

YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS
and
SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP
in the Sphere of
ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY



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What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “entrepreneurship”? For some people, the word entrepreneurship carries negative feelings. One of the main reasons is when people hear the word “entrepreneurship” they assume it is solely about money and profits. Capitalism and neoliberalism had some negative effects in the past, especially on the most vulnerable in our society (Walsh & Lannon, 2018). Entrepreneurship and the social sector are perceived as two opposite things that do not go together as they have different aims (Shaw and Carter, 2007). This perception, however, is slowly changing thanks to a new form of entrepreneurship called social entrepreneurship (SE). This business model is spreading fast (Braun & Clarke, 2012). SE has created a domino effect that is sweeping across Europe and the Western world, and governments are officially recognizing and incorporating this business model into the laws of their respective countries. Subsequently, the SE model has also reached the Maltese shores. SE is being seen by many as a new tool that can be used to create social wealth in a society that was more focused on economic wealth for the past few decades (Jones, Warner, and Kiser, 2010).

WHAT IS SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP?

Social entrepreneurship (SE) as a definition and as legislation is not defined in the same way in every country. As Bandinelli (2017) said, there are different definitions of what makes up SE. This does not mean that definitions vary a lot. There are minor differences and there still does not exist one general definition that is agreed upon universally. Apart from that, not all countries have made SE a law in their country. Malta is still in the process of coming up with the final version of the SE Act. Apart from that, every country that has SE as a law still uses different criteria to say which companies or organisations qualify to be social enterprises.

Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTo0qtdVMpM>

Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tl1f-dZWXFE>

YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Social entrepreneurship is often associated with youthful idealism. Young people are seen as the generation that leans more towards this type of entrepreneurship and understands better what it is, what makes it different from commercial entrepreneurship, and what the benefits are (Bandinelli, 2017). Due to this, youth organizations have the responsibility of making sure that they help young people to learn more about this type of entrepreneurship and help them explore more ways how to start such a business if they want to.

Research by Bandinelli(2017), showed that several youth organizations started to train young people about social entrepreneurship and use it themselves. One must keep in mind that many youth organizations rely mostly on European and national funds to be able to carry out their youth work activities (Thrift, 2005). They realized they spent a lot of time writing applications to get the funds, and they did not have a guarantee that they would be approved. This led many youth workers and other people working with the youth to spend more time writing such applications.

What a number of these youth organizations are doing today, is that they are changing from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which is the legal status that many youth organizations have, to social enterprises (Thrift, 2005). By doing that they are offering a new service or product to their local community, they are becoming financially independent so they can spend more time working with the young people and they are employing people. Most of these youth organisations that turn into a social enterprise are then employing youth with fewer opportunities and that is what makes them a social enterprise (Dugguh, 2013).

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE INCLUSION OF YOUTH WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

Young people with fewer opportunities are those who are at a disadvantage compared to other young people because they face obstacles and certain situations that make it harder for them to be fully included in the society that they are living in (Satar, & Siraj, 2016). Various research shows that people with disability and young people are the two main groups of people in society that are most at risk of social exclusion (Šimundža, Knez-Riedl and Čančer, 2016). Desa's study (2009) showed that while the average rate of unemployment in the European Union was 8.7%, the average rate of youth unemployment was 16.8%.

There are several obstacles and situations that young people could be facing that accelerate their social exclusion. Some of these obstacles are:

Social obstacles: Young people facing discrimination due to their gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or disability, young people with limited social skills or anti-social or risky sexual behaviours, young people from broken families (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2014).

Economic obstacles: young people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on the social welfare system, long-term unemployment, homelessness, poverty, young people in debt or with financial problems. Statistics show that when economic recessions hit, young people were one of the groups at risk of ending up unemployed and thus ended up at risk of poverty (Taylor, 2004)

Disability: young people with mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical, sensory, or other disabilities (Taylor, 2004)

Educational difficulties: young people with learning difficulties, early school-leavers and school dropouts, lower qualified persons, and young people with poor school performance. This is increased by the fact that the industry and other sectors are changing rapidly, and the education sector is struggling to catch up with this rapid change (Taylor, 2004).

Cultural differences: young immigrants, refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families, young people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, and young people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion problems (Taylor, 2004)

Health problems: young people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses or psychiatric conditions, and young people with mental health problems (Patel and Mehta, 2001).

Geographical obstacles: young people from remote or rural areas, young people living on small islands or peripheral regions, young people from urban problem zones, and young people from less serviced areas such as limited public transport, poor facilities, or abandoned villages (Patel and Mehta, 2001).

These situations/obstacles prevent young people from having effective access to education, effective access to a job, and inclusion in society at large. The EU is advanced with regards to the inclusion of such youth and is making use of SE as a tool to help in youth inclusion and has included SE in its policy for youth inclusion. It is supporting this through various programmes and different funds like Erasmus+, Erasmus for young entrepreneurs, The European Social Fund, The Employment and Social Innovation programme, and other funds and programmes (Patel & Mehta, 2001).

IMPACT OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ON YOUTH

The impact of social entrepreneurship on youth especially youth with fewer opportunities is big with this type of entrepreneurship affecting these young people in various ways. What follows are several ways that research by Azzopardi (2020) has found that social entrepreneurship affects these youth with fewer opportunities. In this research, the researcher interviewed six youth organizations that became social enterprises and employed youth with fewer opportunities.

Representative	Country	Description	Target Group / Employees
Rita	Croatia	Crafts and Chocolate Factory/Shop. They create local chocolates and crafts/souvenirs sold to tourists on the Croatian coast.	18 – 35 years old youth with physical and intellectual disabilities.
Carlo	Spain	Various services are given by this social enterprise. Some of the services include a biscuit factory, cleaning and laundry services, gardening services, and a restaurant.	18 – 30-year-old people with low incomes, mental health issues, ex-convicts and immigrants.
Catia	Portugal	Started as a school club. Now NGOs follow the SE model, working on European & local funds, while implementing youth work activities. They get small contracts from other companies and they employ young people for them.	Young people with economic difficulties, come from disruptive families.

Representative	Country	Description	Target Group / Employees
Walid	Palestine	Employs young people who are studying in the local universities. These students privately teach younger students various subjects. Each student teaches what he/she is studying at university to younger students who are still at the primary or secondary level of education.	Youth with family financial difficulties due to conflicts in the region.
Omar	Jordan	Various facilities including an Eco-Camp and Refugee Camp. The local youth and refugees work together in various sectors and sell various products and services including organic products.	Youth and refugees.
Abasi	Egypt	Young people working on different projects both locally and abroad including cultural events and also other projects that help the community improve.	20 – 35-year-old youth most of whom are ex-convicts.

Table 1. Summary of Organizations Description and Target Groups

IMPACT 1: SENSE OF SECURITY

During the interviews in this research, participants said that following the SE model brought about a sense of security and peace of mind. Respondents commonly talked about the fact that SE offers a sense of security to employed young people and also in some cases the relatives of these youth with fewer opportunities in various ways. Apart from that the respondents also spoke about the fact that SE also brings a sense of security to the organisation itself, due to the financial peace of mind, once again because they do not have to rely on external funds to be able to operate.

FINANCIAL SECURITY

One of the main characteristics of SE is the employment of young people with fewer opportunities. The research by Azzopardi (2020) showed that young people with fewer opportunities are usually rejected in every job they apply for with commercial companies. Although they are not told the real reason, it is usually the same reason or reasons that make them young people with fewer opportunities, for example, their disability. Employers do not employ them because these circumstances also make them less productive and less efficient and not economically viable for a commercial company. People who took part in the research by Azzopardi (2020), stated that “it’s difficult to employ people with difficulties...cost related they are slower and cannot do so much”. If it was not for SE these youth would never be given a job and would have to rely on relatives or government funding to be able to live their lives.

Employment by these SE organizations helps these young people with fewer opportunities to have a decent steady income and gain financial independence.

The organizations that were interviewed employ several young people, all of them with different backgrounds and realities. For instance, with the organization from Palestine, the youth are students who are studying and want to continue their studies, but their families cannot support them financially. As Walid from Palestine said, ‘most families in this region are low-income families with limited financial capacity due to the ongoing conflict in this area’. Thanks to this social enterprise, youth are earning some money to be able to afford their studies and to support their daily needs like rent, food, transportation, and education without having to rely on their parents. This also gives them work experience which will assist them in future employment.

Apart from students, these SE organizations like the one in Croatia and Spain, employ youth that already have a family of their own and use the money they earn to sustain their family. One of the workers in the Spanish organization told Carlo 'Thanks to you my family can have a decent dinner on the table'. SE is not offering peace of mind only to the workers that work with them, but to their families as well. Employment is making sure that these people do not end up below the poverty line.

In the case of Jordan it is helping young refugees by providing them a job opportunity, this job is helping young people to earn money to buy basic food for themselves and their families. Furthermore, they are also saving money to rebuild their homes and their lives once the war is over and they go back to their country.

PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT

The fact that SE organizations are offering a safe place where people with fewer opportunities can earn their money came out in this research. This was mentioned by all the respondents however each of them had different reasons. For the Spanish and Croatian organizations that usually employ people with physical or intellectual disabilities, they see their organization as a safe place where the employee has the same rights as other workers, and they are offered equal opportunities as anyone else. Rita from Croatia and Carlos from Spain reported that the young people felt safe and welcomed at this place of work and felt that they were part of the community they formed part of. Omar pointed out that the people that they work with are not just rejected from working with commercial companies, but some of them experience rejection from the people in the community that they form part of. Thus, feeling that they are welcomed and part of the community leaves a very positive impact on them giving them a sense of 'feel good factor as it gives them a meaning in life and they feel that they have a purpose in life.'

Rita shared the same opinion on the issue of a protected environment. She said that in Croatia 'parents are protective and don't encourage these youth with fewer opportunities to try out things by themselves'. Other respondents expressed this same feeling, saying that often parents were worried that their children would be manipulated at their place of work and also possibly bullied. This results in parents being overprotective and in a lot of cases this leads to the children feeling suffocated and can also decrease their overall independence. Therefore, when these youth are employed within the SE, they often start on a trial period to reassure both the employees and their parents that they are in a protected environment.

Catia from Portugal also expressed that several of the youths in their organization told her that thanks to the organization that employed them, they felt that they had matured and become independent of their families, they felt that they had a place in society and that they can give something back to the community that had given them so much.

It is a common practice for young people with disabilities or have fewer opportunities to be left at home, secluded from the rest of the community. This leads them to live a solitary life without opportunities to engage with people within the community. Thanks to SE these young people are given a chance to build new relationships and social bonds with other people, while their parents are given time to take a rest, they see them getting more and more independent in life, which is something that offers them peace of mind.

IMPACT 2: EDUCATION

Tracy (2019) states that work is not just to earn money but also a source of education and a means by which one can practice and improve skills and talents. During the interviews, it was noted that all the organizations had the employees' education as a top priority. Apart from giving monetary payments to their employees, these SEs made sure to give another type of payment, an education. This was carried out directly or indirectly during the working experience. Each organisation had different areas on what to concentrate on when educating the youth. The focus on education came from the challenges or problems that these youth faced. For example, when it comes to the organisation from Egypt, the focus is on behavioural education and how to control motions and other behavioural education, because that group of young people had a lack of education in that area. The organizations like the one in Portugal focused on general education including literacy programmes. They employed several dropout students, most of them had a low level of education while some of them were illiterate. There was a need to focus on this type of education and help these youth become literate. In organisation with people with disability, the focus of the education was on how to overcome the disability they have.

One can see that SE organisations are not there just to take a service from their workers. SE organisations are there also to invest in the education of the young people they employ. In the long run, as Walid said, these young people will benefit from this as they will be better educated, the SE organisation will benefit as it will have a better-educated staff that can do more tasks, and society in general also benefits.

The youth are also given official recognition for the education that they take part in. This official recognition comes in the form of a certificate. This certificate also enriches the curriculum vitae of these youth, increasing their chances of future employment opportunities in other jobs.

WORK EXPERIENCE

One form of educational experience that these youth get from working in SE organisations is the working experience itself. All respondents mentioned that the young people they employed were usually rejected elsewhere not just because of their situation which made them people with fewer opportunities, but also because they did not have any work experience. For most of them, employment in the SE organization is their first work experience. As the representative from Portugal said, the work in the SE served as a good working experience that strengthened their curriculum vitae. This is vital, especially for youth who are dropouts from school and who have few or no school certificates at all.

Employment in SE organizations acts as an opportunity for youth to enrich their skills. Abasi states that SE is a model that promotes learning and utilization of skills. 'They have the opportunity to create and use their skills in the organization. If you are passionate about something, we will help you use that to contribute to the community. We give the opportunity to all especially people with fewer opportunities.' Walid concurs by stating that 'they can develop and polish skills that they need both in their jobs and their daily life'. This is also brought up by Omar who explains that the skills learned can be used in later stages of life, for instance in the case of refugees in Jordan, where these skills can be used to rebuild communities back home when they return.

Another aspect brought out in youth having such working opportunities is the element of responsibility. Catia explained that one of the characteristics that are common amongst young people with fewer opportunities is the fact that most of them, during their lives have been cared for by others. Be it their parents, relatives, or institutions that made decisions for them and thus this removed the aspect of accountability and responsibility from these young people. However, the work offered through SE, allows young people to have the chance to shoulder responsibility and continue the process of character maturation and development.

IMPACT 3: PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Another factor that was raised in this study is the mental health of people with fewer opportunities that work in these organizations. All the respondents mentioned that the mental health of their workers is of great importance as is the physical health of their workers. Such organizations provide a mentor, who spends most of the time is a qualified psychologist, to work with the youth employed. The role of the mentor is to assist these young people in their experience by accompanying them and giving them a helping hand when they need it. Rita and Carlo state that the help offered by the mentor is not related solely to work-related problems. Employees can open up about any problems that they have even in their personal life. As Rita said, 'taking care of the person holistically is of utmost importance for us as an organization'.

In Croatia, Rita explains that having a mentor as part of the organization was a condition they agreed on from the beginning when they met to initially start the organization. Furthermore, she states that 'it's not just that you are employing the people, but you are following them on a psychological level'. Carlo shares the same opinion explaining that this role is essential as 'the mentor is working together with the people providing support and motivating them'. The mentor builds a relationship with these young people and helps with any issues that arise now and then. Walid, Abasi, and Omar further add that the organization must adapt to the youth's needs for the work experience to leave a positive impact. A mentor helps the organisation adapt to the needs of every youth.

Furthermore, SE organizations take various steps and approaches to care for the psychological well-being of their people. Each organization makes sure to help employees believe in themselves and help them to feel valued and believe that they are important team players in the company. Catia said this surely 'helps them to increase their morale and their mental well-being'. This value is shared with the Palestinian organization. Walid explains that knowing that you are a valued member of the organization helps such youth feel appreciated and allows them to believe in themselves and their capabilities. For several decades, youth from Palestine have been demoralized and broken due to the ongoing conflict and occupation by foreign armed forces in the territory that they live in. Therefore, opportunities like this give them the opportunity to rebuild their confidence and thrive in the workplace as well as their everyday life. Moreover, respondents similarly expressed that other measures to support their employees were taken out of work to allow the staff to get to know each other. Carlo and Catia state these activities serve as a way to unite the employees and maintain social relationships.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP OFFERS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL OF US

During the research, respondents emphasized the importance that in SE it is 'all about being equal and the same.' All the organizations that took part in this study said that giving an equal voice to all the workers that make up the organization, is of utmost importance for them. The youth employed in these organizations are not seen just as a number but as a worker who can be easily replaced. As Abasi said, 'For us, every worker is special and all of us are on the same level.' The workers in these organizations are so well-respected and their opinion is so well-valued, that they are included in all major decisions taken by the organizations. This was reinforced when Omar from Egypt said, 'Their say is as important as ours when it comes to important decisions and their vote is as strong as our vote, when we need to vote on some decisions that need to be taken.'

Another interesting outcome that came out of this study was the fact that SE helps in the creation of a society that has equal opportunities for both genders. This came out strong during the interviews done with the Arabic organizations. During the interview, Omar opened up about the fact that women in Arabic countries are not treated equally to men, including when it comes to employment. He said that through SE they are working to give equal opportunities to both males and females. This is also being done in the Palestinian and Egyptian organizations and Walid said that many females have thanked him for giving them equal opportunities as men and for giving them 'hope for a better and more equal future.'

This equality comes in various ways. Thanks to SE, women in these Arabic countries have gained economic independence and were not dependent on men for their material needs. Furthermore, as every person working in these organizations has an equal say when it comes to making decisions, women have been allowed to express their opinions, just like men. While this may seem like the norm in the Western world, for many of these females working in the Arabic culture, this was something new for many of them and has helped them to believe more in themselves and in what they are capable of doing.

CREATING A SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

During the interviews, respondents were asked if organizations following the SE model would help in creating a socially inclusive society. The respondents from Croatia, Jordan, and Egypt stated that they believe that the SE model does help to create a socially inclusive society because once these youth are accepted, they also feel that they have a place in society. This will motivate these youth to contribute more to society. When this happens, the society will accept them more. This takes place in a more amplified manner when it comes to the SE in Egypt that works with ex-convicts. The people in the community do not look positively at these ex-convicts, due to their troubled past and the problems they caused in the community. However, Abasi said that when the people see these ex-convict youth work and produce something be it a service or a product that the community is benefitting from, they 'sort of forgive these youth and welcome them back in the community.' When these youth feel welcomed, they are encouraged more and more to reform themselves and respect the people in the community that they form part of. This motivates them more and more to act in a well-behaved manner and not cause trouble like they did in the past. Thus, this is a win-win situation for both these youth and the community as well.

In Jordan, Omar stated that SE is serving as a platform, where local people and refugees work together, which is helping in breaking social/ethnic boundaries and any stereotypes that different groups of people might have. The respondent continued by saying that as humans we often tend to judge people and build our opinions on popular stereotypes. This comes from the fear of the unknown and is amplified by the media. By creating a place where these people can interact while working together, these stereotypes can be removed. This is happening in the community of people where the Jordanian SE operates.

Abasi agrees with the previous respondents. However, he pointed out that 'the most important thing about SE and social inclusivity is that the one who is leading the social enterprise, believes in the benefits of the social enterprise...because if one is establishing a social enterprise just to make a profit, then that will not be supportive of inclusive communities'.

On a different note, Carlo expressed that 'in a socially inclusive society our job as a social enterprise, would not make sense and would not be needed'. He said that this would be because 'everyone would have the same opportunities and the same chances to get those opportunities, thus why would we need a SE?' Catia shared similar beliefs and explained that in theory, yes SE does help to create a socially inclusive society but 'there needs to be some more work'.

She believes that people with fewer opportunities should 'not only have the same opportunities for all but the same level of access for these opportunities', and therefore in Portugal and probably many other countries, there needs to be more awareness and amendments, for this to happen.

On the notion of awareness, Walid explained further. SE can help in creating a socially inclusive society in places where there is ongoing conflict. In Palestine, the SE organization is helping people from Israel and Palestine interact together and work together. Walid believes that through communication, we can one day 'solve the conflict once and for all.' The respondent continued by stating that 'to communicate with each other we have to first build trust in each other and then once we trust one another we can openly communicate and work to resolve issues that we have'. The opportunity to work together allows people from different sides of the conflict to come together and aid in increasing awareness and trust in one another. Once this trust is built, they can talk about how to reach a conflict resolution.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Social entrepreneurship is also seen as that type of entrepreneurship that apart from taking good care of the social needs of the community it operates in, is a type of business that takes care of the environment surrounding it. Many of the social enterprises that are opening up are making sure that they are environmentally sustainable as much as possible. In social entrepreneurship money is not the sole or the prime target, companies are being careful what they do and how what they do is affecting the environment (Buys & Tedman-Jones, 2004). On the other hand, commercial enterprises usually cut corners and as they put money first, they will do whatever it takes to make profits and even make their profits grow.

Social enterprises help to conserve or save the environment because a good majority of them are making sure that they make use of renewable energy sources. Instead of increasing the carbon footprint, they are making sure to not contribute to it. Each company makes use of different renewable energies, depending on what exists within their country (Drencheva and Stephan, 2014).

Social enterprises are also helping in the conservation of the environment through the services or business ideas that they give. We are seeing a good number of social enterprises that are collecting trash from the sea and turning it into a product to sell. We have other social enterprises that use degraded lands to turn them back into forests. Thus, thanks to the business ideas of these social enterprises we see the environment gaining as well as it leaves a positive impact on it (Buys and Tedman-Jones, 2004).

Drencheva & Stephan, (2014) have tried to study how social enterprises are working to safeguard the environment. From the research, it came out that social entrepreneurs are usually people who believe in the same conspectus or have the same or similar values in life. They have the social concept at heart which is helping others in the community. Apart from that, the same people have environmental protection at heart. Thus, when these people open a social business, they make sure that they implement environmentally friendly measures in their business.

Video 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhgQk7_5e7c

CONCLUSION:

Social entrepreneurship is rapidly gaining ground in today's modern society. Organisations like youth organisations see the benefits that such type of entrepreneurship can offer to the young people that they work with, to the environment, and to their organisation itself. This type of entrepreneurship will continue to gain more momentum and will continue to bring change in the society we are a part of.