included in

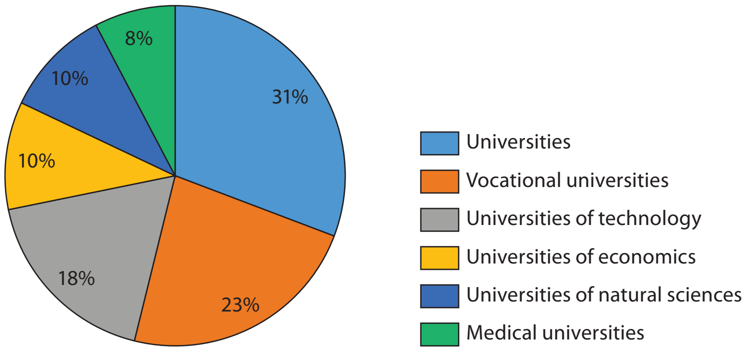


Figure 2. Structure of the Surveyed Universities (%) According to the Type (Profile) of the University

Source: own elaboration.

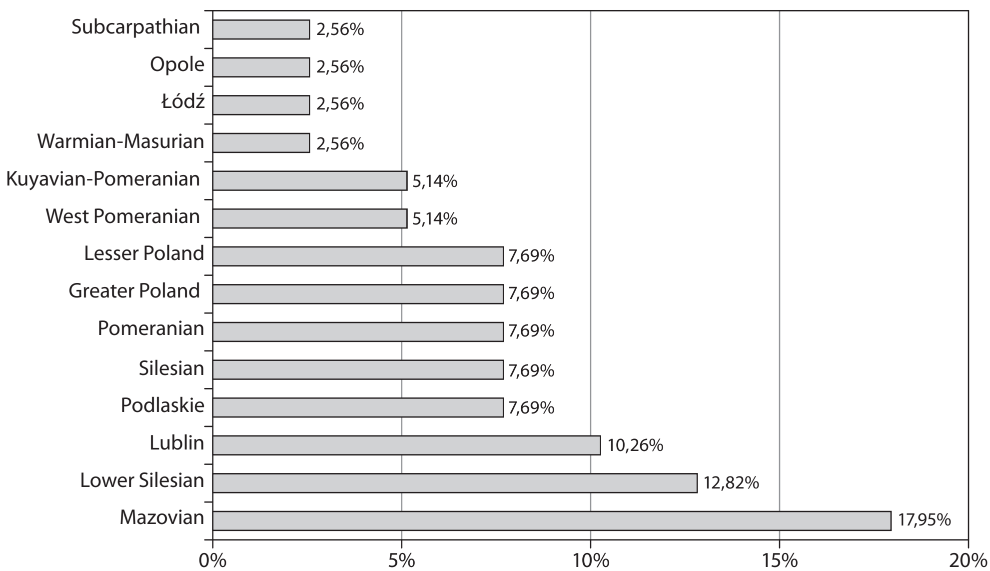


Figure 3. Structure of the Surveyed Universities (%) according to the Location of the University (Voivodeship)

Source: own elaboration.

each. Meanwhile, four provinces – Warmian-Masurian, Łódź, Opole, and Subcarpathian – each contributed one university to the survey, amounting to a total of four universities (10.24%). The distribution of surveyed universities across the provinces is illustrated in Figure 3.

4. Results and Discussion

The empirical study reveals that the vast majority (82.05%) of the surveyed universities that signed the *Declaration of Social Responsibility of Universities* between 2017 and 2022 published the full text of the Declaration, including all 12 principles, on their websites. Additionally, all universities indicated that they had signed the Declaration and confirmed its validity.

Figure 4 presents the survey results regarding the detailed information about the SRU concept available on university websites. A dedicated subpage highlighting activities related to SRU was identified in 41.03% of the surveyed universities. This finding suggests that for most of the surveyed institutions, the topic of social responsibility is not a significant aspect of their image communication.

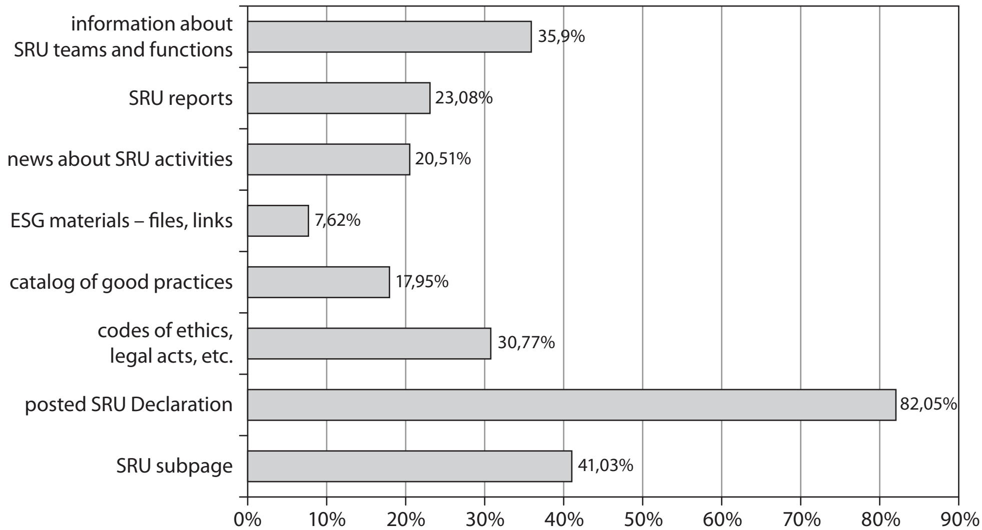


Figure 4. Information Posted on the Websites of Universities that Signed the SRU Declaration in 2017–2022 – Structure of the Surveyed Universities (%)

Source: own elaboration.

On the websites of 35.90% of the universities, information was available about appointed proxies or groups/teams dedicated to SRU. However, it is unclear whether such functions or teams exist at the remaining institutions or if they exist but are simply not reported online. Only one in three universities (30.77%) provides easily accessible codes of ethics or legal documents introducing the concept of social responsibility, such as CSR areas, SRU principles, ESG goals, and similar guidelines, on their websites. Extremely rare, in the context of the survey conducted, were situations where codes of ethics (e.g., codes of ethics for students, for lecturers, for doctoral students, for students at the University of the Third Age, for the entire academic community) developed by the university were posted on the university's website. Such situations concerned about 12.82% of the surveyed institutions.

Despite the growing popularity of the SRU concept, only 23.08% of the surveyed universities publish studies in the form of reports on their websites. These reports most often focus on self-assessments of the process of implementing the SRU concept, typically based on forms provided by the SRU Working Group at the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy. Relatively few institutions, however, present detailed research findings in this area based on their own methodologies or solutions.

In one in four surveyed universities, information (news) on ongoing activities in the SRU areas – in the social, environmental and organizational governance areas – it is posted on an ongoing basis.

For several years, the SRU Working Group has been developing *Catalogues of Good Practices* in the field of social responsibility and sustainable development policies implemented by Polish universities. These catalogues are available on the websites of only 17.95% of the surveyed universities, suggesting relatively low interest in these periodic studies (MEN, 2023). What is particularly concerning, in the context of the need to promote the SRU concept, is that only a small number of universities (7.69%) have materials related to CSR, SRU, ESG, and similar topics available on their websites. The few institutions that do provide such resources include files and links to legal acts, monographs, studies, reports, and examples of good practices from both Polish and foreign universities. By doing so, these universities contribute to the expansion and deepening of knowledge about the concepts and real-world practices of social responsibility.

The deficits in information provided on the surveyed universities' websites, as identified during the research, may come as a surprise given that the vast majority (92.31%) include references to SRU or ESG in their development strategies (Figure 5). Whether these references are direct or indirect, they clearly indicate that universities view the human (social) factor as crucial to their development and future. This conclusion is supported by the observation that university strategies place the strongest emphasis on the importance of communication and collaboration with all stakeholder groups, including students, employees, and representatives of the socio-economic environment, particularly at the local level.

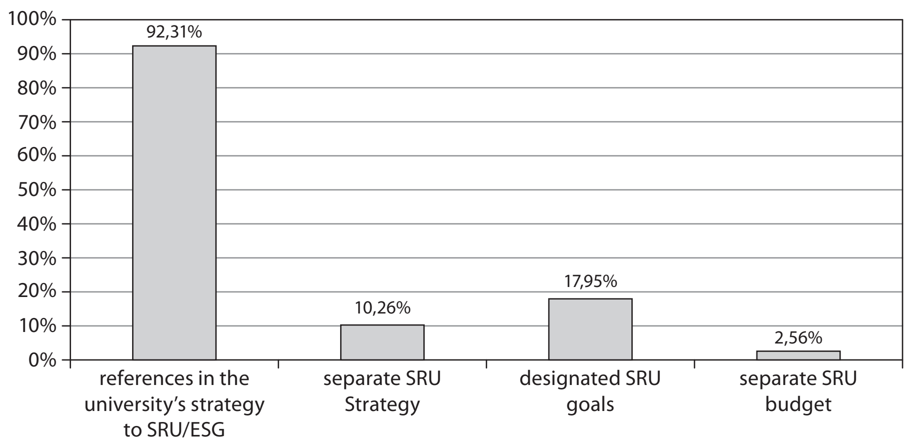


Figure 5. Information Posted on the Websites of Universities that Signed the SRU Declaration in 2017–2022 – Structure of the Surveyed Universities (%)

Source: own elaboration.

Only 10.26% of the surveyed universities have developed and publicly shared an SRU development strategy on their websites. A slightly larger group (17.95%) outlines their social responsibility goals. A particularly unique activity identified during the survey is the preparation and publication of separate SRU budgets for the year, observed in just 2.56% of the institutions.

The research conducted allows for the presentation of a list of good practices that could inspire universities seeking to develop the SRU concept in a meaningful way. Among the activities recommended by the author are:

- Establishing interdisciplinary teams dedicated to SRU.
- Utilizing self-assessment (diagnosis) forms to evaluate the implementation of the SRU concept.
- Developing and implementing a distinct SRU strategy, including vision, values, principles, diagnosis, stakeholders, and strategic goals.
- Preparing SRU reports in both Polish and English and posting them on the university's website, preferably on a dedicated SRU subpage.
- Supporting and promoting scientific research and publications on social responsibility and sustainable development, such as creating an SRU "library" with links to research findings and publications.
- Incorporating subjects related to CSR, SRU, ESG, and similar topics into the curricula of all academic programs.
- Publishing legal acts and documents on the SRU subpage, including strategies, equality plans, regulations, SRU reports, and examples of good practices from various university departments and units.
- Drafting and publicly sharing a university-wide code of ethics, or separate codes tailored for students, employees, doctoral candidates, and other groups.
- Developing English-language versions of university websites, particularly those related to SRU activities.
- Promoting initiatives such as cooperation, integration, educational programs, health-promoting actions, and student and employee volunteering on the university's SRU subpage.
- Introducing participatory budgeting as a mechanism for co-management (participatory governance), which could include initiatives related to ecology and sustainable development, as well as an "employee budget" allowing employees to allocate specific funds annually.
- Organizing "issue meetings" to address topics such as the situation of older, pre-retired employees or non-academic staff.
- Creating a "volunteer map" (empathy map) of the university community, including students, employees, and external partners, using tools like online surveys to identify the scope and scale of academic involvement in volunteering and charitable activities.
- Collaborating on SRU initiatives with other universities and organizations in Poland and abroad, such as joining international forums like the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), participating in Global Compact programs, or implementing HR Excellence in Research standards for university workplaces.

Assuming that the SRU should address the needs of all stakeholder groups, it is important to emphasize that partner expectations generally fall into three broad categories of HEI functioning and impact (Duque et al., 2019; Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2020, p. 6179; Comoli et al., 2021, p. 124; Lytovchenko, 2021; El-Kassar et al., 2023). These categories typically include:

1. Social aspects, including ethical considerations.
2. Environmental concerns, emphasizing care for the natural environment.
3. Corporate governance, such as systemic solutions for organization and management within the HEI (Geryk, 2010, pp. 271–287; Merta-Staszczak et al., 2020; Nguyen Thi Khanh & Nguyen, 2022; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023, pp. 445–459).

In the light of the literature and empirical research, the positive effects of SRU are primarily reflected in university activities that are widespread and continuous, including:

– Adhering to the provisions of the *Code of Ethics for Academic Staff*, which emphasizes values such as conscientiousness, objectivity, independence, openness, and transparency (PAN, 2024).
– Investing in enhancements to the university environment, including improvements to infrastructure.
– Refining processes that positively impact the academic community, the local area, and the natural environment.
– Exploring and implementing more efficient and effective organizational and management approaches (Grudowski & Lewandowski, 2012; Detyna, 2017, pp. 33–48; Detyna, 2023, pp. 224–225).

Among the potential long-term benefits of implementing SRU principles – benefits that can serve as effective motivators for university managers – the author identifies the following:

– Enhanced integration of the academic community with external stakeholders, including the local community, through university-related activities.
– Strengthening the university's reputation as a socially responsible institution.
– Improved communication and engagement among students, staff, and collaborating stakeholders, fostering closer relationships, synergies, and the building of a cohesive academic community.
– Increased work efficiency through the improvement and rationalization of processes across all areas of the university.
– Attracting investment funds and external funding as a reflection of confidence in the university's social responsibility and performance.
– Deepening relationships with external stakeholders, expressed through joint projects, event organization, and investments in popular-scientific, cultural, sporting, charitable, and socially significant initiatives.
– Growing interest from prospective staff, increasing the university's attractiveness as an employer.
– Improved employee retention, reflecting the university's appeal as a workplace.
– Enhanced motivation and creativity among university staff through continuous stimulation and support.
– Reduced risk of litigation, promoting a more secure operational environment.
– Improved public image, resulting from better collaboration with stakeholders such as the local community and students.
– Positive media responses, which contribute to the construction and reinforcement of the university's public image.

Due to their long-term nature, the potential benefits listed require the consistent implementation of principles aligned with the SRU Declaration. The scope of these benefits may expand or contract depending on the actual activities undertaken by the university, rather than those merely stated as public relations objectives.

5. Conclusions

The research resulted in a list of good practices and recommendations for improvement activities for universities that have formally declared their commitment to implementing SRU principles in practice. The publication highlights diverse approaches to defining the social responsibility of organizations, as well as various contexts and potential benefits of applying this concept in universities.

According to the author, the complexity and multifaceted nature of SRU should be carefully considered during both the design and implementation phases. All areas of a university's operations should be accounted for, including image communication and engagement with all stakeholder groups (Riad Shams & Belyaeva, 2019, pp. 423–436; Park, 2023, pp. 147–158; Rybak, 2021; Klein et al., 2021). Social responsibility in higher education institutions (HEIs) is reflected in activities that benefit all stakeholders, including students, employees, employers, and external partners (Bacoup et al., 2016; Hnatyszak, 2018; Schaefer, Terlutter, & Diehl, 2019, pp. 191–212; Cygonek, 2021; Reichel, Rudnicka, & Socha, 2023, pp. 263–275; Agustina et al., 2023, pp. 885–905; Detyna, 2024a, pp. 62–67).

Key to the success of SRU implementation is the continuous improvement of communication among stakeholders and the building of an integrated academic community around the university (Żemigała, 2020; Detyna, 2023). Successful implementation also requires effective communication from university management to all students, staff, and external stakeholders, demonstrating their commitment to embracing and developing SRU principles.

Another critical factor is integrating the SRU concept into key strategic documents, such as the university's vision, mission, development strategy, SRU strategy, and quality policy. Survey results indicate that most universities lack separate SRU strategies. Adopting systemic solutions, including an appropriate organizational structure tailored to the institution's needs, challenges, and opportunities, could prove highly beneficial.

The author also emphasizes the importance of developing a motivational system tailored to the individual needs of university employees. Such a system should stimulate commitment, creativity, and innovation in implementing and sustaining the SRU concept. Planning a policy for employee competence development – consulted with all relevant parties – is also advisable. This includes raising awareness of CSR, ESG, and related concepts, as well as enhancing social competences. The success of SRU implementation depends largely on the knowledge, motivation, and engagement of university employees.

Careful analysis of employee needs and the impact of proposed activities, such as training, on motivation and loyalty is recommended. For instance, the author proposes using a "map" of the university's responsibilities toward employees (Detyna, 2017, pp. 42–43). This "map" could outline various aspects under which specific actions may be proposed, such as:

- Employment conditions
- Health and safety
- Employee development
- Satisfaction and communication
- Involvement in organization and management
- Equal opportunities
- Work-life balance
- Employee volunteering

Activities implemented under these aspects, as part of the SRU concept, can positively impact many areas, including the quality of education, research, and collaboration with representatives of the socio-economic environment. The effectiveness of socially responsible activities may also be enhanced through oversight and initiatives led by specially appointed SRU teams or positions, such as plenipotentiaries, managers, or coordinators.

However, according to the research, cyclical SRU reports are rare at universities. Even when such reports exist, they often go unnoticed due to the lack of up-to-date information on university websites. This includes the absence of published audit results or evaluations of progress toward the stated goals. This lack of visibility is particularly concerning given that the universities voluntarily signed the SRU Declaration between 2017 and 2022. These institutions have a responsibility to keep all stakeholders informed about their socially responsible activities and the successes achieved.

To address the need for monitoring results within the SRU framework, the author recommends developing a scorecard or other reporting mechanism to track and communicate progress. Examples could include specialized survey forms, check sheets, or similar tools. It is crucial that these tools are utilized consistently and systematically to inform decision-making processes and ensure transparency in the university's social responsibility efforts.

In summary, effectively implementing and sustaining the Social Responsibility of Universities (SRU) concept requires tailoring it to the specific needs and capabilities of each institution. This includes considering stakeholder expectations and leveraging available resources such as human capital, knowledge, financial assets, and infrastructure. Communicating SRU initiatives through university websites and social media platforms is crucial for enhancing institutional image and transparency. However, research indicates that Polish universities have significant room for improvement in this area. Enhancing online communication of SRU efforts can lead to better stakeholder engagement and a stronger reputation for social responsibility.

References

Agustina, L., Meyliana, M., & Hanny, H. (2023). Constructing CSR student self-consciousness through university social responsibility implementation. *Social Responsibility Journal*, *19*(5), 885–905. https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-05-2020-0170

Ali, M., Mustapha, I., Osman, S., & Hassan U. (2021). University social responsibility: A review of conceptual evolution and its thematic analysis. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 286, 124931. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.124931

Bachnik, K. (2011). Rewolucja w CSR, *Harvard Business Review Polska*. https://odpowiedzialnybiznes.pl/artykuly/rewolucja-w-csr-wywiad-z-w-visserem/

Bacoup, P., Michel, C., Pralus, M., & Habchi, G. (2016). *Implementation of ISO and lean management into administration: Application in a University Department*. Qualita.

Barcik, R., & Dziwiński P. (2016). Społecznie odpowiedzialna restrukturyzacja zatrudnienia, Imperatyw przedsiębiorczości a odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorcy. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 419, 21–32. https://doi:10.15611/pn.2016.419.02

Barrera-Rodríguez, A. M., Echeverri-Gutiérrez, P., A., Redondo-Ramírez, I., & Hernández-Ramírez, L. (2023). University social responsibility: Bibliometric analysis and research trends. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, *37*(4), 787–809. https://doi: 10.1108/IJEM-12-2021-0467

Bolibok, P., Kasprzak-Czelej, A., & Zinczuk B. (2022). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu w perspektywie zmian i wyzwań współczesnej gospodarki*. Wydawnictwo UMCS.

Bowen, H. R. (1953). *The social responsibilities of the businessman*. Harper.

Buchta, K., Jakubiak, M., Skiert, M., & Wilczewski A. (2018). University social responsibility: Theory vs. practice. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 520, 22–33. https://doi:10.15611/pn.2018.520.02

Buczkowski, B., Dorożyński, T., Kuna-Marszałek, A., Serwach, T., & Wieloch, J. (2016). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu: Studia przypadków firm międzynarodowych*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

Buglewicz, K. (2018). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu: Nowa wartość konkurencyjna*. Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne.

Carayannis, E. G., & Morawska-Jancelewicz, J. (2022). The futures of Europe: Society 5.0 and industry 5.0 as driving forces of future universities. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, *13*(4), 3445–3471. https://doi: 10.1007/s13132-021-00854-2

Castro, A. J., Zanello, L., Lizcano, J., & Daza, A. (2022). USR as a tool for meeting the SDGs: A systematic review. *Revista Iberoamericana de Tecnologias del Aprendizaje*, *17*(1), 48–55. https://doi: 10.1109/RITA.2022.3149982

Chumaceiro Hernandez, A., Hernandez Garcia de Valenzio, J., Velazco Hernández, J., Lagusev, Y., & Rogozhina, A. (2022). The impact of sustainable development and social responsibility on quality education. *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, *13*(1), 51–62. https://doi: 10.14505/jemt.v13.1(57).05

Cichowicz, E., & Nowak, A. K. (2018). Społeczna odpowiedzialność wyższych uczelni w Polsce jako przejaw realizacji idei ekonomicznej teorii zrównoważonego rozwoju. *Gospodarka w Praktyce i Teorii*, *50*(1), 7–19. https://doi: 10.18778/1429-3730.50.01

Comoli, M., Gelmini, L., Minutiello, V., & Tettamanzi, P. (2021). University social responsibility: The case of Italy. *Administrative Sciences*, *11*(4), 124. https://doi: 10.3390/admsci11040124

CSR 2.0 – innowacyjne podejście do prowadzenia biznesu. https://odpowiedzialnybiznes.pl/aktualno-%C5%9Bci/csr-2-0-innowacyjne-podejscie-do-prowadzenia-biznesu/

Cygonek, K. (2021). Zrównoważony rozwój SGH. *Życie Uczelni, Gazeta SGH 2021*, https://gazeta.sgh.waw.pl/meritum/zrownowazony-rozwoj-sgh

Davis, K. & Bloomstrom, R.L. (1975). *Business and society: Environment and responsibility*, McGraw-Hill, New York.

Detyna, B. (2017). Biznes a administracja publiczna w kontekście koncepcji CSR. In K. Zawieja-Żurowska, & A. Waligórska-Kotfas (Eds.), *Problemy przeobrażeń współczesnego społeczeństwa i gospodarki: Perspektywy rozwoju i ograniczenia. Ujęcie interdyscyplinarne* (pp. 33–48). PWSZ Konin.

Detyna, B. (2018). Implementation of lean management concept at the university. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Humanitas*, 19(2). https://doi: 10.5604/01.3001.0012.2039

Detyna, B. (2023). Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni a jakość kształcenia. In A. Bocho-Janiszewska, & M. Zięba (Eds.), *Problemy jakości w badaniach i praktyce* (pp. 208–234). Sieć Badawcza Łukasiewicz – Instytut Technologii Eksploatacji Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Detyna, B. (2024a). Lean Management – w kierunku doskonalenia procesów i zrównoważonego rozwoju uczelni. In A. Bitkowska (Ed.), *Pragmatyka zarządzania procesowego. Strategie – Ludzie – Technologie* (pp. 62–67). TNOiK "Dom Organizatora."

Detyna, B. (2024b). Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni a jej wartość konkurencyjna. In M. Majewska, M. Matuszewska-Birkowska, & T. Orczykowski (Eds.), *Kompetencje przyszłości. Wyzwania w pedagogice, edukacji i psychologii* (pp. 65–83), Vol. 2. Akademia Handlowa Nauk Stosowanych.

Detyna, B. (2024c). Społeczna odpowiedzialność w łańcuchu wartości uczelni – perspektywy rozwoju. In B. Detyna (Ed.), *Nauka – Edukacja – Rozwój. Wspólnie dla przyszłości* (pp. 65–72). Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Nauk stosowanych Angelusa Silesiusa.

Drzazga, M. (2019). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorstwa* (*CSR*): *Perspektywa marketingu* (ebook). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach.

Duque, P., & Cervantes-Cervantes, L. S. (2019). University social responsibility: A systematic review and a bibliometric analysis. *Estudios Gerenciales*, *35*(153). https://doi: 10.18046/j.estger.2019.153.3389

Ebert, R. J., & Griffin, R. W. (2013). *Business essentials*. Pearson Education.

El-Kassar, A. N., Makki, D., Gonzalez-Perez, M. A,. & Cathro, V. (2023). Doing well by doing good: Why is investing in university social responsibility a good business for higher education institutions cross culturally? *Cross Cultural and Strategic Management*, *30*(1). https://doi: 10.1108/CCSM-12-2021-0233

Encyklopedia ESG. (n.d.). https://odpowiedzialnybiznes.pl/hasla-encyklopedii/iso-26-000/

Fatima, T., & Elbanna, S. (2023). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) implementation: A review and a research agenda towards an integrative framework, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *183*(1), 105–121. https://doi: 10.1007/s10551-022-05047-8

Gadomska-Lila, K. (2012). Społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu wobec pracowników. *Management and Business Administration. Central Europe*, *2*(115), 41–51.

Gajdzik, B. (2015). Jakość w karcie wyników CSR. *Problemy Jakości*, 5, 15–21. http://dx.doi.org/10.15199/46.2015.5.3

Gasparski, W. (2022). *Biznes, etyka, odpowiedzialność*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Geryk, M. (2010). Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni niezbędnym czynnikiem jej rozwoju. In M. Geryk (Ed.), *Organizacja w obliczu współczesnych wyzwań* (271–287). Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Zarządzania w Gdańsku.

Godonoga, A., & Sporn, B. (2023). The conceptualisation of socially responsible universities in higher education research: a systematic literature review. *Studies in Higher Education*, *48*(3), 445–459. https://doi: 10.1080/03075079.2022.2145462

Grudowski, P., & Lewandowski, K. (2007). Pojęcie jakości kształcenia i uwarunkowania jej kwantyfikacji w uczelniach wyższych. *Zarządzanie i Finanse*, *10*(3; 1), 397–406.

Gustafson, J. (2007). Czym jest społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu. In J. Witecka (Ed.), *Zarządzanie Firmą* (Vol. 1). Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Hahn, T., Sharma, G., & Glavas, A. (2023). Employee-CSR tensions: Drivers of employee (dis)engagement with contested CSR initiatives. *Journal of Management Studies*, *61*(4), 1364–1392. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12923

Hawken, P. (2007). Realizacja zrównoważonego rozwoju w zgodzie z naturą. In J. Witecka (Ed.), *Zarządzanie Firmą* (pp. 210–221) (Vol. 1). Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Hnatyszak, O. (2018). Uczelnia nowej generacji: Redefinicja instytucjonalna uczelni. *Nierówności Społeczne a Wzrost Gospodarczy*, *54*(2), 336–345.

Huang, C. C., Yen, S. W., Liu, C. Y., & Huang, P. C. (2014). The relationship among corporate social responsibility, service quality, corporate image and purchase intention. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, *6*(3), 68–84.

Hudson, T. D., & Brandenberger, J. (2023). College students' moral and prosocial responsibility: Associations with community engagement experiences. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *46*(1). https://doi: 10.1177/10538259221090599

Huerta, V. P. R., Armas, E. V., & Sotelo, L. Á. F. (2022). University social responsibility and quality sustainability at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, *Universidad y Sociedad*, *14*(5).

ISO 26 000. (2013). *Guidance on social responsibility*. Norma Międzynarodowa dotycząca społecznej odpowiedzialności. https://www.pkn.pl/informacje/2013/09/iso-26000

Jakubiak, M. (2017). Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni: Wybrane aspekty. *Marketing i Rynek*, *11*, 132–147.

Jastrzębska, E., Brdulak, H., Dąbrowski, T. J., & Legutko-Kobus, P. (2019). Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni: Perspektywa strategiczna. *Zarządzanie Publiczne*, *4*(36), 285–297. https://doi: 10.4467/20843968zp.19.020.11940

Khan, P. A., Johl, S. K., Akhtar, S., Asif, M., Salameh, A. A., & Kanesan, T. (2022). Open innovation of institutional investors and higher education system in creating open approach for SDG-4 quality education: A conceptual review. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, *8*(1). https://doi: 10.3390/joitmc8010049

Khoo, E. S., Chen, L. & Monroe, G. S. (2023). Shareholder election of CSR committee members and its effects on CSR performance. *Journal of Business Finance and Accounting*, *50*(3–4), 716–763. https://doi: 10.1111/jbfa.12643

Klein, L. L., Tonetto, M. S., Avila, L. V., & Moreira, R. (2021). Management of lean waste in a public higher education institution. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *286*. https://doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.125386

Kotowska-Wójcik, O., & Luty-Michalak, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność jako podstawa osiągania zrównoważonego rozwoju*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego.

Kowalska, K. (2009). Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni. *Zeszyty Naukowe Małopolskiej Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomicznej w Tarnowie*, *13*(2).

Krodkiewska-Skoczylas, E., & Żarlicka, G. (2015). Społeczna odpowiedzialność nie tylko biznesu. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, *378*, 277–295. https://doi:10.15611/pn.2015.378.22

Latif, K. F., Bunce, L., & Ahmad, M. S. (2021). How can universities improve student loyalty? The roles of university social responsibility, service quality, and 'customer' satisfaction and trust. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *35*(4), 815–829. https://doi: 10.1108/IJEM-11-2020-0524

Ławicka, M. (2016). Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni wyższej w Polsce. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Humanitas Zarządzanie*, *17*(3), 207–220. https://doi: 10.5604/18998658.1228272

Leoński, W. (2015). Koncepcja CSR w polskim sektorze małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw. *Studia Ekonomiczne*, *229*.

Luty-Michalak, M., & Kotowska-Wójcik O. (2016). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność jako podstawa osiągania zrównoważonego rozwoju* (e-book), Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW.

Lytovchenko, O. (2021). Social responsibility of universities as a tool for community development (analysis of domestic scientific publications). *International Scientific Journal of Universities and Leadership*, *12*, 263–272. https://doi: 10.31874/2520-6702-2021-12-2-263-272

Marek, S. (2011). Białasiewicz, M. (ed.). (2011). *Podstawy nauki o organizacji. Przedsiębiorstwo jako organizacja gospodarcza*. PWE.

Martínez-Valdivia, E., del C. Pegalajar-Palomino, M., & Burgos-García, A. (2020). Social responsibility and university teacher training: Keys to commitment and social justice into schools. *Sustainability*. *12*(15), 6179. https://doi: 10.3390/su12156179

Meftah Gerged, A., Kuzey, C., Uyar, A., & Karaman, A. S. (2023). Does investment stimulate or inhibit CSR transparency? The moderating role of CSR committee, board monitoring, and CEO duality. *Journal of Business Research*, *159*. https://doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113762

Merta-Staszczak, A., Serafin, K., & Staszczak, B. (2020). Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni na przykładzie Politechniki Wrocławskiej. *Annales. Etyka w Życiu Gospodarczym*, *23*(4), 91–107. https://doi: 10.18778/1899-2226.23.4.06

Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej [MEN]. (2023). *Katalog dobrych praktyk społecznej odpowiedzialności uczelni w obszarze ESG*. https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/katalog-dobrych-praktyk-spolecznej-odpowiedzialnosci-uczelni-w-obszarze-esg

Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego [MNiSW]. (2017). *Deklaracja Społecznej Odpowiedzialności Uczelni*. https://www.gov.pl/web/nauka/grupa-robocza-do-spraw-spolecznej-odpowiedzialnosci-uczelni

Nguyen Thi Khanh, C., & Nguyen, T. H. (2022). Creating customer loyalty through global engagement: The role of university social responsibility. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *36*(5), 712–728. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-07-2021-0273

PAN. (2024). *Kodeks etyki pracownika naukowego*. PAN. https://pan.pl/etyka-w-nauce/#kodeks

Park, Y. K. (2023). A study on college life experiences and support strategies of students participating in higher education programs for students with developmental disabilities. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, *12*(3), 147–158, https://doi: 10.5430/jct.v12n3p147

Pędziwiatr, E., Czaplicka-Kotas, A., & Kulczycka, J. (2018). Działania realizowane przez szkoły wyższe w ramach społecznej odpowiedzialności: Dobre praktyki. *Ekonomia Społeczna*, *1*, 45–56. https://doi: 10.15678/es.2018.1.04

Piasecka, A. (2015). Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni w kontekście wewnętrznego zapewnienia jakości. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, *378*, 309–319. https://doi: 10.15611/pn.2015.378.24

Piasecka, A., Ludwiczak, A., & Tutko, M. (2021). Projakościowe koncepcje zarządzania w szkołach wyższych. TQM. *Lean Management, Kaizen*. Instytut Spraw Publicznych Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

Pisz, Z. (2009). Odpowiedzialność społeczna w działalności edukacyjnej. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, *42*, 61–71.

Płoszajski, P. (2017). *Czy społeczna odpowiedzialność firmy wspomaga jej innowacyjność?* (e-book). Szkoła Główna Handlowa.

Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. R. (2007). Strategia a społeczeństwo: Społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu – pożyteczna metoda czy nowy element strategii konkurencyjnej. *Harvard Business Review Polska*.

Reichel, J., Rudnicka, A., & Socha, B. (2023). Perspectives of the academic employees on university social responsibility: A survey study. *Social Responsibility Journal*, *19*(3), 263–275. https://doi: 10.1108/SRJ-08-2021-0336

Riad Shams, S. M., & Belyaeva, Z. (2019). Quality assurance driving factors as antecedents of knowledge management: A stakeholder-focussed perspective in higher education. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, *10*(2), 423–436. https://doi: 10.1007/s13132-017-0472-2

Rybak, M. (2021). *Etyka menedżera: Społeczna odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorstwa*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Santos, G., Marques, C. S., Justino, E., & Mendes, L. (2020). Understanding social responsibility's influence on service quality and student satisfaction in higher education. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *256*. https://doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.120597

Schaefer, S. D., Terlutter, R., & Diehl, S. (2019). Talking about CSR matters: Employees' perception of and reaction to their company's CSR communication in four different CSR domains. *International Journal of Advertising*, *39*(2), 191–212. https://doi: 10.1080/02650487.2019.1593736

Tutko, M. (2016). Wybrane aspekty jakości zarządzania w szkolnictwie wyższym. In T. Wawak (Ed.), *Zarządzanie w szkołach wyższych i innowacje w gospodarce*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

Vallaeys, F., & Álvarez-Rodríguez, J. (2022). The problem of the university's social responsibility. *Teoria de la Educacion*, *34*(2). https://doi: 10.14201/teri.28599

Vásquez-Torres, M. C., & Tavizón-Salazar, A. (2021). A management model of university social responsibility from the stakeholders perspective. *Polish Journal of Management*, *24*(1), 441–456. https://doi.org/10.17512/pjms.2021.24.1.26

Waliszewski, K. (2018). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność instytucji finansowych: Od teorii do praktyki*. CeDeWu.

Wirba, A. V. (2023). Corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of government in promoting CSR. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, *15*, 7428–7454. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-023-01185-0

Wiśniewska, M., & Grudowski, P. (2016). High-quality academic teachers in business school: The case of The University of Gdańsk, Poland. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, *27*(10). https://doi: 10.1080/14783363.2015.1064766

Wolak-Tuzimek, A. (2019). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorstwa a konkurencyjność przedsiębiorstw*. CeDeWu.

Yeh, S. T., Arthaud-Day, M. & Turvey-Welch, M. (2021). Propagation of lean thinking in academic libraries. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *47*(3). https://doi: 10.1016/j.acalib.2021.102357

Żemigała, M. (2022). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność nauki. Zarządzanie – badania – wpływ społeczny*. Sekcja Wydawnicza Wydziału Zarządzania Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

Zinczuk, B., Kasprzak-Czelej, A., & Bolibok, P. (2020). *Społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu w perspektywie zmian i wyzwań współczesnej gospodarki*. Wydawnictwo UMCS.

About the Author

Beata Detyna*, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences
ul. Zamkowa 4, 58-300 Wałbrzych, Poland
e-mail: bdetyna@ans.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-4854-8433
* Corresponding author.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences grant no. 22/GW/2024, "Społeczna odpowiedzialność w łańcuchu wartości uczelni / Social responsibility in the university value chain" (awarded for 2024–2026).

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright and License

Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland

Ministry of Education and Science
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.

Social Entrepreneurship Review
2024, Vol. 2

10.15678/SER.2024.2.06

Self-Assessment of Entrepreneurial Potential and Actual Intentions to Start a Business Depending on the Chosen Field and Language of Study

Jakub Boratyn, Michalina Mróz

Abstract: **Background:** This article aligns with contemporary approaches to defining entrepreneurship by examining not only its core essence but also the entrepreneurial potential, personality traits, and behavioral dynamics necessary to identify an individual as entrepreneurial.

Research objectives: By examining the entrepreneurial landscape among students at the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszow (UITM), the article explores the connections between academic specialization, field of study, and entrepreneurial aspirations, focusing on both the potential and intention to initiate business ventures. Based on data from a survey of 1,526 students, representing 29.8% of UITM's total student population, the study offers a representative and comparable research sample encompassing various educational paths in both Polish and English programs.

Results: The research findings reveal how students' entrepreneurial potential is distributed across various academic disciplines, emphasizing the correlations between their chosen field of study and entrepreneurial potential. Additionally, the article examines the relationships between the urge to start a business and factors such as employment status, language of study, and field of study. It also summarizes the impact of academic programs in specific specializations, as well as support mechanisms, on entrepreneurship development.

Conclusions: The study validates two research hypotheses: first, that the chosen field of study affects entrepreneurial potential and the likelihood of starting a business; and second, that the language of study influences the intention to launch one's own business in the near future.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial potential of students, starting a business, entrepreneurial behavior, entrepreneurial person

JEL Codes: L26, J16

Suggested citation:
Boratyn, J., & Mróz, M. (2024). Self-assessment of entrepreneurial potential and actual intentions to start a business Depending on the chosen field and language of study. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, *2*, 92–106. https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2024.2.06

1. Introduction

The post-pandemic economic landscape, coupled with evolving trends in the job market and significant geopolitical transformations, has necessitated the development of a highly adaptive and flexible entrepreneurial perspective on employment. In this context, young individuals, empowered by access to global information and social media platforms, increasingly recognize the importance of self-reliance. They are more inclined to take control of their careers, pursue self-employment, and establish their own businesses to realize their potential.

The structure of this paper is organized as follows: it begins with a review of the existing literature. This is followed by a presentation of the data collected for the empirical analysis, conducted by the research team from the Department of Entrepreneurship at the University of Information Technology and Management (UITM) in Rzeszow, Poland. The subsequent section outlines the methodologies applied in the research and the derived results. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and a summary.

2. Literature Review

Entrepreneurship, as a concept, is rich in its multidimensional nature and plays a crucial role in various domains. It has become a focal point of scientific research, attracting scholars from diverse fields such as management, economics, sociology, and psychology. A review of the literature suggests that researchers aim to explore its characteristics, interdisciplinary nature, multifaceted applications, and definitions, striving to understand the complexity of the concept and its wide range of applications (Łuczka & Rembiasz, 2016; Rembiasz, 2017).

The particularly strong impact of entrepreneurship is evident in shaping both economic and social dimensions. From the perspective of economic sciences, its influence extends far beyond conventional economic indicators, acting as a catalyst for innovation, economic growth, and employment potential. Simultaneously, in the realm of social sciences, there is a marked interest in examining human traits, particularly soft skills and innate abilities, that contribute to fostering entrepreneurial attitudes (Wyrwa & Sołtysiak, 2016). According to Bławat (2003), this perspective, viewed through a humanistic and personalistic lens, defines an entrepreneurial individual in terms of specific characteristics and relatively stable behavioral traits.

Another perspective on defining entrepreneurship is offered by Mrozowicz (2008), who views it as an inseparable, creative, and essential aspect of an individual's personality and character. Mrozowicz considers entrepreneurship to be a set of personal values, primarily evident in socially or professionally shaped roles. Additionally, the researcher highlights a strong and stable connection between behaviors influenced by innate personality traits and those shaped through social and situational factors.

Following the humanistic perspective on entrepreneurship, it is important to highlight a fundamental view that frames it as the ability to navigate effectively through various life situations. This perspective portrays entrepreneurship as a skill that individuals can develop and refine through a dynamic process of learning and experiential growth (Piecuch, 2010).

Another perspective on defining entrepreneurship is the classical approach of Drucker (1992), who views entrepreneurship as a unique approach to management. Drucker emphasizes the role of the entrepreneur, highlighting traits such as innovation and creativity that drive the introduction of new ideas while optimizing the use of available resources and laying the foundation for future business growth. In this view, the entrepreneur is depicted as someone who actively seeks change, responds proactively, and capitalizes on emerging opportunities. Building on the humanistic perspective of entrepreneurship and innovation, Gąsiorowska-Mącznik (2017) argues that the essence of entrepreneurship lies in individuals' abilities and skills to introduce market innovations. This classical perspective underscores the intrinsic relationship between innovation and entrepreneurship.

Building on the values mentioned above, Timmons (1990) offers valuable insights into this perspective. The author defines entrepreneurship as the process of creating or recognizing opportunities and utilizing them regardless of available resources. He emphasizes that entrepreneurial acts are creative undertakings where entrepreneurs dedicate energy to initiating and building organizations beyond ordinary description and analysis.

Some authors, such as Simons (1999), directly link entrepreneurship and creative novelty in the market with the inherent risks of conducting economic activities. Simons characterizes entrepreneurship as a unique venture defined by risk-taking. Entrepreneurs are often identified as individuals willing to embrace risk in their economic pursuits. However, the organizational dimension of entrepreneurship focuses on the processes of identifying and exploiting opportunities, where the individual's personality traits and abilities play a crucial role (Baran & Bąk, 2016).

Continuing to view entrepreneurship as a system of human characteristics, behaviors, and actions, Guliński and Zasiadły (2005) provide an intriguing description. They define commonly understood entrepreneurship as the ability to undertake various initiatives – a trait of energetic and active individuals that manifests at different stages of life. This perspective aligns with psychology, which classifies entrepreneurship as a psychological trait that conditions an individual's ability to succeed as an entrepreneur. Consequently, an entrepreneurial person can be described as someone who naturally excels in organizing and subsequently managing various enterprises.

Entrepreneurship arises from personalized, individual values, including talents, creativity, dynamism, skills, readiness to take risks, and external stimuli influencing the individual, such as economic traditions, resource availability, societal reactions to business initiatives, and socio-economic policies (Dąbrowska & Skowron, 2015; Wach, 2015; Skica, Mikuš, & Holienka, 2022).

In summary, entrepreneurship represents a dynamic and ever-evolving field of study that transcends disciplinary boundaries. Its multidimensional nature – encompassing economic, human, and organizational aspects – enhances its status as a complex and dynamic phenomenon. This multidimensionality underscores its fundamental strength and value as a driver of socio-economic progress (Cieślik, 2014). However, it is equally important to emphasize another critical dimension of entrepreneurship: the humanistic perspective, which centers on the individual, their potential, behaviors, and actions. This raises a compelling question: Who is an entrepreneurial person? How can we describe individuals characterized as entrepreneurial in the literature? First, every attempt to define an entrepreneurial individual highlights a set of traits that facilitate effective engagement in entrepreneurial activities. Below are the key traits identified in the literature review.

- Innovation and Creativity: These traits are understood as the ability to generate innovative ideas and adopt a creative approach to problem-solving (Śledzik, 2013; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; West & Farr, 1989).
- Action and Energy: These qualities are characterized by a propensity to take action, an energetic approach to challenges, and an active stance in achieving goals (Huczek, 2018; Gartner, 1988; Frese & Gielnik, 2014).
- Risk Resilience: This trait is described in the literature primarily as a willingness to take risks and the ability to manage uncertainty. It is most commonly discussed in the context of running a business (Simons, 1999; Miller & Friesen, 1982; Knight, 1921; Ferreira, Coelho, & Moutinho, 2020).

- Independence and Decision-Making: These qualities are perceived in the literature as the ability to make decisions independently and to direct actions and initiatives autonomously. Furthermore, they support the process of independently creating or recognizing opportunities and capitalizing on them (Sarasvathy, 2001; Busenitz & Barney, 1997; Shepherd, Williams, & Patzelt, 2015).
- Communication and Relationships: The key aspects of these traits include the ability to develop effective social networks and business relationships. Central to this is the capacity to navigate the socio-economic environment where specific actions are undertaken, particularly in the context of social networks (Wach, 2015; Podolny, 1993; Phelps, Heidl, & Wadhwa, 2012).
- Strategic Thinking and Goal Setting: These traits are described in the literature as the ability to establish a long-term vision for actions and initiatives, particularly in economic contexts. This aptitude enables individuals to set clear business goals, both in the short and long term (Collins & Porras, 1996; Krueger, 2003; Kóska-Wolny, 2023).

The humanistic perspective and the characteristics of an entrepreneurial individual should be complemented by the concept of entrepreneurial potential. This potential is considered the cornerstone of successful business ventures, enhancing the ability to leverage one's attributes and skills in entrepreneurial activities. High entrepreneurial potential is particularly crucial for identifying and capitalizing on profitable business opportunities. The synergy between personal attributes and entrepreneurial potential is vital for achieving business success (Kuckertz et al., 2020; Obschonka et al., 2020; Obschonka & Stuetzer, 2017). According to Shepherd and Patzelt, key features of this approach include creativity, perseverance, adaptability, and a willingness to take risks. These traits form the foundation of resilience and adaptability, which are especially important for navigating the complexities and uncertainties inherent in the business environment (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018). This version ensures smoother transitions, logical structuring, and a professional tone while retaining the original meaning and references.

Beyond individual traits, the socio-economic aspect plays a crucial role in the entrepreneurial approach. The environment significantly influences the development of entrepreneurial potential, with supportive policies, access to capital, and a favorable business climate serving as essential pillars that foster and amplify entrepreneurial aspirations (Binder & Coad, 2020; Stam & Spiegel, 2016; Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Stephan, 2016). The combination of individual characteristics and external factors, particularly the interaction between them, is a key determinant of entrepreneurial success, as emphasized by Krueger and Brazeal (2018). Moreover, self-assessment of one's entrepreneurial abilities emerges as a critical factor influencing the likelihood of establishing a business. Research indicates that a positive self-assessment enhances willingness to take risks and engage in entrepreneurial activities (Krueger & Brazeal, 2018; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Ferreira et al., 2020).

In conclusion, it is worth noting that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial potential arise from the interaction between individual traits and external factors. Exceptional individuals, equipped with the specific skill sets outlined earlier, demonstrate the ability to adapt to changing environments and socio-economic conditions. This adaptability enables them to effectively transform their potential into success, defined by the establishment of a thriving business.

3. Research Method and Data

The survey was conducted among 1,526 UITM students between January 17 and March 21, 2023, representing approximately 29.8% of UITM's student population. Each field of study was represented by at least 20% of the students, ensuring representativeness and enabling comparisons across disciplines.

The questionnaire was developed in collaboration with experts in economics, sociology, and psychology. The survey consisted of three parts. The first part included 28 questions grounded in existing literature and validated by sociologists, aimed at examining the entrepreneurial potential of students. The second part, comprising 8 questions, focused on students' evaluations of UITM's entrepreneurial support offerings and their needs in this regard. The third part gathered demographic data such as gender, age, professional status, study mode, specialization, country of origin, and level and field of study.

This article analyzes selected aspects of the survey to maintain a clear narrative and focus on topics introduced earlier. A 5-point Likert scale was employed, with 5 indicating "Definitely agree" and 1 "Definitely disagree," allowing students to express their opinions directly and effectively.

The authors conducted Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA tests to graphically represent the research results using box plots. Additionally, C-Pearson and V-Cramer tests were employed to measure the co-occurrence of various studied variables. All collected results were statistically significant, meeting the threshold of $p < 0.05$.

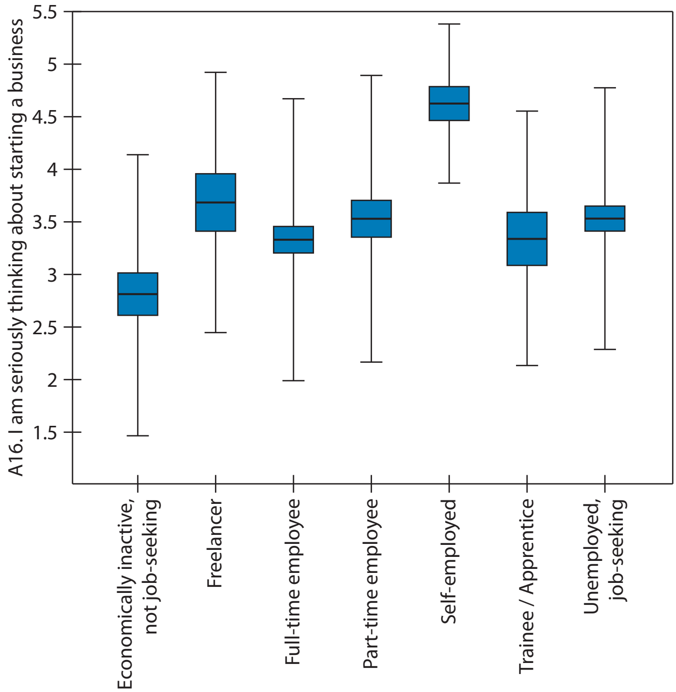
The analysis determined that entrepreneurial potential is directly correlated with self-assessment regarding the urge to start a business. To explore this relationship, the authors included the question, "I am seriously thinking about starting a business," alongside other metric-based questions in their evaluation.

4. Results and Discussion

Figure 1 indicates that the highest willingness to start an enterprise is observed among individuals who are self-employed or shareholders in a company, while the lowest is found among those who are economically inactive and not seeking employment.

Among other groups of respondents, most responses are relatively similar. Notably, freelancers exhibit a willingness to start a business nearly identical to that of full-time employees, despite their unique approach to work that blends elements of full-time employment with entrepreneurial activities (Kazi et al., 2014). This similarity supports the longstanding concept of corporate entrepreneurship discussed in the literature (Bouchard & Fayolle, 2017; Kuratko, 2012; Cieślik, 2015).

The relationship between employment status and willingness to start a business was analyzed using the C-Pearson and V-Cramer tests (Figure 2, Table 1). The C-Pearson test confirmed a relationship between the two variables. However, the V-Cramer test suggests that additional determinants beyond employment status may influence the willingness to start a business. As highlighted in the literature, proactive behavior, irrespective of employment status, plays a crucial role in entrepreneurial potential (Delle & Monipaak, 2016). Nonetheless, unemployed individuals often have more compelling motivations to start their own business (Startiene & Remeikiene, 2009).



Note. P-value < 0.000001

Figure 1. ANOVA Test Results in Response to the Question: "I am Seriously Thinking about Starting a Business" Based on Employment Status

Source: own elaboration.

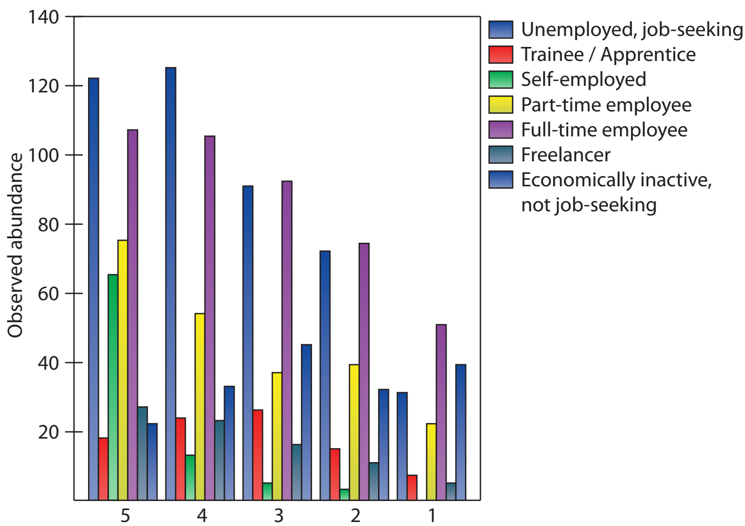


Figure 2. C-Pearson and V-Cramer Tests Results in Response to the Question: "I am Seriously Thinking about Starting a Business" Based on Responses on Employment Status

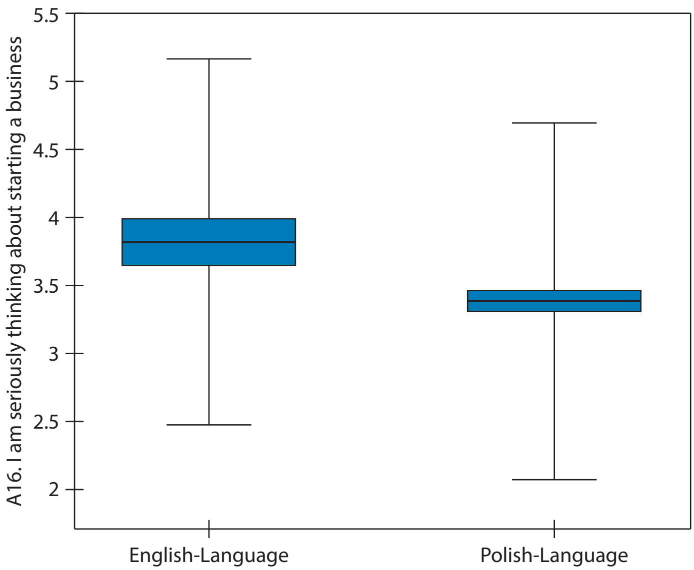
Source: own elaboration.

Table 1. Results of C-Pearson and V-Cramer Tests Presented in Figure 2

Indicators	Value
Pearsons-C	0.31
Pearsons-C (max)	0.89
Pearsons-C (adjusted)	0.35
Cramers-V	0.17
P-value	< 0.000001

Source: own elaboration.

The results in Figure 3 illustrate the relationship between the willingness to start a business and the language of study (English or Polish). Analysis of the data indicates that respondents from English-speaking study programs are significantly more likely to consider starting a business. This finding is visually represented in Figure 3.



Note. P-value < 0.000001

Figure 3. ANOVA Test Results in Response to the Question: "I am Seriously Thinking about Starting a Business" based on Track of Study

Source: own elaboration.

The results of Pearson's C-test indicate a relationship between the language of study and the willingness to start a business. However, the V-Cramer's test (Figure 4, Table 2) suggests that additional factors beyond the language of study influence entrepreneurial intentions.

Notably, most respondents in English-language programs are foreign students who come to Poland to pursue higher education. These students often face numerous challenges, including formal obstacles like obtaining a residence card and cultural adjustments, as studying in Poland represents their first experience in a European country for many, particularly those from

Africa and the Middle East. Overcoming such challenges builds their confidence and motivates them to take on further risks, such as starting a business.

This observation aligns with research by Palimąka and Rodzinka (2018) and Palimąka (2021), which highlights that starting a business is often perceived by students as a new challenge to conquer. Additionally, the necessity to take risks during the study process may contribute to the higher entrepreneurial potential observed among these students (Popescu et al., 2016).

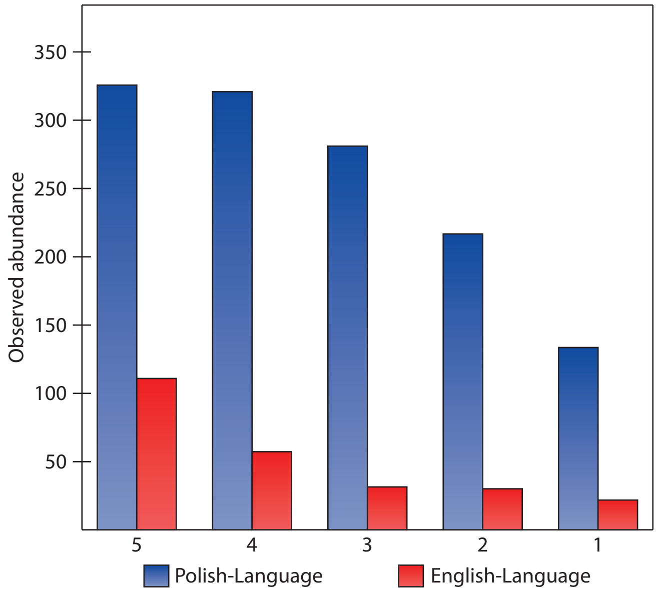


Figure 4. C-Pearson and V-Cramer Tests Results in Response to the Question: "I am seriously thinking about starting a business" Based on Responses on Track of Study

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2. Results of C-Pearson's and V-Cramer Tests Presented in Figure 4

Indicators	Value
Pearsons-C	0.16
Pearsons-C (max)	0.71
Pearsons-C (adjusted)	0.23
Cramers-V	0.16
P-value	< 0.000001

Source: own elaboration.

Analyzing the results shown in Figure 5, it can be concluded that the fields of study where students most frequently consider starting a business are management, cosmetology, nursing, and cybersecurity. For management students, this inclination may be influenced by their academic background, as their curriculum often includes subjects related to entrepreneurship and running a business. The high ranking of cosmetology is also unsurprising, as graduates in this field commonly establish their own service-based businesses, which is a popular career choice.

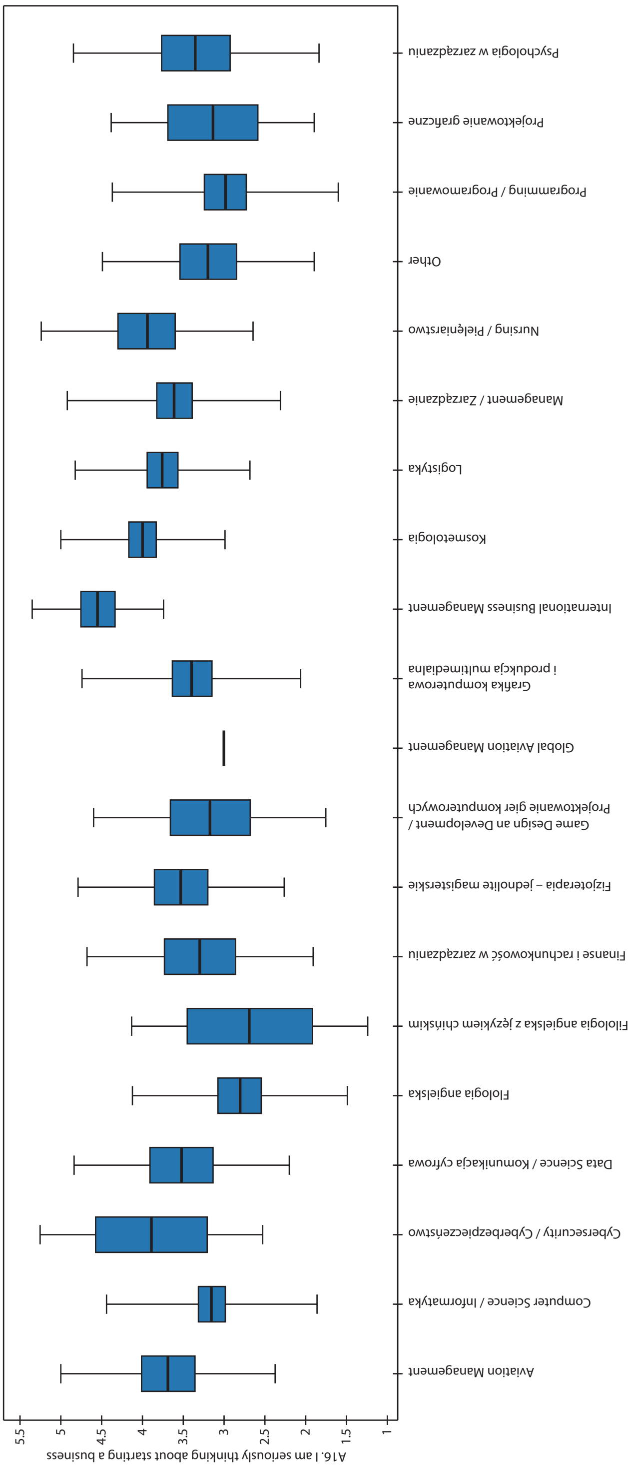


Figure 5. ANOVA Test Results in Response to the Question: "I am seriously thinking about starting a business" Based on Field of Study

Note. P-value < 0.000001

Source: own elaboration.

The presence of nursing among the top results can be attributed to the legal framework allowing nurses to establish partnerships. Nursing is classified as a „free profession" under Article 88 of the Code of Commercial Law, enabling graduates to pursue entrepreneurial ventures within their field. Cybersecurity students also demonstrate a strong interest in starting a business. This is likely due to the growing popularity of the field (Crumpler & Lewis, 2019) and the high demand for skilled professionals. This demand allows cybersecurity graduates to explore opportunities in both full-time employment and entrepreneurial or freelance ventures.

The results presented in Table 3 and Table 4 confirm a correlation between fields of study and the desire to start a business. The C-Pearson test indicates a strong relationship between these variables, supporting the findings of Teixeira and Forte (2017). Their research similarly demonstrated that participation in certain fields of study, particularly those with a predisposition toward entrepreneurship or freelancing, significantly influences the willingness to start a business.

Table 3. Results of C-Pearson's and V-Cramer Tests Presented in Figure 6

Indicators	Value
Pearsons-C	0.35
Pearsons-C (max)	0.89
Pearsons-C (adjusted)	0.40
Cramers-V	0.19
P-value	< 0.000001

Source: own elaboration.

Table 4 includes responses from students categorized by their fields of study. The fields demonstrating the highest entrepreneurial potential are Nursing (51%), International Business Management (49%), Finance and Accounting in Management (34%), and Graphic Design (27%).

Table 4. Cross Table of Responses to the Question: "I Seriously Think About Starting My Own Business" by Field of Study (%)

	Definitely agree	Definitely disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather agree	Rather disagree
Aviation management	30	5	14	39	13
Computer science	14	5	30	40	10
Cybersecurity	17	6	33	39	6
Data science	15	2	22	52	9
English philology	6	2	35	40	16
English philology with Chinese language	0	13	44	38	6
Finance and accounting in management	34	2	34	22	7
Physiotherapy	8	3	44	34	10
Game design and development	6	0	46	29	20
Computer graphics and multimedia production	7	7	35	40	10
International business management	49	4	7	37	4

	Definitely agree	Definitely disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather agree	Rather disagree
Cosmetology	14	4	27	46	9
Logistics	24	2	25	41	8
Management	24	7	18	41	11
Nursing	51	7	7	29	5
Other	21	5	28	42	4
Programming	11	3	35	27	23
Graphic design	27	9	23	14	27
Psychology in management	15	0	27	46	12

Source: own elaboration.

5. Conclusions

Among the theoretical results, several findings stand out:

- Low correlation between field of study and willingness to start a business: This suggests that other factors, such as personal traits linked to entrepreneurial potential, play a significant role. For instance, creativity – a key entrepreneurial trait – is naturally associated with computer graphics students, who demonstrate one of the highest indicators of entrepreneurial potential (Mróz & Boratyn, 2023).
- Higher willingness among English-speaking students: English-speaking students exhibit a significantly greater willingness to start a business compared to their Polish-speaking counterparts. This difference can be attributed to entrepreneurial traits such as a higher risk-taking propensity and persistence in achieving goals. For these students, starting their own business often aligns with their earlier decisions and represents another barrier to overcome in their pursuit of professional fulfillment.

The practical outcome of the study, which the authors emphasize, highlights the significant entrepreneurial potential among UITM students. Importantly, the university's business support offerings should cater not only to students in Polish-language programs but also equally to those in English-language programs. Furthermore, the support system should be tailored to address the diverse needs of students across different study paths, ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness in fostering entrepreneurial success.

Our findings reveal that the fields with the highest concentration of students possessing business-oriented backgrounds and significant entrepreneurial potential are International Business Management, Management, and IT. This trend likely stems from the core curricula of these programs. For instance, International Business Management and Management include subjects directly related to entrepreneurship, providing students with foundational knowledge and skills for running their own businesses. Moreover, these students benefit from additional support, such as specialized training and workshops, beyond basic activities related to business establishment. IT students, on the other hand, are drawn to entrepreneurship due to the streamlined process of setting up businesses in this field and the availability of relatively simple taxation systems (Mencel, 2021).

Conversely, the fields with the lowest entrepreneurial potential are Philology, English Philology with Chinese, and Computer Game Design. This may be attributed to the nature of future professions in these fields, which often do not demand entrepreneurial traits like risk management or innovation. For example, a career in translation, typical for English Philology graduates, does not inherently require these predispositions.

A different perspective on entrepreneurship focuses on the intention to start a business in the near future. Fields characterized by high entrepreneurial intent include Nursing, Computer Science, Computer Graphics, and Multimedia Production. For nursing students, this intent is linked to the legal framework that classifies nursing as a freelance profession, enabling the establishment of partnerships. In fields such as Computer Science, Computer Graphics, and Multimedia Production, the entrepreneurial inclination is likely due to the prevalence of freelance work in these industries (Skrzek-Lubasińska & Gródek-Szostak, 2019).

The study is based solely on the survey conducted at UITM, a private university, and therefore cannot be generalized to the entire population of students in Poland. Factors such as the specific context of a private university limit the scope of the findings. In the next stages of research, the authors intend to expand the study by administering the survey at a national and even international level, enabling comparisons across various student groups.

References

Baran, G., & Bąk, J. (2016). Przedsiębiorczość jako proces stawania się. *International Entrepreneurship Review*, *2*(1), 83–98.

Binder, J., & Coad, A. (2020). The evolution of entrepreneurial potential. *Small Business Economics*, *55*(2), 243–262.

Bławat, F. (2003). *Przedsiębiorca w teorii przedsiębiorczości i praktyce małych firm*, Seria Monografie, 106. Gdańskie Towarzystwo Naukowe.

Bouchard, V., & Fayolle, A. (2017). *Corporate entrepreneurship*. Routledge.

Busenitz, L. W., & Barney, J. B. (1997). Differences between entrepreneurs and managers in large organizations: Biases and heuristics in strategic decision-making. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *12*(1), 9–30.

Cieślik, J. (2014). *Przedsiębiorczość, polityka, rozwój*. Wydawnictwo Akademickie Sedno.

Cieślik, J. (2015). Miejsce przedsiębiorczości w strukturze nauk o zarządzaniu. *Kwartalnik Nauk o Przedsiębiorstwie*, *35*(2), 59–69.

Collins, J. C., & Porras, J. I. (1996). Building your company's vision. *Harvard Business Review*, *74*(5), 65–77.

Crumpler, W., & Lewis, J. A. (2019). The cybersecurity workforce gap (p. 10). Washington, DC, USA: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Drucker, P. (1992). *Innowacja i przedsiębiorczość: Praktyka i zasady*. PWE.

Dąbrowska, K., & Skowron, M. (2015). *Porównanie postaw przedsiębiorczych studentów studiów ekonomicznych, społecznych i humanistycznych*.

Delle, E., & Amadu, I. M. (2016). Proactive personality and entrepreneurial intention: employment status and student level as moderators. *Journal of Advance Management and Accounting Research*, *3*(7), 69–81.

Estrin, S., Mickiewicz, T., & Stephan, U. (2016). Human capital in social and commercial entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *31*(4), 449–467.

Ferreira, J., Coelho, A., & Moutinho, L. (2020). Dynamic capabilities, creativity and innovation capability and their impact on competitive advantage and firm performance: The moderating role of entrepreneurial orientation. *Technovation*, 92, 102061.

Ferreira, J. J. M., Fernandes, C. I., Kraus, S., & O'Sullivan, D. (2020). Entrepreneurship research: Mapping intellectual structures and research trends. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, *16*(4), 1241–1282.

Frese, M., & Gielnik, M. M. (2014). The psychology of entrepreneurship. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, 413–438.

Gartner, W. B. (1988). "Who is an entrepreneur?" is the wrong question. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *12*(4), 47–68.

Gąsiorowska-Mącznik, E. (2017). Teoretyczne podstawy przedsiębiorczości. *Nierówności Społeczne A Wzrost Gospodarczy*, 52, 392–403.

Guliński, J., & Zasiadły, P. (2005). *Innowacyjna przedsiębiorczość akademicka–światowe doświadczenia*. PARP.

Huczek, T. (2018). *Przedsiębiorczość: Podstawy teoretyczne*. Wydawnictwo C.H. Beck.

Kazi, A. G., Yusoff, R. M., Khan, A., & Kazi, S. (2014). The freelancer: A conceptual review. *Sains Humanika*, 2(3), 1–7.

Knight, F. H. (1921). Risk, uncertainty and profit. *Houghton Mifflin Company.*

Krueger Jr, N. F. (2003). The cognitive psychology of entrepreneurship. In *Handbook of entrepreneurship research: An interdisciplinary survey and introduction* (pp. 105–140). Springer US.

Krueger, N. F., & Brazeal, D. V. (2018). Entrepreneurial potential and potential entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *42*(6), 947–72.

Kóska-Wolny, M. (2023). Pomiar przedsiębiorczości organizacyjnej w sektorze publicznym. *Polish Journal of Materials and Environmental Engineering*, 6.

Kuckertz, A., Brändle, L., Gaudig, A., Hinderer, S., Morales Reyes, C. A., Prochotta, A., … & Berger, E. S. (2020). Startups in times of crisis: A rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, 13, e00169.

Kuratko, D. F. (2012). Corporate entrepreneurship. In *Handbook on organisational entrepreneurship* (pp. 226–241). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Łuczka, T., & Rembiasz, M. (2016). Badanie postaw przedsiębiorczych studentów – wybrane aspekty teoretyczne i empiryczne. *Horyzonty Wychowania*, *15*(34), 27–47.

Mencel, A. (2021). *Determinanty wyboru formy opodatkowania jednoosobowej działalności gospodarczej: Aktualne problemy badawcze*, 78–85, Wydawnictwo Naukowe FNCE.

Miller, D., & Friesen, P. H. (1982). Innovation in conservative and entrepreneurial firms: Two models of strategic momentum. *Strategic Management Journal*, *3*(1), 1–25.

Mrozowicz, K. (2008). Osobowościowa geneza i determinacja kształtowania się zachowań przedsiębiorczych. *Wpływ Zarządzania Procesowego Na Jakość i Innowacyjność Przedsiębiorstwa*, 2, 557–571.

Mróz, M., & Boratyn, J. (2023). Student self-assessment of entrepreneurial potential and the decision to start a business. *Społeczeństwo i Polityka*, *3*(76), 15–33.

Palimąka, K. (2021). Financial and non-financial aspects of entrepreneurship: The Polish perspective. *Financial Internet Quarterly*, *17*(4), 105–119.

Palimąka, K., & Rodzinka, J. (2018). Students' attitudes towards starting a business, on the example of students at the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów (Poland). *Financial Internet Quarterly*, *14*(4), 90–103.

Phelps, C., Heidl, R., & Wadhwa, A. (2012). Knowledge, networks, and knowledge networks: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, *38*(4), 1115–1166.

Piecuch, T. (2010). *Przedsiębiorczość: Podstawy teoretyczne*. Wydawnictwo C.H. Beck.

Podolny, J. M. (1993). A status-based model of market competition. *American Journal of Sociology*, *98*(4), 829–872.

Popescu, C. C., Bostan, I., Robu, I. B., Maxim, A., & Diaconu, L. (2016). An analysis of the determinants of entrepreneurial intentions among students: A Romanian case study. *Sustainability*, *8*(8), 771.

Rembiasz, M. (2017). Student entrepreneurship–research on development. In *MATEC Web of Conferences*. Vol. 121 (p. 12015). EDP Sciences.

Sarasvathy, S. D. (2001). Causation and effectuation: Toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency. *Academy of Management Review*, *26*(2), 243–263.

Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review*, *25*(1), 217–226.

Shepherd, D. A., Williams, T. A., & Patzelt, H. (2015). Thinking about entrepreneurial decision making: Review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, *41*(1), 11–46.

Shaver, K. G., & Scott, L. R. (1991). Person, process, choice: The psychology of new venture creation. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *16*(2), 23–45.

Shepherd, D. A., & Patzelt, H. (2018). Entrepreneurship and strategy in the informal economy. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, *12*(1), 3–20.

Simons Robert. 1999. "How Risky is Your Company?" *Harvard Business Review*, *3*(85).

Skica, T., Mikuš, J., & Holienka, M. (2022). Financial literacy and new business entry. *Financial Internet Quarterly*, *18*(2), 42–66.

Skrzek-Lubasińska, M., & Gródek-Szostak, Z. (2019). *Różne oblicza samozatrudnienia*. Oficyna Wydawnica SGH-Szkoła Główna Handlowa.

Stam, E., & Spigel, B. (2016). Entrepreneurial ecosystems. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

Śledzik, K. (2013). Schumpeter's view on innovation and entrepreneurship. *Management Trends in Theory and Practice*. S. Hittmar (ed.), Faculty of Management Science and Informatics, University of Zilina & Institute of Management by University of Zilina.

Startiene, G., & Remeikiene, R. (2009). The influence of demographical factors on the interaction between entrepreneurship and unemployment. *Engineering Economics*, *64*(4).

Obschonka, M., Stuetzer, M., Audretsch, D. B., Rentfrow, P. J., Potter, J., & Gosling, S. D. (2020). Macrogenetic link between personality and entrepreneurship: The role of national culture. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *35*(1), 105937.

Teixeira, A. A., & Forte, R. P. (2017). Prior education and entrepreneurial intentions: The differential impact of a wide range of fields of study. *Review of Managerial Science*, *11*(2), 353–394.

Timmons, J. (1999). *New venture creation: Entrepreneurship for the 21st century*. 5th Edition: Irwin/McGraw-Hill.

Ustawa z 15.09.2000 r. Kodeks Spółek Handlowych. Dz.U.2024.0.18.

Wach, K. (2015). Przedsiębiorczość jako czynnik rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego: przegląd literatury. *Przedsiębiorczość–Edukacja*, 11, 26–28.

West, M. A., & Farr, J. L. (1989). *Innovation and creativity at work: Psychological and organizational strategies*. Wiley.

Wiklund, J., & Shepherd, D. (2003). Aspiring for and achieving growth: The moderating role of resources and opportunities. *Journal of Management Studies*, *40*(8), 1919–1941.

Wyrwa, D., & Sołtysiak, M. (2016). Przedsiębiorczość akademicka–postawy przedsiębiorcze studentów. Zeszyty Naukowe PWSZ w Płocku. *Nauki Ekonomiczne*, 2, 259–270.

About the Authors

Jakub Boratyn*, BA
Department of Entrepreneurship
University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów
ul. Sucharskiego 2, 35-225 Rzeszów, Poland
e-mail: jboratyn@wsiz.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-6531-7629
* Corresponding author.

Michalina Mróz, MSc.
Department of Entrepreneurship
University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów
ul. Sucharskiego 2, 35-225 Rzeszów, Poland e-mail: mmroz@wsiz.edu.pl

Authors’ Contributions

J.B., M.M.: conceptualization, J.B., M.M.: writing, original draft preparation, J.B., M.M.: writing, review and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

The authors would like to thank Dr. Habil. Tomasz Skica, prof. WSIiZ and Dr. Łukasz Cywiński for the entire support with conceptualization and statistical analysis

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland

Ministry of Education and Science
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.

Social Entrepreneurship Review
2024, Vol. 2

OPEN ACCESS

10.15678/SER.2024.2.07

American Higher Education at the Crossroads: Between Liberal Arts and Entrepreneurial Education

Thomas Gold

Abstract: Background: American higher education faces declining public trust, rising costs, and growing skepticism about its relevance to the job market. As artificial intelligence and globalization reshape societal and economic landscapes, universities must prepare students for complex, real-world challenges.

Research objectives: Text This study investigates the role of entrepreneurial experiential learning in addressing these challenges by fostering critical skills, enhancing engagement, and cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets.

Research design and methods: Using a practitioner self-study approach, the research analyzes two case studies—Education Entrepreneurship and Education Consulting courses at a large private university. Data sources include instructor observations, student feedback surveys, and reflective memos analyzed through thematic analysis.

Results: The findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial experiential learning enhances students' problem-solving, collaboration, and social impact assessment skills while preparing them for leadership in the social economy.

Conclusions: Entrepreneurial experiential learning bridges theory and practice, equipping students with essential skills for navigating societal challenges and driving reform in higher education. By addressing the skills gap and prioritizing human-centered problem-solving, this model contributes to the ongoing evolution of universities as catalysts for social impact.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education, experiential learning, higher education reform, social economy, career readiness, project-based learning

JEL Codes: I23, L26, J24

Suggested citation:

Gold, T. (2024). American higher education at the crossroads: Between liberal arts and entrepreneurial education. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, *2*, 107–124. https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2024.2.07

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, higher education in the United States stands at a crossroads. Confidence in universities has sharply declined, driven by rising tuition costs and the perception that degrees no longer guarantee value in the job market. Enrollment rates continue to drop as public trust erodes, and universities face growing pressure to prove their relevance in preparing students for an increasingly dynamic and uncertain world. Employers, meanwhile, have voiced concerns that graduates often lack the critical skills needed for the modern workforce, such as teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability.

At the same time, global challenges such as climate change, global migrations, income inequality, and workforce disruption demand innovative and socially conscious leaders. In this context, higher education must ask not only how to prepare students for individual success but also how to equip them to address these collective challenges. The traditional liberal arts approach, while still relevant, has struggled to adapt to these shifting priorities. Students and employers alike are seeking more interdisciplinary, hands-on learning experiences that bridge academic theory with practical application.

Entrepreneurial experiential learning has emerged as a promising model to address these challenges. Rooted in constructivist learning theories, this approach emphasizes problem-solving, innovation, and reflection through real-world projects. It allows students to engage deeply with societal issues while developing critical skills like creativity, collaboration, and adaptability. More importantly, it fosters an entrepreneurial mindset focused not only on financial success but also on making meaningful contributions to the social economy.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What skills and competencies do students develop through entrepreneurial experiential learning in undergraduate education?
2. How do students apply these skills to address real-world problems in the social economy?
3. What are the broader implications of entrepreneurial experiential learning for higher education reform and workforce readiness?

To address these questions, this article examines two case studies: Education Entrepreneurship and Education Consulting, courses taught by the author at a private university. Both courses challenge students to identify and address real-world problems while developing actionable solutions. By focusing on applied learning and stakeholder engagement, these courses provide a model for how universities can respond to declining public trust and shifting educational priorities.

Through this analysis, the article argues that entrepreneurial experiential learning offers a pathway to bridge the growing divide between higher education and the workforce while preparing students to become leaders in the social economy. By equipping students with the tools to address complex societal challenges, universities can reclaim their relevance and contribute meaningfully to the communities they serve.

2. Methods

This article presents findings from a practitioner self-study (Samaras, 2010), where the author reflects on teaching practices and classroom observations to analyze the impact of entrepreneurial experiential learning in two undergraduate courses: Education Entrepreneurship and Education Consulting. This approach focuses on qualitative, classroom-based insights to identify patterns in student learning and engagement. Data were collected over eight semesters in the two courses.

Data Sources

Instructor Observations

a) The author engaged in ongoing observational practices throughout each semester to assess student engagement, collaboration, and skill development. While formal notes were not systematically recorded after each class, observations were informed by multiple interactions and reflective processes, including:

– Grading and Feedback: Detailed assessments of student assignments, project deliverables, and presentations provided opportunities to evaluate evidence of problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skills.
– Office Hours and Informal Discussions: Regular one-on-one and group interactions with students during office hours and class sessions offered deeper insights into their learning processes, challenges, and progress.
– Classroom Interactions: The author carefully monitored group dynamics, participation, and collaboration during class activities and discussions, drawing on these observations to tailor instruction and support.

b) These observations, while informal, were continually integrated into the instructional approach and guided by the author's reflections on teaching practices. This iterative process aligns with the principles of practitioner self-study, which emphasize reflective engagement with students as a means to understand and improve learning outcomes (Woods, 2021).

End-of-Course Student Feedback Surveys

a) At the conclusion of each semester, students completed anonymous feedback surveys provided by the university.
b) The surveys, administered as part of course evaluations, included multiple agreement scale questions about the quality of the course and teaching and two open-ended questions:
– "Is there anything else you would like to share about the course?"
– "Is there anything else you would like to share about the instructor?"
c) Surveys were collected primarily for teaching improvement purposes.

Student Reflection Memos (Education Consulting Course Only)

a) Students submitted reflection memos as part of their graded coursework.
b) The memo's prompts encouraged students to reflect critically on their learning, team dynamics, challenges encountered, and connections to real-world contexts.
c) This structured reflection process aligns with Kolb's experiential learning cycle, emphasizing the crucial "reflective observation" stage (Kolb, 1984). Memos prompt students to connect academic concepts with professional skills, bridging their learning with broader personal and career development goals (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Eyler, 2002).

Informal Feedback

Additional feedback was gathered through informal discussions during class and office hours. These conversations were not systematically recorded but contributed to the author's overall reflections.

Other factors

Sample Size and Demographics

a) The study involved around 172 undergraduate students across eight semesters:
– Education Entrepreneurship Course: 85 students.
– Education Consulting Course: 87 students.
b) Demographic insights were drawn from classroom observations and interactions, indicating roughly:
– 65% of international students (predominantly from Asia).
– 35% of domestic students from diverse socioeconomic, racial and ethnic backgrounds.
c) While no formal demographic survey was conducted, this diversity is notable for understanding varied perspectives on entrepreneurial learning.

Data Analysis

a) The qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method identifies recurring patterns and themes within qualitative datasets. The analysis followed these steps:
b) Data Familiarization
– Student work, feedback surveys, and reflection memos were reviewed multiple times to identify patterns.
c) Initial Coding
– The author conducted inductive coding by identifying recurring words, phrases, and ideas (e.g., "teamwork," "confidence," "problem-solving," "real-world issues").
d) Theme Identification

Codes were grouped into broader themes aligned with the research focus. Emergent themes included:

– Skill Development: Students reported communication, teamwork, and critical thinking growth.
– Engagement: Experiential projects provided meaningful, applied learning opportunities to develop professional skills.
– Reflective Growth: Students highlighted how feedback and iteration deepened their learning.

e) Cross-Referencing
– Themes from feedback surveys and reflection memos were compared with student work and classroom observations to identify areas of convergence or divergence.

Ethical Considerations

a) Data Collection Context: The data for this study were derived from routine teaching practices, including observations, feedback surveys, and coursework. However, students were not explicitly informed at the time that their reflections and survey responses might be used for research purposes.
b) Anonymization Measures: To ensure privacy, all data analyzed were fully anonymized, and no individual student could be identified in the study. Reflection memos, part of graded coursework, were included retrospectively to provide qualitative insights into student experiences.
c) Study Framing: As this study was conducted retrospectively without explicit informed consent, it is framed as a self-study of teaching practices rather than formal human subjects research.
d) Future Compliance: Future iterations of this research will seek appropriate institutional review board (IRB) approval to adhere to formal research guidelines and ensure transparency in the use of student data.

Limitations

a) This study has a few limitations that should be acknowledged:
– Self-Reported Data: Feedback surveys and reflection memos rely on students' subjective perceptions, which may introduce bias.
– Potential Researcher Bias: As the instructor and researcher, the author's dual role may influence interpretations of the data.
– Absence of Peer Validation: The analysis was conducted solely by the author without external validation or inter-rater checks.

b) Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable practitioner insights into entrepreneurial experiential learning's potential to foster skill development, student engagement, and reflective growth. This study aligns with classroom-based qualitative approaches often used in practitioner self-studies (LaBoskey, 2004), where instructors reflect on pedagogical practices to identify student outcomes and areas for improvement.

3. Background

3.1. Declining Confidence in Higher Education

Today, the American higher education system is at a crossroads as the public's trust in universities has eroded significantly over the past 25 years. In 2015, 57% of Americans surveyed expressed confidence in higher education as an institution. By 2023, that number had dropped to 36%, with an alarming 22% expressing little confidence (Gallup, 2023). This was the most significant drop in confidence of any institution, including banks, the military, health care system, etc. This shift also reflects growing skepticism about higher education's value within the context of the rising costs of tuition and the general perception of the institutions' elitism. These divisions have also been divided along political lines, with voters on the right (Republicans) showing a 37-point decline in trust compared to a 9-point drop among voters on the left (Democrats) (Gallup, 2023).

This declining trust also comes at a time of shifting enrollment trends in higher education. Over the past decade, higher education institutions have faced a steady decrease in student enrollment. Between 2010 and 2021, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting higher education institutions decreased by 15%, dropping from 18.1 million to 15.4 million students (NCES 2023). The Covid-19 pandemic appears to have accelerated this decline. From fall 2019 to fall 2023, undergraduate enrollment fell by over 900,000 students, representing almost a 6% decrease in students (Best Colleges, 2023). As a result, the proportion of Americans without a college degree remains relatively high; around 42 million have only "some college, no degree" (Brown, 2023).

Part of this decline is no doubt due in part to the demographic shifts brought on by lower birth rates, which has resulted in a decrease in actual high school graduates (O'Connell-Domenech, 2024). However, other factors might account for this shift, particularly the rising costs of attending university, which has outpaced inflation and wage growth. This has resulted in more students taking on more debt to afford a university education (The Change Leader, n.d.). This cost increase has occurred primarily due to the increase in non-teaching administrative roles at universities and a perceived lack of efficiency (the Change Leader, n.d.).

Employers have also raised concerns about the disconnect between higher education and the economy, reporting that graduates often lack essential skills required in the modern workforce. A 2021 survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) revealed discrepancies between the importance employers place on certain skills and industry perceptions of recent graduates' proficiency in those areas. For instance, while 62% of employers deemed teamwork essential, only 48% felt recent graduates were well-prepared in this skill. The largest gap was in critical thinking, with a 21-percentage-point difference between importance and preparedness (Finley, 2021). Although the report noted that employers overall have faith in the value of a higher education degree – 87% said it is "definitely" or "probably" worth the investment of time and money -- they also see room for improvement (Finley, 2021).

3.2. A Shift in Educational Priorities

In recent years, students have started moving away from traditional liberal arts disciplines toward career-oriented and technical fields. The liberal arts, which emphasizes critical thinking, interdisciplinary learning, and a broader understanding of the human experience, is intended to develop a wide range of skills in youth to prepare them for various fields. Most 4-year university programs (as opposed to more technical 2-year programs) in the U.S. will provide their students with a liberal arts curriculum and even require students to take specific courses in the liberal arts.

The popularity of the liberal arts, however, is starting to lose ground among students. We see this shift at various institutions, including the most elite. For example, at Harvard University, only 7% of the 2022 entering class majored in a humanities field, down from nearly 30% who studied the humanities in the 1970s (Heller, 2023). Students increasingly seek programs that they perceive are better aligned with job market demands and provide clearer pathways to employment.

This trend is not merely a reflection of changing preferences; it mirrors evolving workforce needs. In addition, the rise of automation, AI, and globalization has shifted the focus toward building technology, business, and communications skills. Liberal arts programs that fail to incorporate these elements risk becoming irrelevant. In fact, in the AAC&U report, employers also favored students who during their period in university had completed an internship or apprenticeship (49%), worked in a community setting with people from different backgrounds and cultures (47%) or had a job or engaged in work-study while in college (46%) (Finley, 2021).

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) reported in its Jobs Outlook 2022 survey that employers identified significant gaps between what they considered important in specific competencies and the actual capacity of recent university graduates. For example, although critical thinking and communication skills were highly valued, employers noted that many university graduates were not strong in these areas (Gray, 2021). The hiring platform Monster.com has conducted its own research on skills and found that a "third of U.S. employers say the skills gap has increased compared to last year (2020), and 80 percent of employers say they have difficulty filling openings due to skills gaps as opposed to a year ago." (Monster 2021).

This skills gap has also had a concrete impact on employment. Data from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York indicates that as of December 2021, 41% of college graduates in the United States aged 22 to 27 were underemployed, working in jobs that typically do not require a college degree. This rate is higher than the 34% underemployment rate among all college graduates, suggesting a persistent issue for recent graduates (Pew Research Center, 2022).

Colleges have responded in part by developing programs that merge the liberal arts with more technical fields, like data science, equipping students with analytical skills alongside critical thinking ones. For instance, the University of Illinois is combining information sciences, statistics, computer science, and math to prepare students for careers that involve data and research (see Illinois's Bachelor of Science in Information Sciences + Data Science: https://ischool.illinois.edu). Some institutions are offering majors that integrate fields, like environmental science, with the liberal arts (See Wildavsky 2024 for a discussion of the "career arts" as a blend of liberal arts and a focus on careers). For example, the University of Toronto's School of the Environment claims to provide a "hub for researchers and students from many different disciplines spanning the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities, bringing together many different perspectives to bear on today's pressing environmental challenges."

Given the challenges facing higher education and the increasing demands of the social economy, entrepreneurial experiential learning offers a promising pathway forward. The following literature review explores the theoretical foundations and pedagogical approaches that inform this educational model, while identifying critical gaps in the current scholarship.

4. Literature Review: Experiential Learning and Entrepreneurial Learning

Experiential learning emphasizes active student engagement through real-world challenges, hands-on projects, and reflective practice. According to Kolb (1984), “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 41). Experiential learning immerses students in authentic, often complex tasks to develop collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

The experiential model of learning is rooted in the broader educational philosophy of constructivism, which argues that knowledge needs to be constructed through experience and interaction within the students’ environment. Dewey (1938) argued that education should blend theoretical knowledge and practical action to provide students with the skills to engage with society critically. This principle of learning by doing contrasts with more traditional objectivist and behavioralist approaches, which emphasize lecture-based teaching and mastery through practice and repetition (Dewy, 1938).

The constructivist approach is at the core of the growing trend toward more student-centered pedagogies, such as project-based learning (PBL) and entrepreneurial education, which aim to bridge academic theory with tangible, real-world problem-solving. David Kolb’s (1984), experiential learning theory (ELT) offers a structured model for understanding how experience drives learning. According to Kolb’s, experiential learning involves a cyclical framework with four stages:

1. Concrete Experience: Active engagement in a task or problem.
2. Reflective Observation: Reviewing and reflecting on the experience.
3. Abstract Conceptualization: Formulating theories or ideas based on reflections.
4. Active Experimentation: Testing these concepts in new, practical contexts.

Kolb’s ELT framework is significant because it highlights the dynamic relationship between experience and reflection, a process critical for developing higher-order skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. Within this cycle, learners are encouraged to alternate between “doing” and “thinking,” making learning both interactive and reflective (Kolb, 1984).

At the higher education level, PBL generally means providing students with an opportunity to work on a large project that develops career ready skills and mirrors the professional world before they graduate. Through projects, students master skills that are hard to teach in traditional lecture-style classrooms (Glenn, 2016). Studies have found PBL in higher education to also provide “enhanced student engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, and authentic problem-solving” (Evenddy et al., 2023).

Entrepreneurial education offers an ideal application of Kolb’s model. According to Hägg and Gabrielsson (2020), entrepreneurial education evolved from a focus on traditional business knowledge to incorporating pedagogical approaches that emphasize real-world engagement, opportunity recognition, and risk-taking. In entrepreneurship education, students:

– Identify a real-world problem or challenge (concrete experience)
– Reflect on the relevance of the problem within a global context (reflective observation)

– Develop innovative solutions to address the problem (abstract conceptualization)
– Test these solutions iteratively (active experimentation)

Entrepreneurial education is inherently experiential, allowing students to integrate theoretical knowledge about venture creation with practical applications (Motta & Galina, 2023). As Bell and Bell (2020) suggest, effective entrepreneurial education requires learning environments that support iterative, reflective learning experiences, and not simply knowledge transfer. As such, students in entrepreneurial education engage in activities like brainstorming, customer interviews, prototyping, elevator pitching and even sales.

Experiential entrepreneurial education is intended primarily to create more entrepreneurial intentions among students, it can further enhance student engagement by fostering innovation, agency, and a clearer connection between students' educational experiences and their future goals, particularly as it relates to starting their own business. While venture creation is a common focus, Motta and Galina (2023) argue that entrepreneurial education also supports the development of soft skills such as adaptability, critical thinking, and communication – skills that are transferable to various career paths, not just entrepreneurship.

Key benefits of experiential entrepreneurial education include:

– Skill Development: Enhances critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and adaptability.
– Engagement: Motivates students through meaningful, real-world projects.
– Mindset Cultivation: Encourages innovation, resilience, and problem-solving.

Experiential entrepreneurial education also bridges the gap between academic learning and professional practice, addressing critiques that higher education fails to prepare students for real-world complexities (Finley, 2021). Other studies have also stressed how working in teams, such as those for entrepreneurial projects, provides students with opportunities to experience a more professional environment (Morai et al., 2021).[1]

However, while Kolb's framework is widely acknowledged, its application to entrepreneurial education—particularly in social entrepreneurship—remains underexplored. Hägg and Gabrielsson (2020) highlight a gap in scholarship regarding how experiential approaches cultivate entrepreneurial competencies specifically for societal impact, rather than profit-driven goals. This gap underscores the need for studies, like the present one, to examine entrepreneurial experiential learning in contexts that address challenges in the social economy.

5. Case Studies of Education Entrepreneurship and Education Consulting

The author currently teaches at a large private university as part of an interdisciplinary Bachelor of Arts degree in Education Studies that combines a comprehensive liberal arts education with opportunities for practical, hands-on learning experiences. The program emphasizes critical thinking, analytical skills, and preparing students for diverse career paths, including those in education, policy, and beyond.

Two of the courses the author teaches – Education Entrepreneurship and Education Consulting – exemplify the entrepreneurial experiential learning model that is critical for reinvigorating higher education. Both courses are designed to immerse students in real-world challenges, encouraging them to apply their academic learning to create innovative solutions to pressing issues. In addition, both courses introduce elements of the specific education market.

[1] It's important to remember that such preparation is crucial for future professionals, as they will often work in settings that require them to integrate perspectives and expertise from various fields. This alignment between educational methods and professional realities makes PBL an effective strategy for bridging the gap between academic learning and workplace skills.

For the entrepreneurship course, it is much more explicit, as students develop ideas for business ventures that address education challenges.

With the consulting class, the focus is on addressing solutions within the context of a mock professional advisory service. While these courses differ in the ways they incorporate the market, they share a common goal: to develop students' entrepreneurial mindsets and provide them with critical skills to address complex issues in the 21st century, including those in the social economy.

5.1. Education Entrepreneurship

Course Overview

The Education Entrepreneurship course blends theory and practice to explore how market forces can drive educational reform. Students begin by engaging with foundational debates in education research, political economy, and policy. The course quickly transitions to hands-on applications, requiring students to work in teams as education entrepreneurs tackling real-world problems. Students focus on identifying key educational challenges and designing innovative solutions to address them.

A core part of this process involves conducting customer research by interviewing potential users and leveraging insights to develop viable business ideas. Throughout the course, students present their findings to the class, iterate on the feedback received, and refine their projects. Past projects have addressed issues such as:

- The challenges faced by international students post-Covid-19.
- The mental health needs of university students.
- Financial literacy gaps among youth.
- Limited access to higher education resources for low-income families.

Core Skills Developed

The Education Entrepreneurship course immerses students in a process that mirrors real-world entrepreneurial ventures, focusing on three key experiential components: problem identification, opportunity recognition, and social impact.

Problem Identification. This is a fundamental skill in entrepreneurship, yet one often overlooked in traditional education. Students learn that most new businesses fail because they do not address a market need. To address this, students dedicate a significant portion of the semester to identifying and refining the problem -- the "hair on fire" issue that needs solving -- before progressing to solution development.

For example, in the class, one group of international students identified difficulties navigating the U.S. healthcare system. Through interviews with peers and potential users, they uncovered critical issues, including challenges accessing providers, navigating insurance, and addressing language barriers during medical appointments. By leveraging these insights, the team proposed an app that integrated provider directories, insurance tutorials, and live translation services. This group iterated on their project throughout the semester – starting with a focus on more general issues that international issues face and then zeroing in on health care as they conducted the interviews and gained new insights, demonstrating that customer research teaches students to be flexible and open.

Another group focused on recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals. Initial research revealed that many of these former prisoners lacked basic technology skills, which hindered employment and reintegration. Through interviews with prison education administrators, nonprofits, and formerly incarcerated individuals, the students shifted their focus to developing a program providing digital literacy and workplace technology training. Reflecting on their process, the team wrote: "Each interview pushed our business idea forward by testing our hypotheses with real-world contexts."

These examples highlight how the iterative process of problem identification requires students to challenge assumptions, adapt their thinking, and develop a deep understanding of stakeholder needs – skills that extend far beyond the classroom.

Opportunity Recognition. This is a cornerstone of entrepreneurship education, equipping students with the ability to identify problems that not only need solutions but also have viable market potential (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). In this course, students are encouraged to identify challenges that resonate personally or professionally, often leading to projects with long-term real-world impact.

For instance, one group identified a lack of accessible information about their university's courses and facilities. They noted gaps in understanding course structures, such as whether they used innovative teaching methods like project-based learning, and identified a need for real-time updates on resource availability (e.g., library seat occupancy). Building on these insights, the team developed a prototype for a university information system to enhance student decision-making. They continued refining the concept after the course ended, collaborating with faculty and administrators to test its feasibility.

Another group tackled the challenge of helping international families navigate the private school admissions process in the U.S. They proposed a specialized app providing tailored guidance on school profiles, application requirements, and scholarships. These projects demonstrate how entrepreneurial experiential learning enables students to carry their ideas beyond the classroom while fostering lifelong skills in critical thinking and adaptability.

Social Impact. What sets this course apart is its focus on social impact. Students are required to develop a process for measuring how their innovations contribute to the social economy, focusing on tangible benefits for specific populations. This approach encourages students to think beyond profitability, incorporating metrics and measures to evaluate their solution's impact.

In the project addressing recidivism, the team proposed metrics such as learning outcomes and longer-term indicators like career development and lifelong learning for their beneficiaries. Another project, aimed at improving career outcomes for university students, emphasized metrics such as increases in self-confidence and job satisfaction, alongside traditional employment rates.

These projects illustrate how students are challenged to balance financial sustainability with social impact, learning to design solutions that address the double bottom line. One observation is that when students are forced to come up with a process for measuring outcomes, they think more critically not only about the value of their innovations, but the importance of demonstrating impact to key stakeholders over time. This holistic approach not only enhances students' understanding of entrepreneurship but also instills a deep sense of accountability and critical thinking about the societal implications of their innovations.

Student feedback

End-of-course surveys and observations highlight several themes about students' experiences:

Opportunities for real world application of skills:

This course truly taught me a lot about translating our skills into abilities in the labor market, whether it's doing a start-up or entering a company. (2024)

This course is very hands–on and constructive in building my business skills and business mindset. I like the course… because of its real–world application value and how it gives us genuine (not fake and superficial!) team–work experience. (2024)

Opportunities to work collaboratively with others:

I consider this as a genuine team–work experience where we get to work together for a long time and truly tried to integrate our skills in the team. (2024)

Opportunities to incorporate theory into practice:

The ratio of education policy learning to entrepreneurship learning was perfect. I was able to incorporate important educational issues and statistics into my innovation project. The weekly homework presentations were great practice for the bigger presentations, including the final [project].

5.2. Education Consulting

Course Overview

In the Education Consulting course, students collaborate with university offices or external nonprofits to solve specific problems of practice given to them by their clients. Acting as consultants, they deliver actionable recommendations and solutions to real-world clients. Like the Entrepreneurship course, Consulting emphasizes teamwork, stakeholder engagement, and practical skill-building. Unlike the entrepreneurship course, the focus for students is not to develop their own ideas but to work with a client and address their issues.

Given that students are undergraduates, they are not expected to enter the course with any prior knowledge of the issues they will address. Instead, the course focuses on teaching students how to develop interview protocols, ask meaningful questions, and work professionally with clients to provide actionable results. Through this process, students learn how to uncover and leverage the resources within themselves to solve complex problems, help others, and deliver tangible value to their clients.

Students engage in a variety of consulting tasks, including conducting interviews, analyzing data, and producing professional deliverables such as evaluation plans, logic models, and strategic recommendations. These projects provide students with opportunities to apply their knowledge to real-world contexts, developing critical skills that prepare them for professional careers.

Examples of Client Projects

- Supporting Military-Affiliated Students. A consulting team worked with a university office dedicated to providing holistic support to students, including time management coaching and financial literacy. Their project focused on addressing the unique needs of military-affiliated students, such as older veterans transitioning to university or part-time students actively serving in the military. To develop recommendations, the team conducted interviews with university officers and faculty and researched how other institutions address similar challenges.
- Evaluating the Impact of a Local Education Nonprofit. Partnering with a local education nonprofit, a team of student consultants developed a plan to evaluate the organization's impact. The team conducted stakeholder interviews, reviewed organizational documents

and data, and created a logic model to map the nonprofit's use of resources. Based on their findings, they provided actionable recommendations that the nonprofit later implemented to support its expansion efforts.

– Promoting Community College Transfer Programs. Another consulting project involved a university program focused on recruiting students from local community colleges and supporting their transition to complete their degrees. The student consultants conducted interviews and desk research to develop a plan for raising awareness about the program and providing support for transfer students once they arrive on campus.
– Enhancing Diversity in Global Admissions. A consulting team collaborated with a university office responsible for global admissions to design a strategy for recruiting a more diverse pipeline of students. The team conducted interviews with staff and performed desk research to identify local organizations in various countries that could serve as recruitment partners. The consultants also developed a logic model to outline the office's recruitment strategy and optimize collaboration with these organizations.

Reflective Memos

Themes in Reflections. Through these memos, students articulate the skills they developed and the lessons learned. The reflections also provide qualitative data that inform course improvements, allowing the instructor to refine teaching methods and adapt to evolving student needs (Brookfield, 2017).

Professional Skills. Students consistently highlighted the development of professional skills such as communication, organization, and public speaking:

> This class taught me how to conduct an effective interview and ask the right questions. (2023)
>
> I learned about the importance of communication and organization skills in consultancy. Translating these principles into my own work helped me gain confidence in speaking publicly, asking questions, and coming up with new suggestions on the go. (2023)
>
> Immersing myself in our consulting project for an extended period also proved to be a valuable experience, enhancing my ability to plan strategically and execute tasks efficiently to achieve our goals on time. (2023)

Teamwork and Collaboration. Students reflected on the importance of teamwork, recognizing how collaboration can improve outcomes and build confidence:

> My team taught me how much more confident you feel progressing in your project when you are aware of each person's capabilities. More importantly, when team members honestly communicate when they need help. It reassured me that I can also ask for help when I need it. (2023)
>
> While I thought I liked working alone, my team members helped me realize that I am more productive in a group. Working with others leads to more effective results as group members contribute diverse ideas. (2021)
>
> In modern days, group work is the nature of most jobs, so it's necessary to learn how to cope with a team's dynamics and take the role of a leader when required. (2021)

Feedback and Iteration. Another key theme was the value of receiving feedback:

> Overall, they were very good teammates and allowed me to take initiative while still giving me constructive feedback on things I could do better. (2023)

Meaningful Learning. Finally, students emphasized how the course enabled them to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways:

> This course has been extraordinarily meaningful to me. I have always preferred practical application over theoretical discussions, and I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to showcase our abilities. (2023)

Course Impact

The Education Consulting course provides students with opportunities to engage in real-world problem-solving while developing critical skills such as communication, critical thinking, and collaboration. By partnering with clients and producing professional deliverables, students gain practical experience that prepares them for impactful careers.

Both experiential learning opportunities not only foster skill development but also encourage personal growth, social awareness, and a deeper connection to the communities they serve. Together, the Consulting and Entrepreneurship courses demonstrate the transformative potential of entrepreneurial project-based learning in higher education.

6. Discussion: The Case for Entrepreneurial Education

In the ongoing debate about what to teach in universities, a key issue is often overlooked: how do we ensure higher education prepares students not just for individual success, but to address society's most pressing challenges? Much of the conversation has centered on questions like:

- How can we design programs that align with the demands of the future economy?
- How do we attract students who feel that higher education has lost its purpose?
- How can we maintain the tradition of the liberal arts while providing practical, job-ready skills?

While these are important questions, they are incomplete. What is missing is a deeper focus on teaching the skills needed to help society face future challenges. This shifts the discussion from individual outcomes to collective responsibility: How can universities foster the next generation of social entrepreneurs and change-makers?

This question is especially relevant today as artificial intelligence (AI) rapidly transforms education and the workplace, automating tasks we once took for granted, such as summarizing research, writing papers, and solving complex problems. As traditional skills become less relevant, universities must prioritize innovation, ethical reasoning, and human-centered problem-solving – skills that cannot be replicated by AI. This reorientation of higher education is not just an adaptation to technological change; it is an opportunity to address global challenges like sustainability, equity, and social justice.

The Contribution of Entrepreneurial Experiential Learning

Entrepreneurial education offers a framework for addressing these challenges. By emphasizing critical thinking, empathy, and innovation, entrepreneurial courses help students develop the skills necessary to tackle complex problems. Findings from this study highlight how entrepreneurial experiential learning uniquely addresses critical gaps in both theory and practice:

Bridging the Skills Gap

- The entrepreneurial experiential learning model explicitly targets the "skills gap" identified in the background of this article. Students gain hands-on experience in problem identifica-

tion, opportunity recognition, and social impact assessment, which directly align with the skills needed in today's workforce.
- In the Education Entrepreneurship course, students worked on a project to address recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals. Through iterative problem-solving and customer research, they identified a need for digital literacy programs to support reintegration into the workforce. This process not only enhanced their critical thinking and adaptability but also demonstrated how entrepreneurial skills can lead to tangible solutions for urgent societal challenges.

Fostering Empathy and Human-Centered Design:

- Empathy and vulnerability, often overlooked in traditional education, are central to entrepreneurial learning. Students learn to listen, adapt, and respond to stakeholder needs. One student reflected on how approaching interviews with curiosity transformed their understanding of a client's challenges, emphasizing the importance of empathy in developing impactful solutions.
- These findings contribute to the growing recognition of human-centered problem-solving as a core competency in social entrepreneurship.

Social Capital and Career Development:

- Experiential entrepreneurial courses provide students with opportunities to develop social capital through interactions with clients, peers, and mentors. As one student noted, conducting interviews with educators was the first time they felt their academic work could drive real change. These experiences help students build networks and confidence, essential components of career development and societal impact.

Implications for Educators, Policymakers, and Practitioners

Educators:

- Entrepreneurial experiential learning should be integrated across disciplines to prepare students for interdisciplinary problem-solving. Courses should focus on teaching students how to identify problems, engage with stakeholders, and evaluate the social impact of their solutions.
- Reflective practices, such as memos or presentations, should be incorporated to help students internalize lessons and connect theory with practice.
- Instructors need support because PBL is not easy to implement in the classroom. It requires considerable organization and attention to detail that is not needed as much in traditional, lecture style courses. In addition, in terms of time on task, instructors for project-based learning classes need to spend considerable time working directly with students, monitoring their projects, and ensuring that their teams are collaborating effectively.

Policymakers:

- Policies should encourage universities to adopt entrepreneurial education models that balance traditional academic goals with practical, market-driven skills. Funding for experiential learning programs and partnerships with nonprofits or businesses can strengthen these initiatives.

– Policymakers should also prioritize curricula that emphasize ethical reasoning and innovation, preparing students to address global challenges such as climate change, equity, and technological disruption.

Industry leaders:

– Findings underscore the importance of partnering with universities to mentor and engage students in real-world projects. These collaborations not only support community organizations but also create opportunities for students to learn and innovate in meaningful contexts.

Recommendations for Future Research

– Longitudinal Studies on Impact. Future research could examine the long-term impact of entrepreneurial experiential learning on students' careers and contributions to society. Do these programs lead to higher rates of social entrepreneurship or other forms of civic engagement?
– Adapting to AI Disruption. Studies should explore how entrepreneurial education can evolve in response to AI, identifying new skills and frameworks that complement technological advancements.
– Expanding Across Disciplines. Research could explore how entrepreneurial experiential learning models can be adapted to a variety of disciplines, such as STEM or the humanities, to promote innovation across fields.

Bringing the Discussion Full Circle

Today's students demand more than a degree—they seek meaning, relevance, and the opportunity to make a difference. Entrepreneurial experiential learning provides a pathway to meet these demands, equipping students with the skills, mindset, and social capital to address future challenges. As one student reflected:

> This course has been extraordinarily meaningful to me. I have always preferred practical application over theoretical discussions, and I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to showcase our abilities.

In an era where traditional skills are rapidly evolving, the emphasis on empathy, innovation, and human-centered problem-solving makes entrepreneurial education more critical than ever. By embracing this model, universities can prepare graduates not only to thrive in their careers but also to tackle the world's most pressing issues with creativity and purpose.

7. Conclusion

Higher education must evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. This study demonstrates that entrepreneurial experiential learning offers a compelling model for addressing critical gaps in both theory and practice. By focusing on real-world problem-solving, stakeholder engagement, and social impact, entrepreneurial education equips students with the skills and mindsets needed to tackle pressing societal challenges.

The findings from the Education Entrepreneurship and Education Consulting courses reveal how this approach fosters essential skills such as critical thinking, empathy, and adaptability. Students not only gain practical experience but also learn to navigate the complexities of balancing financial sustainability with social impact – a vital competency for leaders in the social economy. These results underscore the transformative potential of entrepreneurial experiential learning to bridge academic theory with tangible, measurable outcomes.

For educators, policymakers, and practitioners, the implications are clear. Universities should integrate experiential entrepreneurial models across disciplines to better align educational outcomes with workforce and societal needs. Reflective practices, stakeholder partnerships, and opportunities for students to measure social impact should be central to these efforts. Policymakers must support funding for experiential programs that prepare students to innovate in an era of rapid technological and social change.

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of entrepreneurial experiential learning on students' careers and contributions to society, as well as its adaptability across diverse educational contexts. As higher education continues to navigate declining trust and shifting priorities, embracing this model offers a path forward – one that reaffirms universities' role as catalysts for innovation and social progress.

By equipping students with the tools to drive meaningful change, entrepreneurial education addresses both the immediate and long-term needs of society. It fosters not just career-ready graduates but empathetic, innovative leaders poised to shape a better future in the social economy.

References

Ash, S. L., & Clayton, P. H. (2009). Generating, deepening, and documenting learning: The power of critical reflection in applied learning. *Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education*, *1*, 25–48.

Bell, R., & Bell, H. (2020). Applying educational theory to develop a framework to support the delivery of experiential entrepreneurship education. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, *27*(6), 987–1004.

Best Colleges. (2023). Research: *College enrollment decline*. https://www.bestcolleges.com/research/college-enrollment-decline/

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Brookfield, S. D. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. John Wiley & Sons.

The Change Leader, Inc. (n/d). *How to stop declining enrollment in higher education*. https://changinghighered.com/how-to-stop-declining-enrollment-in-higher-ed/

Evenddy, S. S., Gailea, N., & Syafrizal, S. (2023). Exploring the benefits and challenges of project-based learning in higher education. *PPSDP International Journal of Education*, *2*(2), 458–469.

Eyler, J. (2002). Reflection: Linking service and learning – Linking students and communities. *Journal of Social Issues*, *58*(3), 517–534.

Finley, A. (2021). *How college contributes to workforce success: Employer views on what matters most*. Association of American Colleges and Universities. https://dgmg81phhvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/Research/PDFs/AACUEmployerReport2021.pdf

Gallup. (2023). *Americans' confidence in higher education down sharply*. https://news.gallup.com/poll/508352/americans-confidence-higher-education-down-sharply.aspx

Glenn, P. (2016, April 23). *Why project-based learning hasn't gone mainstream and what we can do about it*. https://www.edsurge.com/news/2016-04-23-why-project-based-learning-hasn-t-gone-mainstream-and-what-we-can-do-about-it

Hägg, G., & Gabrielsson, J. (2020). A systematic literature review of the evolution of pedagogy in entrepreneurial education research. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, *26*(5), 829–861.

Heller, N. (2023, February 27). The End of the English Major. *The New Yorker*. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/03/06/the-end-of-the-english-major

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice-Hall.

LaBoskey, V. K. (2004). The methodology of self-study and its theoretical underpinnings. In J. J. Loughran, M. L. Hamilton, V. K. LaBoskey, & T. Russell (Eds.), *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (pp. 817–870). Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Brown, C. (2023). Crisis of confidence in U.S. higher education: A call for renewed focus and reform. *Lumina Foundation*. https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/crisis-of-confidence-in-u-s-higher-education-a-call-for-renewed-focus-and-reform/

Monster. (2021). *The future of work 2021: Global hiring outlook*. https://hiring.monster.com/resources/blog/future-of-work-2021-summary/

Morais, P., Ferreira, M. J., & Veloso, B. (2021). Improving student engagement with Project-Based Learning: A case study in Software Engineering. *IEEE Revista Iberoamericana de Tecnologias del Aprendizaje*, *16*(1), 21–28.

Motta, V. F., & Galina, S. V. R. (2023). Experiential learning in entrepreneurship education: A systematic literature review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *121*, 103919.

Gray, K. (2021). *Competencies: Employers weigh importance versus new grad proficiency*. National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) December 3, 2021. https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/competencies-employers-weigh-importance-versus-new-grad-proficiency/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *Undergraduate enrollment: Condition of education 2023 report summary*. U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cha/undergrad-enrollment

Northern University. (n.d.). Experiential learning: *An instructional guide. Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning*. https://www.niu.edu/citl/resources/guides/instructional-guide/experiential-learning.shtml

Pew Research Center. (2022, April 12). 1*0 facts about today's college graduates*. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/04/12/10-facts-about-todays-college-graduates/

Samaras, A. P. (2010). *Self-study teacher research: Improving your practice through collaborative inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review*, *25*(1), 217–226.

O'Connell-Domenech, A.(2024, January 10). College enrollment could take a big hit in 2025 – here's why. *The Hill*. https://thehill.com/changing-america/enrichment/education/4398533-college-enrollment-could-take-a-big-hit-in-2025-heres-why/

University of Toronto School of the Environment.(2022). *Viewbook: School of the Environment*. https://www.environment.toronto.ca/sites/www.environment.toronto.ca/files/2022-2023%20Viewbook%20School%20of%20the%20Environment%20University%20of%20Toronto.pdf

Wildavsky, B. (2024). *The career arts: Making the most of college, credentials, and connections*. Princeton University Press.

Woods, A. (2021). Self-Study: A Method for Continuous Professional Learning and A Methodology for Knowledge Transfer. *Quality Advancement in Nursing Education*, *7*(1), 1–13.

About the Author

Thomas Gold*, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Education Studies Faculty
Steinhardt School of Culture, Education,
and Human Development
New York University
82 Washington Square E, New York, NY 10003,
United States of America
e-mail: thomas.gold@nyu.edu
ORCID: 0009-0005-7999-8102
* Corresponding author.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

I would like to thank Jessie Yu and Kenzi Yang for their research during summer 2024 that supported part of this analysis.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright and License

Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland

Ministry of Education and Science
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.

Social Entrepreneurship Review
2024, Vol. 2

10.15678/SER.2024.2.001

Education and Cooperation for the Development of the Social Economy: Initiatives Undertaken at the University of the National Education Commission in Krakow

Janina Pach, Dorota Murzyn, Renata Śliwa, Marta Czyżewska

Abstract: This article highlights the initiatives in social economy and social entrepreneurship undertaken by the University of the National Education Commission in Krakow. It explores activities related to education for the social economy, educational and research projects in this field, and the development of collaborations with the socio-economic environment, including partnerships with social economy entities.

Keywords: social economy, social entrepreneurship, higher education
JEL Codes: A12, B55

Suggested citation:
Pach, J., Murzyn, D., Śliwa, R., & Czyżewska, M. (2024). Education and cooperation for the development of the social economy. Initiatives undertaken at the University of the National Education Commission in Krakow. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, *2*, 125–132. https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2024.2.001

1. Introduction

Education is a key component of the ecosystem supporting the development of social enterprises and, more broadly, the social economy (Borzaga et al., 2020). Without an understanding of what social entrepreneurship entails, its progress is hindered. In Poland, the formal education of human resources for the social economy remains a relatively underexplored issue. At the university level, social economy and social entrepreneurship were historically taught primarily through postgraduate programs. Over time, however, these educational offerings began to expand. Factors driving the development of social entrepreneurship education were identified, and models of collaboration between universities and social economy actors were explored (Stanienda, Gądek, & Płonka, 2017; Starnawska 2018). Beyond formal curricular proposals, courses on social entrepreneurship have also been integrated into a broader educational and research framework within various management and economics programs (Popowska, 2018; Pacut, 2019).

The initiative to develop academic programs in social economy education was launched at the Pedagogical University of Krakow (now the University of the National Education Commission in Krakow, abbreviated as UKEN) in 2016. Responding to the growing need for managerial staff within social economy entities, the university undertook the implementation of first- and second-level degree programs. These courses were designed to introduce the unique characteristics of the sector and to prepare graduates for roles in cooperatives, associations, foundations, social enterprises, and even traditional businesses seeking to operate in a socially responsible manner. The establishment of the social economy program at UKEN in 2016 was spearheaded by Professor Janina Pach, who assembled a teaching and research team and inspired it to focus on this emerging field. Since then, efforts have been ongoing to adapt the educational offerings to meet the needs of both the social economy sector and students.

2. Presentation of Activities

The degree program in social economics became a permanent part of the educational offerings at the Faculty of Social Sciences at UKEN. Notably, UKEN was the only university in Poland providing free education in this field at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The program featured a practical profile, with a curriculum rooted in collaboration with the socio-economic environment. This was particularly evident in the implementation of a dual studies model for the Master's degree program between 2019 and 2021. The dual studies approach combined the traditional model of knowledge acquisition with skill development and practical vocational training. Before launching the program, the curriculum and study plan, including course charters, underwent extensive consultations and modifications to better align with the actual needs of the labor market. During their studies, students integrated academic knowledge with practical experience through internships and participation in the activities of social economy entities. These included study visits, thesis work conducted with the involvement of mentors from social organizations and enterprises, and other forms of engagement. The dual degree program was implemented as part of the project "Social Economy – Practical, Necessary and Attractive," funded by the National Centre for Research and Development under the POWER 2014–2020 program, co-financed by the European Social Fund. As of the 2023/2024 academic year, UKEN has introduced a degree program in economics with an academic profile, offering specializations: "social economics" at the undergraduate level and "social manager" at the graduate level.

Educational activities in social economics at UKEN are directed not only at its own students but also at those from other universities, both domestic and international. Since 2021, UKEN staff have been conducting workshops on social entrepreneurship for students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School and Taiwan National Chiayi University. These workshops are part of the project "Responsible Business – From East to West," which completed four editions by the end of the 2023/2024 academic year. The project introduces students to diverse business models that move beyond the traditional profit-maximization paradigm, emphasizing the importance of key stakeholders and societal well-being. Participants explore concepts such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), shared value creation (CSV), ESG strategies and reporting, and social entrepreneurship, among others. Social entrepreneurship, in particular, is presented as a pathway to conducting business in a socially responsible manner. The project brings together experts from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, the UK, and Poland, with the UKEN team leading the social entrepreneurship component.

International cooperation plays a crucial role in enhancing and modernizing teaching practices and, equally important, in strengthening research potential. Many projects undertaken by UKEN academics are grounded in conceptual, methodological, and applied frameworks developed through international collaborations co-financed by the EU. The first such initiative was "INN@SE – Innovative Social Entrepreneurship with Youth Engagement," funded under the Erasmus+ program (KA205, Strategic Partnerships, Cooperation for Innovation), and implemented between 2020 and 2022. This project, led by UKEN in partnership with institutions from Italy, Northern Macedonia, and Jordan, focused on fostering social entrepreneurship among young people. Within the project's framework, research was conducted to understand young people's attitudes towards social entrepreneurship. Additionally, a global database and map of best practices in social entrepreneurship were developed, alongside a model for supporting youth engagement in the field. The project also produced policy recommendations aimed at helping policymakers enhance strategies and initiatives to promote social entrepreneurship among young people. All publications and outcomes from the project are accessible at https://innose.up.krakow.pl/. In 2022, the project was recognized by Youth@Work – one of Europe's largest transnational alliances for youth employability and entrepreneurship – as the best project developed within the network.

The next two projects focus on the role of social entrepreneurship in the ecological transformation, also referred to as the green transformation. This potential has been acknowledged by the European Union (European Commission 2021), recognizing that the business models and practices of the social economy are particularly well-suited for creating local and collective initiatives that deliver both social and environmental benefits. To explore green skills in the social economy and develop tools for their enhancement, UKEN has been implementing the project "SDG Labs – Harnessing the potential of the social economy towards a green transformation through the establishment of Socially Driven Green Labs within Universities" from 2021 to 2024. This initiative represents the first comprehensive transnational effort to identify current and future green skills shortages within social economy entities. Strengthening green skills education is critical for empowering social economy actors to contribute to the green transformation of the broader economy (Kowalska et al., 2022). Coordinated by UKEN, the project was carried out in collaboration with partners from the Czech Republic, Greece, and Belgium and received funding through the Erasmus+ program (KA220, Strategic Partnerships in higher education). From the same funding source, the project "SEgoesGreen – Integrating Nature-Based Solutions into Higher Education towards Exploiting the Transformative Potential of the Social Economy for a Green and Inclusive Future" has been implemented by UKEN between 2022 and 2025 in partnership with institutions from Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, and Portugal (UKEN acts as a project partner). The work centers on building a research and analytical framework to identify strategies and practical examples for integrating nature-based solutions and eco-citizenship into social economy curricula. These efforts require an interdisciplinary approach and the establishment of communication pathways between experts from various disciplines (Murzyn et al., 2024).

In the context of international cooperation, it is important to highlight UKEN's involvement in global networks focused on the social economy and entrepreneurship. Since 2022, UKEN staff have been members of the EMES International Research Network, the largest international research network on social entrepreneurship. In 2024, this collaboration was further strengthened with UKEN joining the Affinity Group on Research on Training and Education on Social Economy, an initiative within EMES. This group focuses on advancing social economics education and provides a platform for lecturers to share and discuss resources, teaching methods, and educational approaches. It also serves as a space for researchers to exchange experiences, ideas, projects, and events related to social economy education. Additionally, UKEN has collaborated with REVES, the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy, in preparing a project proposal in the field of social economy for Horizon Europe in 2024.

Recognizing that a modern university should not only fulfill its teaching and research functions but also engage in the so-called "third mission" of addressing contemporary social and economic challenges (Koj, 2013), UKEN staff place significant emphasis on building and fostering relationships with the socio-economic environment. Educational initiatives in social economics, aimed at cultivating a broader sense of social responsibility, are extended to primary and secondary school students as well. Between 2018 and 2020, UKEN hosted the University of Young Explorers, a program offering a series of classes for students in grades VI–VIII from primary schools in the Lesser Poland region. These activities were part of the Entrepreneurial and Socially Responsible Citizen project, funded by the National Centre for Research and Development under the POWER program. Similarly, in 2024, UKEN conducted a series of lectures and workshops, including sessions on social entrepreneurship, for first- and second-year secondary school students. These activities were carried out as part of an educational project funded by the National Bank of Poland.

A significant form of cooperation between UKEN and social economy entities has been the series of student-practitioner meetings organized as part of four editions of the Forum for Cooperation and Integration of the Institute of Law, Administration, and Economics with External Partners, held between 2018 and 2021. These meetings have resulted in a robust network of institutional partners with whom UKEN co-creates and conducts social, economic, and sectoral initiatives.

Since the inception of the Social Economy degree program, UKEN has collaborated closely with regional authorities, including the Regional Centre for Social Policy in Kraków. This cooperation includes promoting and disseminating knowledge about social enterprises, their creation, and management during the annual event Social Economy Week. Additionally, since 2020, UKEN employees have actively participated in the Lesser Poland Committee for the Development of the Social Economy (MKRES), which advises the authorities of the Lesser Poland Voivodeship. Professor Dorota Murzyn represents UKEN on the MKRES and joined the Social Economy Research Group, established within the Committee in 2024. The group's objective is to develop methodologies and research tools to diagnose the demand and supply of social services, particularly for local government units involved in creating social service centers or social service development plans. Reflecting its commitment to social inclusion and raising awareness of responsible consumption, UKEN (then the Pedagogical University) became the first university in Poland to be awarded the title Fair Trade Friendly University.

Since 2017, UKEN has organized international scientific conferences dedicated to addressing various issues within the social economy sector. These conferences provide a platform for presenting research findings and exchanging both scientific insights and practical experiences. Notably, they represent the only recurring event of this kind in Poland. Held annually, each conference focuses on a different theme within the social economy. Topics explored in past editions have included: innovation in the social economy sector; the role of education and social capital in the development of social entrepreneurship; social entrepreneurship in the face of 21st-century challenges, including the transition to a circular economy; green skills in the social economy; and the role of social economy entities in the provision of social services. A lasting legacy of these conferences is the series of post-conference publications, produced annually as monographs edited and co-authored by UKEN staff.

3. Discussion and Planned Courses of Action

The activities and lessons learned in education, research, and cooperation in the field of social economy undertaken at UKEN in recent years allow for several key reflections. First of all, education in economics and social entrepreneurship is not only crucial for socio-economic development but also essential for building awareness and knowledge in this area and fostering pro-social and pro-environmental attitudes, particularly among young people. Since the launch of the social economics degree program, UKEN staff have periodically surveyed students to better understand their motivations, opinions, and attitudes. The results of the first such survey, conducted among students who began their studies in the 2016/2017 academic year, revealed a low initial awareness of the term "social economy," with more than 50% of respondents indicating unfamiliarity. Additionally, only 8% of students reported choosing this field of study out of personal interest (Maciejewski 2018). Subsequent years saw only slight improvements, although the level of understanding of social economy and social entrepreneurship did increase. However, research also highlighted that young people's grasp of social entrepreneurship often remains intuitive and unsupported by deeper scientific knowledge. For instance, a 2020 survey conducted as part of the INN@SE project found that half of the respondents claimed familiarity with the terms "social economy" and "social entrepreneurship," but only 37% stated that they understood the distinction between social entrepreneurship and traditional entrepreneurship. The research, which targeted young people aged 18-35, also identified a subgroup of social economy students. When compared to the broader group, these students demonstrated significantly higher awareness: 68% were familiar with the term "social entrepreneurship" (Chi-square test = 13.336, p = 0.001), and 46% understood the difference between social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship in general (Murzyn et al., 2020). These findings underscore the vital role of education in enhancing awareness and understanding of social entrepreneurship, highlighting its importance in addressing gaps in knowledge and shaping informed attitudes.

Successive surveys of students, along with direct discussions with their representatives (e.g., through educational quality councils), revealed the need to increase the number of strictly economics-focused courses within the degree program. This feedback, among other factors, motivated a shift in the educational profile and led to the introduction of the economics degree program in 2023. To ensure continuity in education for the social economy, the specializations "social economics" and "social manager" were incorporated into the program. The economics degree program is designed with an academic profile, fostering a stronger connection to the research conducted at the university.

The University of the National Education Commission in Kraków (UKEN) is actively advancing its educational and research activities in the field of social economics and entrepreneurship. Recognizing that, in Poland, the social economy is traditionally positioned within the domain of social policy, the university places a stronger emphasis on the economic and entrepreneurial dimensions of the field. To maximize the potential of social enterprises and boost employment within them, it is essential to integrate social entrepreneurship into broader entrepreneurship and business education (Murzyn, 2021). Social economy entities require personnel with entrepreneurial competencies and the expertise needed to manage effective social enterprises. Moreover, UKEN's educational offerings and ongoing projects increasingly address contemporary challenges, such as environmental and digital transformation, aligning their activities with the evolving demands of the modern world.

The activities outlined above showcase a wide range of initiatives, programs, and projects undertaken by the University of the National Education Commission in Kraków (UKEN) to promote education and cooperation in the development of the social economy. Since 2016, UKEN has offered a degree program in "Social Economy," uniquely providing such studies at both undergraduate and graduate levels free of charge in Poland. UKEN has also participated in numerous international projects that have expanded research and cooperation in social economics. These projects have focused on areas such as developing young people's skills in social entrepreneurship and identifying green competences essential for ecological transformation. Collaboration with other universities, international organizations, and local partners has facilitated the creation of support networks and the exchange of knowledge and best practices. UKEN's educational initiatives extend beyond its students, targeting primary and secondary school students as well as the general public through various social and educational programs. The university also organizes international academic conferences to present research findings and share experiences in the field of social economics, further contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this area.

Drawing from its experience, UKEN recognizes a significant demand for education in the field of social economy across various levels of education. A key focus in fostering pro-social and pro-environmental attitudes among the younger generation is the establishment and reinforcement of partnerships with social economy entities and enterprises committed to social responsibility. UKEN supports this objective by organizing internships, placements, and research projects in collaboration with these organizations. Expanding and continuing international cooperation is also essential, particularly in the context of research and educational initiatives addressing green transformation and sustainable development. Participation in international networks such as EMES plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of both education and research in these areas.

Promoting social entrepreneurship as an integral component of economic and business education is essential. UKEN plans to continue its efforts in developing green competences and integrating nature-based solutions into academic curricula. The university remains committed to addressing social and economic challenges by strengthening its engagement in the so-called "third mission" of the university. This includes organizing events, collaborating with local authorities and social actors, and fostering education that promotes a responsible and socially aware society. A significant challenge for the social economy lies in developing increasingly effective methods to address both long-standing social issues and emerging problems. These challenges arise from the dynamic evolution of the global economy, including digitalization, e-commerce, demographic shifts, changes in family structures, and, most critically, the need to adapt and innovate in creating social services and solutions.

References

Borzaga, C., Galera, G., Franchini, B., Chiomento, S., Nogales, R., & Carin, C. (2020). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe: Comparative synthesis report. European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/567551

European Commission (2021). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy. COM (2021) 778 final. Brussels, December 9, 2021.

Koj, A. (2013). Ewolucja idei uniwersytetu i jego misji. In J. Woźnicki (Ed.), *Misja i służebność uniwersytetu w XXI wieku* (pp. 58–60). Wydawnictwo Instytutu Społeczeństwa Wiedzy i Fundacji Rektorów Polskich.

Kowalska, K., Szczygieł, E., Szyja, P., Śliwa, R. (2022). *Green skills in the field of Social Economy*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego.

Maciejewski, W. (2018). Motywy wyboru kierunku studiów z obszaru ekonomii społecznej. In D. Murzyn, & J. Pach (Eds.), *Ekonomia społeczna: między rynkiem, państwem a obywatelem* (pp. 397–410). Difin.

Murzyn, D. (2021). Social entrepreneurship and selected elements of the entrepreneurship eco-system. *Przedsiębiorczość – Edukacja* [*Entrepreneurship – Education*], 17(1), 165–176. https://doi.org/10.24917/20833296.171.13

Murzyn, D., Czyżewska, M., Lupa-Wójcik, I., & Maciejewski, W. (2020). *Innovative Social Entrepreneurship with Youth Engagement. Needs Analysis in Poland, Italy, North Macedonia and Jordan*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego.

Murzyn, D., Czyżewska, M., Lupa-Wójcik, I., Maciejewski, W., Aleksić Fredotović, A., Barišić, A., Buljan, A., Načinović Braje, I., Wittine, Z., Manou, D., Papathanasiou, J., Miguéis, S., Vlachou, M., & Kandefer, D. (2024). Integrating Nature-Based Solutions in Social Economy Education for Enhancing Environmental Sustainability. *European Research Studies Journal*, *XXVII*(1), 96–113.

Pacut, A. (2019). Przedsiębiorczość społeczna a szkoły wyższe – Formy, obszary i wyzwania kooperacji. In M. Banaś, F. Czech, & M. Kołaczek (Eds.), *Współpraca uczelni wyższych i organizacji pozarządowych jako animatorów społeczeństwa obywatelskiego z wykorzystaniem potencjału dziedzictwa kulturowego* (pp. 71–102). Księgarnia Akademicka.

Popowska, M. (2018). Przedsiębiorczość społeczna jako klucz do skutecznej edukacji przedsiębiorczej na społecznie odpowiedzialnym uniwersytecie. *Horyzonty Wychowania*, *17*(42), 205–218. https://doi.org/10.17399/HW.2018.174216

Stanienda J., Gądek A., & Płonka M. (2017). Przedsiębiorczość społeczna. Nauka – praktyka – edukacja. Biblos.

Starnawska M. (2018). Guiding Directions in Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation Education: Experts' Insights. *Horyzonty Wychowania*, *17*(44), 31–39. https://doi.org /10.17399/HW.2018.174 403

About the Authors

Janina Pach, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Department of Economics and Economic Policy
University of the National Education Commission, Krakow
ul. Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland
e-mail: janina.pach@uken.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-9177-0742

Renata Śliwa, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
Department of Economics and Economic Policy
University of the National Education Commission, Krakow
ul. Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland
e-mail: renata.sliwa@uken.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-5029-8798

Dorota Murzyn*, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Department of Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation
University of the National Education Commission, Krakow
ul. Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland
e-mail: dorota.murzyn@uken.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0003-2032-8401

Marta Czyżewska, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
Department of Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation
University of the National Education Commission, Krakow
ul. Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland
e-mail: marta.czyzewska@uken.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-6709-6842
* Corresponding author.

Authors' Contributions

All authors made: conceptualization, writing, review and editing, supervision. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the text.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

None reported.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland

Ministry of Education and Science
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.

List of reviewers in 2024

Kemi Akeju, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria
Atsiya Pius Amos, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria
Agata Austen, University of Economics in Katowice, Poland
Antea Barišić, University of Zagreb, Croatia
Ivana Načinović Braje, University of Zagreb, Croatia
Katarzyna Bratnicka-Myśliwiec, University of Economics in Katowice, Poland
Ana Aleksić Fredotović, University of Zagreb, Croatia
Joseph Ibbih, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria
Adam Jabłoński, Uniwersytety WSB Merito, Poland
Monika Klimowicz, University of Wrocław, Poland
Wiesław Koczur, University of Economics in Katowice, Poland
Agnieszka Lorek, University of Economics in Katowice, Poland
Jason Papathanasiou, University of Macedonia, Greece
Katarzyna Plebańczyk, Jagiellonian University, Poland
Sylwia Słupik, University of Economics in Katowice, Poland
Zoran Wittine, University of Zagreb, Croatia
Magdalena Zajączkowska, Krakow University of Economics, Poland