

# ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS – A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL INNOVATIONS?

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## ABSTRACT

Along with globalization processes and adjustments – social and environmental problems that are challenging global sustainability in the labor market and society, it's essential to ask whether the demand for education is also changing? Having regard to the fact that in 2015 United Nations (UN) member states adopted the 17th Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) to address global challenges and emphasized the importance of quality education in Sustainable Development Goal 4 and The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have long recognized the need to develop skilled people through education. As they strive to find new sources of growth to underpin a solid and sustainable future, it is crucial to understand the best ways to advance social innovation, which is key to solving these increasing demands in the entrepreneurial process. It can manifest itself in various elements of pedagogical work.

The study conducted content analysis to find out how social innovations and entrepreneurial skills show in the experience of four academic representatives of educational sciences to analyze various perspectives and opportunities of social innovation implementation by promoting entrepreneurial skills.

To reach the aim of the research, three following questions were asked:

1. How has the meaning of social innovation in the educational sciences changed since 2015, when UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and 17 Sustainable Development goals (SDGs)?
2. What entrepreneurial skills help implement social innovation in the educational sciences?
3. What are the most critical factors for the sustainable social innovations implemented in the educational sciences?

The study results reveal diverse and ordinary comprehensions depending on professional academic experience, which has been listed and analyzed through the theories of social innovation.

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial skills, Higher education, Education for Sustainable Development, Pedagogical entrepreneurship, Social Innovations*

## Introduction

The increasing global inequality of opportunities and individual marginalization call for initiative and innovation to promote individual participation in democratic institutions, social unity, and justice, and human rights and autonomy, which all profoundly impact society and the economy (United Nations, 2020).

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Transforming Our World: A 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, or Agenda 2030. It sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 sub-targets for global poverty reduction and sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

All 17 goals of sustainable development that affect the environment, society, and the economy are essential, but none of them can be achieved without education. That is why United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is developing various initiatives to strengthen the role of education in global processes.

However, in the Prospective Report on the Future of Social Innovation in Education, it is mentioned that numerous social, economic, and technological developments keep bringing changes to the context in which policy making aims to shape the future of education (European Union, 2020).

In 2020, the International Commission on the Future of Education was established. Within two years, in the process of the global consultation, it formulated a vision for education development in 2050, placing education as a common good for society (UNESCO, 2021).

All the above-mentioned means that there is a growing consensus among practitioners, policymakers, and the research community that technological innovations alone cannot overcome the social and economic challenges modern societies – including the field of education – are facing. The importance of social innovation in successfully addressing social, economic, political, and environmental challenges of the twenty-first century has been recognized from a global perspective (Domanski et al., 2020). This shows that without relevant social skills, we will not be able to succeed in tackling the challenges of sustainability.

Some skills have been identified as being fundamental in developing innovation: 1) creativity; 2) self-efficacy; 3) energy and enthusiasm; 4) empathy and curiosity; 5) brokering, linked to empathy; 6) risk-propensity, 7) leadership (Zazzerini, 2021). These skills almost overlap with the entrepreneurial skills (Lackeus, 2015), which are formed, consolidated, and, finally, realized by separate individuals due to certain abilities characteristic to everyone in varying degrees. These separately identified abilities determine general entrepreneurial ability, as well as his ability to

engage in entrepreneurship in the innovation sphere where the long-term social and sustainable projects can be developed. It has been researched that innovation and entrepreneurial skills can be acquired, trained, and developed over time (Zizzerini, 2021) thereby the educational process can be used as an instrument for the development of entrepreneurial skills and innovative solutions in diverse spheres of life.

The research problem is formulated based on the social innovation perspectives developed by Matteo Bonifacio (2014), analyzing policy documents.

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) addressed to the **social demand perspective**, which applies to the most vulnerable social groups to reduce such issues as poverty (United Nations, 2000; Bonifacio, 2014; Komarkova et al., 2015).

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) follow the perspective of a societal challenge and help address societal challenges in various areas – environmental, economic, and societal- showing that these areas are not separate but interlinked (United Nations, 2015; Bonifacio, 2014; Komarkova et al., 2015).

In turn, the UNESCO report on the Futures of Education shows a **systemic perspective to change** and promotes the change and a new culture of cooperation, emphasizing the well-being of people through education as a common good for society (UNESCO, 2021; Bonifacio, 2014; Komarkova et al., 2015).

All the above shows that understanding social innovation from a global perspective has been very diverse and multifaceted. Still, it is only in recent years that international policy documents have shown that the issue of social innovation is also becoming relevant in education. Hence, there are still challenges to successfully implementing them and making them sustainable (European Union, 2020; Oeij et al., 2019). Therefore, this article will focus on promoting social innovation through entrepreneurial skills.

## **Entrepreneurial skills as a Pathway to Sustainable Social Innovations**

Although entrepreneurship has a long history in academic research, policy, and practice – as an economic, organizational, and individual phenomenon, initially, the conceptualization of entrepreneurship competence was strongly dependent on the financial aspects of entrepreneurship (Komarkova et al., 2015). Since the 20th century, the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter viewed entrepreneurs as agents of change responsible for the 'creative destruction' that happens as a consequence of entrepreneurial activity, accordingly, presenting the element of innovation and introducing a new value proposition (Schumpeter, 1934).

Entrepreneurship competence, defined as a “sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, is recognized by the European Union as one of the eight key competencies for lifelong learning. It has been stated that entrepreneurship competence is necessary for all members of a knowledge-based society (European Parliament and Council, 2006) where many reasons can be said. For instance, the development of entrepreneurial skills deals with the promotion of creative skills that can be used in practice, education and an environment that supports innovation (Binks et al., 2006; Gundry et al., 2014). Within the framework presented in EntreComp, entrepreneurial skills are described as a basic generic competence applicable to individuals and groups and include three competence areas and 15 dimensions (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). The three competence areas presented in EntreComp are interconnected:

- 1) ideas and opportunities – the ability to spot opportunities, creativity, vision, evaluation of ideas, ethical and sustainable thinking;
- 2) resources – assessment of one’s abilities, motivation, and perseverance, mobilizing resources, financial and economic competence, communication, and human resources mobilization;
- 3) into action – initiative, planning, action in times of uncertainty, teamwork, learning from experience (Bacigalupo et al., 2016).

Proactivity and risk-taking is a part of entrepreneurial skills, and it has been researched that proactivity and risk-taking influence the number of innovations generated (Pérez-Luño et al., 2011) where social as well as purely commercial products and services are made. Entrepreneurial ability also demands adaptive behaviors and schemes to impact others’ activity in associative factors (Ferris et al., 2005; Tocher et al., 2012), in that way promoting innovation and initiate high returns (Wei et al., 2019).

The link between innovation and entrepreneurship has been widely discussed in research (Komarkova et al., 2015), and there are stated two main models of entrepreneurs:

- 1) those who run the business without any innovation and
- 2) those who transform innovative ideas into economically viable ventures (Baumol, 1993).

Although mainly entrepreneurs are associated with business, different types of terms and broader meanings than commercial can be applied. In this research, the authors step beyond the traditional view and look at the general concept of the relation between entrepreneurial skills and social innovations, considering that innovations (either social or commercial or both) are a part of alert types of firms. There is a particular term for entrepreneurial employers defined – intrapreneurs, that presents an emerging behavior that involves intentions and actions that depart from ‘customary ways of doing business’ (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001; 2003), and it plays

a vital role in the innovativeness and competitiveness of established and large organizations (Pinchot, 1985; Zahra, 1991). Also, the term social entrepreneurship has been recently entering the global stage, and it is an emerging type of entrepreneurship that targets social/societal value creation. It may be seen as a phenomenon that combines two inseparable elements – economic and community/social – be they only different levels of the same action (Komarkova et al., 2015).

MacLean et al. (2013) identified three common characteristics between social innovation and social entrepreneurship:

- 1) innovation is the basis for both, with social entrepreneurship about channeling entrepreneurial activity towards solving social problems;
- 2) the creation of social value is central to both concepts;
- 3) the rise of social entrepreneurship is due to the increasing inability of the state to satisfy growing social welfare needs.

In this research, entrepreneurs are seen from a competence perspective, analyzing the characteristics that can be applied in diverse disciplines, including education and feeding the soil for generating innovative solutions. The innovative entrepreneur's characteristics are imagination, boldness, ingenuity, leadership, persistence, and determination (Baumol, 1993; Metcalfe, 2004; Kirzner, 1978; Komarkova et al., 2015). Five dimensions determine entrepreneurship: 'risk-taking,' 'innovativeness,' and 'proactiveness' together with 'autonomy' and 'competitive aggressiveness' (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Rauch et al., 2009). Innovativeness is associated with creativity and experimentation and leads to the conclusion that entrepreneurship and innovation are inseparable.

The concept of entrepreneurship is often associated with innovation, which does not always have to be a tradable product for the market – it can be a social innovation, for instance, in an education system, environmental policy, or social inequity (Altan, 2015).

Social innovation is critical in the entrepreneurial process. It can manifest itself in various elements of the educational field – where entrepreneurial academic staff see problems as opportunities for the social change they have envisioned (Van der Heijden et al., 2015).

However, it is essential to mention the general difference between social innovation and innovation. This difference is mainly due to the concept of 'social.' In this context, it is argued that social innovation does not mean technological advances or in the context of tangible goods or services, but the level of social practices that aims to benefit society (Oeij et al., 2019).

This means that social innovation is not only a difficult concept to define because the social element is hard to measure, but the term "innovation" concerning "social" is also a complex one (Van der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016; Ozdemir & Gupta, 2021).

In the context of current EU policies (2017), the term social innovation was used in the “European Pillar of Social Rights” to confirm the European commitment to the three categories: Equal opportunities and access to the labor market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion.

The definition of social innovation states it as new responses to current social needs and the development of new social relationships and different combination of forms of cooperation that go beyond established institutional contexts, enabling and reinvolving vulnerable groups either in or because of the innovation process (Unceta, et al., 2019) Thus, social innovations are social in terms of their goals and the means to achieve them (BEPA, 2010; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace, 2017).

Hence, if social innovation and innovation are seen as a process, then researchers use procedural phases in both. This process is inherently complex because many variables interact, and the outcome of their interactions cannot be predicted or controlled. Three successive phases are distinguished in the innovation process: invention, development, and implementation. Different stages require different skills and different types of stakeholders. (Garud et al., 2013).

Edwards-Schachter and Wallace (2017) state that identifying and addressing societal and wicked problems as drivers of social innovation goes along with the participation of ‘non-traditional’ actors such as civil society, third sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, social entrepreneurs, and activists.

Importantly, especially in education, many definitions of social innovation emphasize the empowerment of citizens as a primary aim. This distinguishes social innovations from other services consumed and driven by demand based on prices, income, and preferences. Social innovations attempt to assign new roles and relationships (e.g., between groups in society) to individuals or parts of society in need, and they develop assets and capabilities and the more efficient and environmentally sustainable use of existing assets and resources (Von Jacobi & Chiaperro, 2015; Windrum et al., 2016).

In this research, the focus is on social innovations in the field of educational sciences. Due to the changing demands and ongoing challenges, academic staff, students, and other stakeholders must show initiative that has a positive relationship with innovation (Naldi et al., 2007). Students’ views on their entrepreneurship education are related to their perception of innovation; fostering innovation through entrepreneurship education is the primary task of universities. Innovative awareness and creative ability are the core process of students’ innovation activities, which are also influenced by innovative personality. It might enhance the confidence of the students that they will be able to solve new and unexpected problems (Wei et al., 2019).

Students and academic staff with entrepreneurial skills can more effectively cope with environmental uncertainties and new challenges (Brian & Norma, 2010; Seikkula-Leino, 2011; Premand et al., 2016; Ferris et al., 2000) recognize opportunities and exploitation, take risks and innovate (Chandler & Hanks, 1994; Fillis & Rentschler, 2010). Opportunity recognition is defined as the process of identifying new and potentially successful ideas (Shane & Eckhardt, 2003), which are influenced by individual characteristics and contextual factors (Wei et al., 2019) in education, it can be observed in the classroom and lectures where teachers and professors evaluate the needs of the concrete audience and create appropriate solutions/ innovations to improve the quality of the study. Entrepreneurial activities are present in diverse levels of educational discipline, starting with the teacher to academic and non-academic institutions such as social enterprises that offers topical solutions. For instance, digital applications were developed during the pandemic to facilitate the learning and teaching process.

Another significant factor of entrepreneurial skills is a social network and interpersonal relationships that help expand the scope of resource acquisition and improve the ability of resource integration. Interpersonal relationships help participants understand and implement innovative decisions and enhance the efficiency of resource development and product innovation (Wei et al., 2019).

In summary, specific entrepreneurial skills, such as proactivity, risk-taking, teamwork, spotting opportunities, and resource management, are catalysts for innovative actions. The outcome of innovation is the generated value, which may have the form of economic and financial gains, be it of social, societal, environmental, and cultural nature, or a combination of all these factors as encountered in academic debate. More importantly, this value should be novel – a result of the creative variety of resources and innovative capabilities that respond to existing (or future) opportunities.

All things considered, the concept of entrepreneurship is often associated with innovation, which does not necessarily have to be a market product – it can be a social innovation, for example, in the education system. Social innovation is a difficult concept to define, as the social element is difficult to measure; it is also reflected in the meaning of the term “innovation” in relation to “social.”

However, the main difference between social innovation and innovation, in general, is that social innovation is social in terms of its goals and the means to achieve them, emphasizing the empowerment of citizens as a primary goal. Additionally, similarities can be found by analyzing social innovation and innovation from a procedural perspective, where both can be implemented in three phases: invention, development, and implementation.

Entrepreneurship skills – opportunity recognition, creativity, evaluation of ideas, ethical and sustainable thinking, mobilizing resources, initiative, and proactivity can foster social innovations in educational sciences – where the academic staff sees problems as opportunities for their intended social change and by using resources deals with global, national, and community issues, fostering sustainability.

## Methods

Content analysis was used in this study to analyze various perspectives and opportunities for social innovation implementation by promoting entrepreneurial skills through the experience of four academic representatives of the educational sciences field.

To reach the aim of the research, four research tasks were performed:

1. Conduct four structured interviews with experts from educational sciences and social entrepreneurship fields.
2. Store data in the QSR NVivo 12 program.
3. Analyse data using an Inductive qualitative content analysis approach with three main phases (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).
4. Structure and report findings.

To perform the first task of the study, four remote interviews were organized with educational science field experts. Discussions took about 30 minutes and consisted of three open-ended questions:

1. How has the meaning of social innovation in the educational sciences changed since 2015, when UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and 17 Sustainable Development goals (SDGs)?
2. What entrepreneurial skills help implement social innovation in the educational sciences?
3. What are the most critical factors for the sustainable social innovations implemented in the educational sciences?

The inductive coding process was represented in three main phases: preparation, organizing, and reporting (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

In the **Preparation** phase, units of analysis in the video format were transcribed in words. They were selected and stored as sentences and words as it was decided to analyze only manifest content without latent content.

In the second phase – **Organising**, researchers “got to know” unstructured data using QSR NVivo 12 – a qualitative data analysis program (QDA) with open coding (notes and text written), developing coding sheets (headings), grouping them by higher-order, categorizing and making abstractions – formulating a general description of the research topic through generating categories.



The last phase – **Reporting**, was the formulation of a general description of the research topic through generating categories and reporting results by developing categories and sub-categories. The aim of the third phase was to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon, and the outcome of the analysis is concepts or categories describing the phenomenon. Usually, the purpose of those concepts or types is to build up a model, conceptual system, conceptual map, or categories. (Elo, Kyngäs, 2008; Granenheim et al., 2017)

To ensure the validity of the open coding of the study data, categories and subcategories were discussed among the researchers and how the data would be labeled and re-coded as needed.

## Results

As a result of the inductive content analysis, three main categories were developed: Social Innovation in Education, Entrepreneurial Skills for Development of Social Innovation, and Criteria for Sustainable Social Innovation. Each of the three categories had several generic categories, and those were divided into several sub-categories. Categories were created based on the theoretical analysis of social innovation and entrepreneurship described in the previous chapters.

Regarding the first main category, six generic categories and 15 subcategories were developed. Experts emphasized that the first generic category – Innovation in the study process, can be a new study program, inclusive education, and Education for a Sustainable development approach where environmental issues can be tackled.

Second generic category – Added value in education implies science communication aspects, social entrepreneurship, intellectual commercialization, and interdisciplinarity aspects.

The third category – Global Competence, implies civic participation and citizen science that is needed to solve current global issues.

The fourth generic category emphasizes the paradigm shift in education, where the co-creation of knowledge is important. The teacher is no longer the only source of knowledge but creates knowledge together with the student.

The fifth general category is sustainability, which experts describe as a solution to significant ongoing social problems that have a long-term social impact.

The sixth category is a culture of cooperation, where experts mention the importance of cooperation between students and lecturers in the process of social innovation, as well as respect for students' needs and work-study balance (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Social innovation in Education category

<b>Main category</b>	<b>Generic category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>
Social innovation in education	Innovation in the study process	New study program Inclusive education Education for sustainable development
	Added value in education	Science communication Social entrepreneurship Intellectual commercialization Interdisciplinarity
	Global competence	Civic participation Citizen science
	Education paradigm shift	Co-creation of knowledge
	Sustainability	Solution for significant ongoing social problems which have long term social impact Comprehension about SDG's
	Culture of cooperation	Interaction of students and lecturers Student needs Work-studies balance

Regarding the second main category it be stated that entrepreneurial skills for the development of social innovation focuses on four generic categories (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Entrepreneurial Skills for the Development of Social Innovation Category

<b>Main category</b>	<b>Generic category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>
Entrepreneurial skills for the development of social innovation	Problem solving	Problem identification Focus Critical thinking
	Resources	Resource mobilisation Finding solutions by streamlining resources to create added value Planning and organising
	Communication	Co-creation Locally and globally
	Market analysis	Knowledge of society, Citizen science Ability to assess the impact of innovation on society Professional development

Problem solving which involves problem identification, critical thinking, and focus. The idea stands for ability and willingness to solve diverse problems – not only personal but societal as well. Resources that involve ability to plan and organise how to pool the necessary recourse to create an added value. Communication – within the community and globally if needed. It highlights the power of corporation and co creation. Market analysis – process of research where the social needs are discovered and the assessment of the impact of innovation on society is made.

Regarding the third main category – Criteria for Sustainable Social Innovation, experts mentioned three generic categories and seven subcategories.

The first generic category is Planning, where experts emphasize the importance of matching the needs of the labor market and students, attracting experts, performing Practice-based learning, Problem situation modeling, and solution prototyping to achieve sustainability in social innovation. The second generic category is feedback, where experts mention graduate testimonials like bachelor's, master's, or doctoral thesis, where sustainability issues can be tested. The third generic category is an example where experts mention that teachers or university lecturers need to be catalysts of change who inspire students. Lifelong learning also was mentioned as a criterion for sustainable social innovations and also voluntary work, which brings social innovation in practical dimensions and shows examples of its acquisition (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Criteria for Sustainable Social Innovation category

Main category	Generic category	Subcategory
Criteria for sustainable social innovation	Planning	Matching the needs of the labour market and students Attracting experts Practice-based learning Problem situation modelling and solution prototyping
	Feedback	Graduate testimonials
	Example	Teachers – catalysts of change Lifelong learning

## Discussion

Considering the Sustainable development goals as a topical policy stream, it can be acknowledged that Education for Sustainable Development is a newsworthy form of social innovation, as it addresses current social problems. However, the concept is complex and abstract because it aims to

integrate a balance between ecological, social, and economic dimensions into all aspects of teaching and learning. Corresponding is the concept of social innovation because it is difficult to define, and the social element is strenuous to measure.

## Conclusions

Concerning the results of the study, it can be stated that at the beginning of 2015, social innovations were more related to environmental problems. However, over time, the relevance of Sustainable Development appears in education. Social innovation acquires a new meaning in educational sciences as it relies on the global policy process and is used to address pressing social needs.

In the entrepreneurship definitions, the most indistinguishable concept of social innovation in social entrepreneurship as they have at least three similarities – innovation is the basis for both. They tend to solve social problems, satisfy growing social needs, and create social value in this process.

Entrepreneurial skills such as – initiative, problem-solving skills, vision, ability to pool and effectively use resources, to plan, organize, lead, commercialize, assess impact, collaborate, co-create, be flexible, reflect and use feedback, recognize opportunities, think ethically and sustainably support the creation of social innovation in the educational sciences.

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