

## **Corporate Social Entrepreneurship Practice: Lithuanian Case Analysis**

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**Abstract.** Corporate social entrepreneurship is a relatively new term proposed by the EMBRACE (ERASMUS+ programme Knowledge Alliance project "European Corporate Social Entrepreneurship Curriculum") team in 2020. The problematic area of this study is that previous scientists and business practitioners rarely analyze the corporate social entrepreneurship practice, and there is no consensus on this concept, especially in the Lithuanian case. As a result, this study explores the main peculiarities of corporate social entrepreneurship in Lithuania by benchmarking corporate social entrepreneurship practices in public and private sector organizations. The research methodology was based on qualitative and quantitative methods such as expert interviews and focus groups. The findings of this study show that in order to disseminate and implement corporate social entrepreneurship practices in small and medium-size Lithuanian companies, there is a strong need for better cooperation between business and higher education institutions to prepare skillful business professionals.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, corporate social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, case study.

## **1. Introduction**

Globalization, technology development, and a knowledge-driven global economy demand a more significant emphasis on addressing the issues of social inclusion, social equality and engaging society in research and innovation processes to generate solutions responsive to societal needs (EMBRACE, 2020). Such direction can be achieved if the open, collaborative engagement between public and private organizations in society exists (Plewa, Galán-Muros, & Davey, 2015).

The foundation key to developing such an inclusive, cooperative, socially aware entrepreneurial society is linked to learning communities mindset transformation through comprehensive social entrepreneurship education (EMBRACE, 2020; Marzocchi, Kitagawa, & Sánchez-Barrioluengo, 2019; Shahid & Alarifi, 2021). Scientists still highlight a lack of studies and consensus on the social entrepreneurship concept and practice in different regions and sectors (Ibáñez, 2021; Sheldon, Pollock, & Daniele, 2017; Wang, Rasoolimanesh, & Kunasekaran, 2021). There is a strong need to explore Lithuanian social entrepreneurship practices to facilitate and fulfill these gaps.

The first direction could be to establish, within the framework of the social business initiative, a favorable environment for social economy stakeholders to be aware of the need to identify actions to increase the visibility of corporate social entrepreneurship and the development of a more socially conscious entrepreneurial society (EMBRACE, 2020). This awareness-building can be achieved through collaboration between the public and private sectors to a unique horizon scanning mechanism that identifies new technological and societal trends for creating mutual value for organizations and society.

The second dimension is the co-design, co-development, and co-implementation of an innovative, multidisciplinary European and Lithuanian corporate social entrepreneurship practice to be incorporated into higher education institutions' programs (EMBRACE, 2020). The output of such a study could be more competent graduates capable of contributing more effectively and efficiently to public and private sectors to implement various social entrepreneurship practices.

The third dimension is establishing a sustainable environment that facilitates flow, exchange, and co-creation of knowledge between higher education institutions and business organizations, resulting in new social entrepreneurship opportunities dealing with social change both external and within organizations (EMBRACE, 2020).

As a result, these main dimensions generate a conceptual framework of transversal competencies learning and appliance throughout higher education institutions that are transferable to various social entrepreneurship practices. In order to get closer to these main directions, this study aims to explore the main peculiarities of corporate social entrepreneurship in Lithuania by benchmarking corporate social entrepreneurship practices in public and private sector

organizations. The research methodology was based on expert evaluation, including expert interviews and focus groups techniques.

## **2. Problematic Areas and Need for Corporate Social Entrepreneurship Study**

The recent economic crisis during the Covid-19 underlined that Europe's struggles to respond to unemployment rates had risen (Look, Pickert, & Pogkas, 2021). At the same time, public and private sectors have difficulties hiring relevant staff because of a lack of experience and core competencies, and graduates face challenges finding satisfying employment due to experience and lack of practical competencies. Also, some studies (OECD, 2017) show that graduates highlight the lack of knowledge and low-value assessment of the new skills required by the current flexible labor market. Based on European statistics, youth unemployment is rising (Statista, 2021b), economies are shrinking, job losses continue (Statista, 2021a), and inequality is widening. In order to address these issues, higher education institutions are increasingly relied upon to move beyond the realms of theoretical knowledge appliance and enable learning communities to access job market opportunities and engage in European and Lithuanian economies. Higher education institutions must find new ways to provide entrepreneurship practices in a dynamic and unpredictable economic climate. Entrepreneurship education has long been acknowledged as one solution to youth economic marginalization (Nungsari, Ngu, Chin, & Flanders, 2021). Higher education institutions play an essential role in entrepreneurial learning because they can offer safe, open, simulative, or collaborative environments (Tejero, Pau, & Leon, 2019). Although, higher education institutions can have different roles and impacts on developing entrepreneurial mindsets among learning communities (Chepurensko, Kristalova, & Wyrwich, 2019). However, the emphasis in higher education institutions has principally been on entrepreneurship education, which is very important because it presents entrepreneurship as a possible self-realization mechanism, career choice and acts as an encouraging developer of the mindset needed in entrepreneurial practice (Azizi & Mahmoudi, 2019; García-Uceda, Murillo-Luna, & Asín Lafuente, 2019). Entrepreneurship education is beneficial, regardless of possibilities of self-efficacy, self-realization, starting businesses, or forging a career (Kummitha & Kummitha, 2021). Intrapreneurship is also valued by organizations that care about risk management and change management competencies needed within organizations (Gawke, Gorgievski, & Bakker, 2019). The benefits of entrepreneurship education are not limited to boosting start-ups and innovative ventures (Daneshjoovash & Hosseini, 2019). Entrepreneurship education programs can be defined as curricula (Daneshjoovash & Hosseini, 2019) for improving entrepreneurial competencies (set of knowledge, abilities, and skills) (Westhead & Solesvik, 2016) and helping communities to learn to be more self-confident and creative in various activities by

developing resources for specific entrepreneurial purposes (Zheng, Yang, Zhang, & Yang, 2021).

Based on previous entrepreneurship studies, there is a strong need for university-business collaboration to develop the necessary levels of the self-confident community leading to self-realization of uniqueness based on creativity and innovation outcomes further to intertwine education and entrepreneurship by application of solution-based learning. Thus, active cooperation between higher education institutions, public and private organizations, and learning communities makes entrepreneurial learning relevant to social entrepreneurship practice.

A close collaboration of the established partnership between higher education institutions, public and private organizations, and learning communities, and the identification of new technological and societal trends, will enable to co-exploit practical entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial experiences to be transferred into the European and Lithuanian corporate social entrepreneurship practice. This field is an emerging area in higher education institutions seeking to effectively and efficiently manage the knowledge cycle consisting of knowledge acquisition, creation, storage, sharing, and application (Kordab, Raudeliuniene, & Meidute-Kavaliauskiene, 2020; Raudeliūnienė, Tvaronavičienė, & Blažytė, 2020). As a result, it builds this conceptual framework: entrepreneurship, corporate entrepreneurship, and social entrepreneurship and thus, provides a broad range of competencies to be integrated (EMBRACE, 2020, 2021).

Implementing this conceptual framework improves learning communities' competencies and facilitates integration and transition to public and private sectors. It will encourage learning communities to act as social intrapreneurs to serve societal needs better, generate new ideas within the auspices of the corporate umbrella, and take advantage of its strengths in networking and market share (Stewart, 2013). New social entrepreneurial competencies – empathy, teamwork, creativeness, and uniqueness in problem-solving leading to local and global leadership – are fundamental to public and private sectors as a possibility to be unique in value creation. As a result, more narrow studies in a corporate social entrepreneurship field can develop and scale social innovations within organizations by integrating global trends and technological advancement for deploying strategies and building the adopting set of core social entrepreneurial competencies to create social values for society and organizations.

### **3. Research Methodology**

In order to explore the main peculiarities of corporate social entrepreneurship in Lithuania, the research consisted of several stages and was conducted in May-September 2020. The methodology was based on various research methods combining qualitative and quantitative aspects.

The first stage was expert evaluation through interviews, including two experts

from both public and private sectors. The foremost expert was a corporate social entrepreneurship consultant who has developed social entrepreneurship initiatives and programs. The second expert was from the public sector to obtain detailed information about good social entrepreneurship practices in both sectors. The interview consisted of two parts: (1) corporate social entrepreneurship and critical elements and (2) representations of corporate social entrepreneurship education and training programs. The first part of the interview consisted of experts' considerations about organizations' integration of economic and social values; main challenges and differences between the public and the private sectors; specific examples of organizational practices that reveal the promotion and creation of social values; teams and departments to foster social activities; innovations to achieve advanced social entrepreneurship practices; instruments and actions for creating social values visible, etc. In the second part of the interview, two experts discussed the EMBRACE team's definition of corporate social entrepreneurship (EMBRACE, 2020, 2021), educational programs and courses to deliver social entrepreneurship practice change, public and private sectors collaboration in this field with higher education institutions, etc.

In the second stage, the expert evaluation consists of 34 potential experts working in sixteen Lithuanian higher education institutions in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda. Each higher education institution was chosen based on performed desk research and was identified as institution that had programmes or study subjects related to corporate social entrepreneurship: Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (expert was related to scientific research in social responsibility area), Mykolas Romeris University (expert was responsible for promoting entrepreneurship and social responsibility programmes and courses), Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (role of expert was linked to development of Business management programme), Vilnius University (expert was related to management Business program), University of Applied Sciences in Vilnius (expert was associated with teaching experience in corporate social responsibility and sustainable development), Kaunas University of Technology (role of expert was linked to teaching experience in entrepreneurship), Kaunas University of Applied Sciences (expert was related with teaching experience in corporate social responsibility and sustainable development). Seven experts agreed to participate in research based on the focus group technique.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

To interview the social entrepreneurship experts, two experts in this field agreed to participate. The first expert was a corporate social entrepreneurship consultant with more than five years of experience in this field and also has been the CEO of several companies and worked with several social start-ups. The second expert was from the public sector, targeting social integration, labor and employment, gender equality, social insurance, and other social aspects in order to diverse opinions from

private and public sectors. As a result, one expert was related to the development of innovative social businesses by consulting them as a freelancer, and the other expert worked at the Ministry of Social Security and Labor and was involved in activities targeted to socially vulnerable groups, analysis of societal needs, promoting social entrepreneurship in Lithuania, etc.

Even though experts had different approaches to the research object during the interview, both agreed that corporate social entrepreneurship is crucial for Lithuanian public and private organizations. This initiative started with large organizations or creating innovative companies leading to changes in public perception. During the interview was emphasized that small businesses in Lithuania pay much less attention to corporate social entrepreneurship because of a lack of capabilities and resources. A proactive attitude is related more to the company's or individual's maturity that creates social businesses and various initiatives (Table 1).

Table 1: Corporate social entrepreneurship (CSE) key elements in Lithuania based on expert evaluation results (Part I)

Questions/ Expert's insights	Expert 1 (private sector)	Expert 2 (public sector)
Considerations about companies that are working towards the integration of economic and social values	A significant change has been observed during the past 10-20 years. CSE has become popular and started with large companies in the bank and telecommunication sectors. Such companies have separate divisions or representatives to develop and maintain social values and systems. A lot of cultures come from Scandinavia. Suppose some of the business activities in the company hurt environment; in that case, they are keen to keep the balance. Small business pays much less attention to CSE as attitude is related to the company's maturity or individuals who create social businesses or initiatives—emerging new businesses created by a new perception of social values.	More and more companies are working towards CSE. We can see the emergence of start-ups and socially responsible businesses in the media. It has more to do with creating new, innovative companies and the change in public perception, and older companies must rethink their policies.
Main challenges related to CSE	Companies that seek to implement CSE must have enough capabilities, e.g., financial capabilities. Often small businesses do not have enough funds to implement CSE initiatives. Behavioral changes and employee resistance are also quite common in many cases as the CSE initiatives may not be supported. Sometimes CSE initiatives can come for suppliers and business partners to adhere to new standards or social behavior, attitudes, and norms.	The main challenge can be corporate self-awareness divided into two main aspects: legal regulation and social responsibility. In the first case, compliance with legal norms becomes apparent, not related to the existing social responsibility. In the second case, social responsibility is more a corporate policy arising from within rather than being let down from the outside.
CSE differences in the public and the private sectors	The CSE covers a wide range of activities. If there are some social problems, their solutions cannot be only cost-effective. Sometimes a private or state fund contribution is needed as care for the disabled, older people, etc. Often private initiative tends to yield better results. Ideally, if some actions come from private initiatives, personal experiences, and a deeper social perception of problems and challenges, in such cases, individuals are more aware and ready to act.	The social responsibility of private companies stems more from the inside. It is linked to the company's success policy, while public organizations pursue its policy by international standards, obligations, conventions, etc.
A specific example of an organizational practice that reveals the promotion, creation of social values	Such large, modern, and mature companies as Lithuania railways, Ignitis group.	It could be examples related to establishing sorting containers, promoting telework as protection of society by encouraging the safety of others, and employing people with disabilities in state organizations.

The experts noticed the main challenges related to corporate social entrepreneurship, such as financial capabilities and corporate self-awareness. Both experts indicated that the social responsibility in private companies stems more from the inside and is linked to the company's policy of success. At the same time, public organizations pursue their policy according to international standards, obligations, conventions, etc. Besides, it was noticed that private initiative tends to yield better results in large, modern, and mature companies. Both experts underlined that creating teams or departments to foster corporate social entrepreneurship is linked to the CEO's strategies and perspectives. One of the experts emphasized that steering groups or initiatives were not always related only to the company's board or top management if employees were more openly involved and willing to participate in social initiatives (Table 2).

Table 2: Corporate social entrepreneurship (CSE) key elements in Lithuania based on expert evaluation results (Part II)

Questions/ Expert's insights	Expert 1 (private sector)	Expert 2 (public sector)
Teams to foster CSE activities and usage of innovation to achieve advanced CSE practices	There are no statistics about it, but several banks and energy holding companies have such initiative teams unrelated to its board or top management. Then employees are more openly involved and more willing to participate in such cases. The very existence of such groups within the organization is already an innovation. These groups are informally encouraged by management in modern organizations.	There are rare cases in public institutions, but such policies and the establishment of groups are often linked to the CEO's initiatives.
Instruments, activities that would make the creation of social value credible and visible; what ways does double return (social and economic) take place in companies	It is often proper communication within the company that contributes to awareness and reputation formation. There could be public KPIs and measure the achievement of goals (ecological, sustainability, responsibility) where plans were expressed strongly and loudly (Profit-People-Planet) for awareness to grow and accountability. If it becomes a habit, it should appear as social impact reports. Marketing mantra – create, communicate and deliver value at a profit for a target audience at a profit (two goals are the needs of the customers, and at the same time satisfy shareholders). At this point, stakeholders' needs should be added to meet society's values and needs. Businesses need to do this without seeking short-term benefits from social activities. As a rule, there is a return in the long run. There are no benefits in the short term, but it would significantly improve ecology, employees' health, microclimate. Indirectly - increased productivity.	When working in the field of the most vulnerable groups of society, civil servants would be significantly helped by outcomes, meetings, or workshops with those groups of society. In this case, there is a gap in information about those groups.
Strategies and actions can companies perform/ implement with their stakeholders to optimize their social impact; the main needs and gaps in this area	The emergence of a common informal framework and more precise indicators of KPIs, which would make it possible to measure changes in performance and facilitate cooperation in the exchange of information, benchmarking oneself and others, would encourage individuals to focus on social entrepreneurship.	Development of a new concept of day employment for people with disabilities, i.e., making them close visitors to day centers and feel needed, useful, and active community members. We support those activities related to social contact. For disabled people, a gap could be called "a caring approach" and benefits provided, allowances system, which currently encourages people with disabilities to live actively.

Concerning cogenerating value importance of a common informal framework and more evident indicators of key performance indicators were emphasized. It would make it possible to measure changes in performance and facilitate cooperation in the exchange of information, benchmarking oneself and others, would encourage staff to focus on social entrepreneurship. One of the experts emphasized the importance of value creation to promote corporate social entrepreneurship practice. Besides, businesses need to do it without seeking short-term benefits from social activities because there is a long-run return (Table 1, 2).

Both experts agreed that corporate social entrepreneurship is a way of doing business so that all staff in any organization are fully aware of their role, responsibility, and contribution to the sustainable socio-economic enhancement of their organizations and the communities in which they live and work (EMBRACE, 2020, 2021). The corporate social entrepreneurship process includes creating an enabling entrepreneurial environment, fostering corporate social intrapreneurship, amplifying corporate purpose and values, and building strategic alliances to solve economic and social problems and promote the success of emerging innovative business strategies (EMBRACE, 2020, 2021).

The experts agreed on the necessity of corporate social entrepreneurship training and more communication and collaboration between stakeholders. Companies can take part in discussions; share good practices and what challenges and difficulties they have faced. Such workshops could be targeted to promote ideas for small communities and interested organizations. Social initiatives training could help employees be qualified about corporate social entrepreneurship to encourage them to participate in these activities. Such training for governmental organizations could help for transparency in key performance indicators (KPIs). Corporate social entrepreneurship courses for the executives and CEOs were proposed as part of the master study programs or separate study subjects. Also, one of the most crucial factors – the mindset of society – was emphasized. Young people coming with new approaches, some of them have volunteering experience, and information on corporate social entrepreneurship, new models, new possibilities, and activities could encourage acting in such direction (Table 3).

The second part of the expert evaluation consisted of 34 potential experts working in sixteen Lithuanian higher education institutions located in main Lithuanian cities. Seven experts agreed to participate in this research, and the expert evaluation was organized based on the focus group technique. All seven interviewees presented a quite similar perception of corporate social entrepreneurship. Several experts emphasized corporate social entrepreneurship as a process to enable the business to develop more advanced and powerful forms of corporate social responsibility as a new type of business model. The two types of higher education institutions were represented in this research: universities that have postgraduates, masters, and Ph.D. programs and colleges responsible for



postgraduate education.

Table 3: Representations of corporate social entrepreneurship (CSE) educational programs and training in Lithuania based on expert evaluation results

Questions/ Expert's insights	Expert 1 (private sector)	Expert 2 (public sector)
A need to develop educational courses and programs to deliver this disruptive change; ways how companies can collaborate with HEIs towards the co-design, co-development, and co-implementation of CSE courses to create this disruptive change	There is a need to popularize in the form of training and methodological materials. More communication and collaboration between stakeholders would be preferable to understand the current situation and assess the problem. Business companies gain more practical experience and can provide good practice examples. Universities could get used to offering the newest tendencies based on statistics, methodologies, models, standardization guidelines.	Companies can take part in discussions; share good practices and what challenges and difficulties they have faced. Those who are more active in this area are very valuable by giving a lecture.
Recommendations on how to design, develop and implement such courses	Promote this kind of course to mini-communities and interested private and public organizations. To organize training for the inspired staff of organizations to encourage them for CSE activities or for public organizations to make KPIs clearer. Also, provide specific CSE courses for executives and CEOs or propose CSE courses as a part of the study programs (modules or separate topics).	Promote as a part of existing courses offering good CSE practices.
Crucial skills for a graduate student to promote CSE mindset and practices at the workplace; an example of a company that has developed any program or initiative related to CSE with HEIs	Management-related skills targeted towards implementing social impact as the base value for any business organization. All large companies are keen to cooperate, for example, operating in the bank sector.	The most important would be the mindset. Young people coming with a new approach have volunteering experience, and information on CSE, new models, new possibilities, and activities could encourage acting in such direction.

These institutions' corporate social entrepreneurship discipline was delivered as a separate course or part of other management courses in both cases. During focus group discussion between experts by analyzing the different structures of study subjects, courses or modules concluded that corporate social responsibility and entrepreneurship were the most popular courses or part of other courses in all analyzed institutions. In sum, all social entrepreneurship courses reside within Business schools in higher education institutions. However, at the undergraduate level, these disciplines were often optional study subject choices (electives) for students from different fields like engineering, information technology, etc. Another vital aspect was noticed, that in part of institutions, these courses were taught as separate courses, for example, social business, corporate social responsibility, social responsibility in the organization, business principles, entrepreneurship, social business, etc. Other institutions chose to teach corporate social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, social awareness as part of various management-related courses, such as business ethics and social responsibility, consumer behavior,

creation of organizational culture, sustainable business development, management, total quality management, organizational behavior, etc. Based on focus group research results, at least several experts worked at institutions in the field of corporate social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility, and others were more concentrated in the entrepreneurship field. This concluded that in each major city (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda), institutions had staff interested in teaching these courses. However, only fewer experts were researching entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility and teaching based on scientific research results. Also, social companies were involved in the teaching process and actively participated in creating corporate social entrepreneurship courses.

In most cases, valuable collaboration with the government organizations was noticed. In sum, where businesses companies were engaging, it tended to be in program reviews, internships, and the need for new knowledge identification in entrepreneurship programs. All experts emphasized that having corporate social entrepreneurship in the study programs was very beneficial for their students as business professionals, whose activities can become essential factors in creating public welfare. According to experts, some students were purposefully interested in social business development as a new business direction, even if corporate social entrepreneurship courses were optional rather than mandatory. However, also several experts doubted students' necessity in selecting these courses. As a result, during focus groups discussions, it was suggested to emphasize corporate social entrepreneurship courses in collaboration with social partners operating in the social business industry.

## **5. Conclusions**

In order to explore the main peculiarities of corporate social entrepreneurship practices in Lithuania, the research consisted of several stages and was conducted in May-September 2020. The methodology was based on various research methods combining qualitative and quantitative aspects.

In the first part of the experts' evaluation, two experts agreed to participate in this study. The first expert was a corporate social entrepreneurship consultant and the CEO of several companies who worked with several social start-ups. The second expert was from the public sector, targeting social integration, labor and employment, gender equality, social insurance, and other social aspects to diverse opinions from private and public sectors. Both experts agreed that corporate social entrepreneurship is crucial for Lithuanian public and private organizations. The experts emphasized that small businesses in Lithuania pay much less attention to corporate social entrepreneurship because of a lack of capabilities and various resources. Also, it was noticed that companies face main challenges related to corporate social entrepreneurship, such as financial capabilities and corporate self-awareness. Social responsibility in private companies stems more from the inside

and is linked to the company's policy of success, while public organizations pursue their policy according to international standards, obligations, conventions, etc. Besides, it was underlined that private initiatives yield better results in large, modern, and mature companies. Both experts agreed on the necessity of corporate social entrepreneurship training and more communication and collaboration between business and higher education institutions.

The second part of the expert evaluation consisted of seven experts working in sixteen Lithuanian higher education institutions in main Lithuanian cities. All higher education institutions' experts presented a similar perception of corporate social entrepreneurship. Experts' evaluation results concluded that corporate social responsibility and entrepreneurship were the most popular courses or part of other courses in all analyzed higher education institutions. Also, experts emphasized that having corporate social entrepreneurship in the study programs was very beneficial for their students as business professionals.

The findings of this study show a strong need for better cooperation between business and higher education institutions to prepare competitive business professionals for implementing corporate social entrepreneurship practices in small and medium-size Lithuanian companies.

The limitations of this study are related to the single case approach and the small sample size collected to explore corporate social entrepreneurship practices in small and medium-size Lithuanian companies. Further research could be a survey and experts' evaluation of European small and medium-sized companies to identify better problematic areas in regions and good business examples in the corporate social entrepreneurship field.

## **Acknowledgments**

Funding: This study was partly supported by the ERASMUS+ Programme Knowledge Alliance project "European Corporate Social Entrepreneurship Curriculum" (EMBRACE), No. 612464-EPP-1-2019-1-IE-EPPKA2-KA.

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