

WORKSHOP ON DEVELOPING TEACHING AND RESEARCH ON SOCIAL INNOVATION & SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (24th May 2022)

Presentation session (Morning)

The first talk of the day was delivered by Prof Richard Blundel provided a brief insight into the Social and Sustainable Enterprise (SSE) research cluster. The SSE cluster aims to address the connections between entrepreneurial activity, innovation, and the transition towards more environmentally and socially sustainable ways of doing business. He also noted the impact of renowned OU professors such as Rob Paton and Roger Spear works on social enterprise. Finally, he stated the SSE cluster has inputted their research insights and own case-based materials into Open University teaching materials, including B205 Exploring Innovation and Entrepreneurship, B327 Creating Futures: Sustainable Enterprise and Innovation and the new MBA elective module BB851 Entrepreneurship in Context.

The second talk of day was given by Prof Richard Hazenberg of the Institute for Social Innovation and Impact at the University of Northampton (UoN). He noted that UoN is committed to social innovation which is why it is a changemaker campus. All students at UoN have usually have a module dedicated to learning about social innovation. He also expressed that some of the research they have conducted such as Explored social innovation ecosystems in higher education in South-East Asia was funded by The British Council. Further, the UoN utilises a 'place-based learning' approach in their teaching to ensure their students are socially aware, be able to 'think laterally' and approach societal problems from a new perspective.

From these first two speeches delivered, insights [questions] arising include:

- Is it possible to conduct research in social innovation/social enterprises using artificial intelligence or big data analytics?
- How can we involve the public sector in the teaching of social innovation/enterprise in HEIs?
- How can UoN assist the OU in enhancing their "place-based learning' approach to student learning?

The third talk of the day was a joint delivery by Dr Daniel Haslam and Dr Fidele Mutwarasibo of The Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership (CVSL) at the OU. They expressed the CVSL sees leadership as a shared collaborative space. They focus their research efforts on exploring the assumptions about the voluntary sector. The CVSL has also designed free courses via OpenLearn platform and engages in problem-focused practice teaching to communicate the value of the CVSL.

A key insight/question that arose from their talk is:

- How can the voluntary sector via the practice of social enterprise aid in reducing food poverty?
How can the sector influence policymaking in the area?

The fourth talk of the day was delivered by Nichola McAvoy, who is an Account Manager at Social Enterprise UK (SEUK). She noted that the SEUK has been in existence for 20 years and is the

representative body of the UK social enterprise sector. The SEUK is member-led with about 3,000 social enterprise members. She noted that 47% of social enterprises are under 5 years old and that financial sustainability is one of the main concerns of social enterprises.

A key area for deliberation/research she raised is;

- How do we overcome the digital transformational gaps in the social enterprise sector?
- How is social enterprise an alternative form of international aid?
- 'Heropreneurship' in the social enterprise sector? How can this be addressed?

The final speech of the day was given by Jay Baughan, a Social Entrepreneur in Residence at the University of Northampton, UK. He has incorporated snack learning technique via technology to teach social impact. Also, the UoN has developed a changemaker incubator ensuring they can work with social entrepreneurs and innovators to future-proof and scale their existing services. He noted that he also developed PluggIn to use UoN measurement of social impact to become a barometer for UK social enterprises.

Following his talk, questions (insights) raised include:

- The need to understand the unique value proposition (UVP) of people interested in starting a social enterprise?
- How do we get social enterprises to become more sustainable? How can we aid them in operating in a more efficient manner?
- What 'language' do we need to make social enterprise understanding more accessible i.e., reach more people, communities, and organisations?
- How can social economy (i.e., social enterprises) be used to address the employment issues? (SEUK will be interested in this area).
- How can social enterprises participation in supply chain procurement make supply chain more ethical?

Group work session (Afternoon)

This part of the workshop was geared towards gaining insights on the ideas and initiatives including exploring potential collaborative synergies between the two universities.

Teaching

The following topics were raised during the teaching-related discussion as starting points for future research:

- Focus on the need to develop a toolkit to assess social enterprises that they can adjust to monitor changes through time.
- Unique areas related to social enterprises that are not currently fully explored by business schools such as social investment and impact measurement.

- Focus on the misunderstanding surrounding what a 'social enterprise' is about as this can have multiple applications. Produce clarity for the governmental organisations and the funding bodies allowing SE to access more funding and opportunities. Increase understanding of SE for the communities to allow SE to take root in the territory. Lastly, improve clarity for businesses that already operate as SE, but they are afraid to become one because of existing misconceptions (i.e., lack of profit). The idea could be developing a lexicon [a register] of social enterprise for people to use as a resource. Many participants believed that the SEUK can be the convener for such resources.
- Focus on the role of social enterprises in BAME communities or as a mechanism to promote inclusion and employability of BAME communities and/or newcomers (this is linked to the discussion within the Research session). To help with the non-recognition of BAME groups in many Social Enterprise Town initiative. For instance, the case of Northampton Social Enterprise Team.
- The 'collaboration paradox' (the need for and the difficulty in collaborations) for social enterprises: what is it and how can we address it especially on how it affects the link between social enterprises and the public sector?
- How can business school experts pitch ideas to social enterprise practitioners at the right level for them to understand?
- Focus on increasing the support in researching funding opportunities for SE. This could be translated into the need for business schools to build funding of social innovation/enterprise ideas into their learning module outcomes in a social enterprise course or the need for academics to compensate SE for their support with research and help with funding opportunities.
- SEUK has a high-profile audience of big businesses (about 30). How can their operations be scaled so that they could begin to see themselves as a social enterprise since they operate as one?

Next Steps Teaching

If you are interested in working on one of those topics in relation to teaching, please contact Giroletti Toa (TG) or Daniele Tori (DT) so that a working group can be established to carry on the discussion.

TG and DT aim at working with other partners to put together applications for funding to sustain the creation of bottom-up and co-created learning assets dedicated to social entrepreneurs and innovators. In particular, the aim is to explore the feasibility of

- the development of reflexive and flexible online assets useful to place-based learning, trying to overcome the barriers between academics, learners, and communities
- the development of learners-led resources integrating peers-learning (e.g., 'learning clubs') and action learning approaches
- consistent embedding of issues related to social entrepreneurship and innovation within the overall teaching offer

The funder initially identified is Friends Provident Foundation (FPF), which focuses on projects aiming at 'developing a fair economy' both at systemic and local levels. In particular, this funder is interested in supporting projects directed to local communities that can engage local actors and support their leadership, within a framework of upstream and long-term thinking that can be applied to different areas. The new funding round of FPF should open in Autumn 2022. In addition, another potential funder could be targeted is the Nuffield Foundation (Spring 2023).

Research

During the research discussion the following topics were highlighted as potential starting point to be developed for future research:

- Focus on the procurement processes of social enterprises, intended as both internal supply chain and the relation with the public sector: on one hand focusing upon the supply chain and its sustainability of the social enterprises on the other focusing upon the relation with the public sector and the integration of social enterprises in the public sector procurement processes
- The role of social enterprises in BAME communities or as a mechanism to promote inclusion and employability of BAME communities and/or newcomers.
- Explore and understand the role of social enterprise in participating with other actors in social innovation processes
- How policy and legal context can influence social enterprise activities and scalability

Next Steps Research

If you are interested in working on one of those topics, please contact Francesca Calo (FC) and we can establish a working group to develop. FC will work with international partners to respond to a EU Horizon call (Deadline 2023) on the topic the role of social economy in a changing world of work which potentially can address the second point above highlighted. In addition to that FC is particularly interested on the topic of social innovation and the relation between public and private actors in addressing complex problems.