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SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ENVIRONMENT IN LITHUANIA

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Social enterprises are created and are developing using market possibilities in Lithuania. The paper seeks to disclose the situation in Lithuania from the legal, economic, technological, environmental and the sociocultural positions, and hence provide the perspectives for potential social entrepreneurs to create or start such kind of business. Despite the enforcement from the government and EU policy focusing recent years on social enterprises, numerous problems in Lithuania such legal ambiguity, lack of knowledge and appropriate skills of human resources, lack of financial and cooperation support for social enterprises exist. The product and added value created by social enterprises remain difficult to understand and measure for people starting their own business. Management of social enterprises' activity stays complicated of lack of appropriate competences and skills. The paper seeks to disclose Lithuanian circumstances with respect to the legal, economic, technological, natural, and sociocultural positions, which provide the attitude of potential social entrepreneurs to create new ideas/ and start such kind of businesses and disclose main barriers for the development of social enterprises in Lithuania in terms of existing situation. Research methods include the scientific literature in depth analysis, statistical data analysis, situational analysis. The results of the paper present the situational factors of creating and developing social enterprises in Lithuania, especially emphasising the rural areas and their environment. The period of research was conducted from 2018 focusing mainly on three years period forward. Research methods include scientific literature in depth analysis, statistical data analysis, situational analysis.

Keywords: *social entrepreneurship, social enterprises, environment of social entrepreneurship*

INTRODUCTION

Social enterprises are taking more and more interest developing businesses in Lithuania. There are several crucial reasons for this development. The first one is a support from the EU funds for such kind of enterprises and activities. The second reason is the narrow market and necessity for innovative activities in Lithuania, especially considering rural areas (Greblikaite et al. 2017). Emigration, inflation, unemployment rates force the government and business owners to consider new possibilities in the market and to orientate their activities to the unexplored niches and possibilities. The paper's research aim is to present the recent situation of the social entrepreneurship and the social enterprises in EU and Lithuania and to provide the main situational factors affecting further development of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises. Despite the enforcement from the government and the EU policy provided during the recent years for social enterprises, there are still numerous problems in Lithuania such as legal ambiguity, lack of knowledge and appropriate skills of human resources, lack of financial and cooperation support for social enterprises. The product and added value created by social enterprises remain difficult to understand and measure for people starting their own business. The added value created by social enterprises can remain arguable. Managerial competences and skills might be lacking for successful implementation of ideas as support provided from state mechanism could be not enough for being socially entrepreneurial (Urmanaviciene et al., 2021). The paper seeks to disclose the situation in Lithuania from the legal, economic, technological, environmental and the sociocultural positions, and hence provide the perspectives for potential social entrepreneurs to create or start such kind of business. Research methods include scientific literature in depth analysis, statistical data analysis, situational analysis. The paper's objective is the environment of social entrepreneurship. . The period of research was conducted from 2018 focusing mainly on three years period forward.

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The research is fulfilled analysing statistical data, legal documents related social entrepreneurship especially focusing on period from 2018 forward three years and now. The methods applied in the article are scientific literature

analysis in depth, statistical data analysis, legal document analysis, situational analysis. The analysis of social entrepreneurship is based on theoretical assumption and later the situational analysis applied focusing on economic, legal, sociocultural, technological and research, and natural environment analysis evaluating the current conditions for social entrepreneurship in Lithuania in overall EU context and describing the main barriers in each environment as spheres for improvement. Different environments' conditions are measured in the range of *unfavourable* to *highly favourable*.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Research of social entrepreneurship arise from the two groups of the main causes. They might be called as self-raised and initiated. Self-raised causes are from the common EU, and the Lithuanian economic circumstance. The EU economy does not develop as fast as expected. The employment level is not sufficient, and the market is very competitive. This specific situation forces businesses to seek for new markets, new products, and new models of activity. The EU economy is socially oriented and is based on social integration and social cohesion. There are business challenges similar in Lithuania, Poland, and other countries. Some of the problems are more serious in Lithuania in comparison to other EU countries, such as lack of financial resources, lack of innovative activity, narrow internal market, separation of rural areas, the unequal development of regions, etc. Social entrepreneurship might be one of the solutions to solving these problems. Social economy consisted of more than 50 percent of some EU countries budget (UK, France, and others). There were 2.8 million social economy enterprises, representing 10% of all businesses in the EU. The European Commission itself, in its EU action plan for the circular economy, recognised that social economy enterprises will make "a key contribution to the circular economy (European Social and Economic Committee, 2017). Recently in Lithuania social business potential is more exploited but still not used enough. The implementation of social innovation just recently started. The EU economic development and the development of welfare society development is impossible without social entrepreneurship. These facts just strengthen the importance of this research.

Additional causes for researching social entrepreneurship are initiated causes. It might be helpful to be politically active and to take additional initiatives which are influenced by the first group of causes. It refers to the support of social entrepreneurship in the strategic level starting from the Lisbon 2000 strategy, continuing with „Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan“(European Economic and Social Committee, 2013). In these documents, the importance of social entrepreneurship, support for starting social business, for social entrepreneurs, development of entrepreneurial skills was clearly emphasized.

Social Business Initiative by EC (2014) described indicators concerning the dimensions of social entrepreneurship. First, the entrepreneurial aspect applies to the regular economic activity. This separates social business from the traditional nongovernmental organisations or social economy subjects, which seek social aims, but they are not involved in the regular economic activity. The important indicators are a) revenue from the market; b) employees. Second, the social aspect remains on social aim. The aim distinguishes the social business subjects from the traditional ones. The indicators of social dimension are a) description of organisational activities for social benefit; b) distinction of target benefit groups. In addition, the managerial aspect defines mechanisms that are devoted for social aims implementation and identifies the social business form traditional business and non-governmental organisations. In this case, main indicators are a) limited profit distribution; b) asset lock; c) autonomy: is organisation independent from public sector and other businesses and non-profits; d) participation in management of the enterprise; e) clarity of social business.

Lithuanian political and strategic initiatives on the state level started from the confirmation of social entrepreneurship concept in 2015. The role of the document is discussed in situational environment analysis.

Scientific research abroad about social entrepreneurship and social business are fulfilled more than 20 years already. The predecessors of the phenomena research could be named: Dees J. G. (1998, 2007), Dees et al. (2001) who researched social entrepreneur skills and abilities, Sullivan Mort, Weerawardena G. J., Carnegie K. (2006) were researching concept of social entrepreneurship, Mair J., Marti I (2006) analysed social entrepreneurship as a process where different resources were combined, M. Peredo and M. McLean (2006) devoted their attention to various peculiarities of this phenomena, Smith-Hunter A. E. (2008), Smith B. R. et al. (2009) analysed multidimensional aspects of the phenomena. Zahra Sh. A. etc. (2009) still were analysing conceptual questions of social entrepreneurship. Some research were made about social entrepreneurship as community business (Astromskienė A., Gargasas A., 2013, Lumpkin et al., 2018). Choi, N., & Majumdar, S. (2014) were focusing attention to aspects of resources in social entrepreneurship.

Later research about social entrepreneurship and related questions with it were analysed focusing on social value, social entrepreneurship, and socioeconomic context relations (Felicio J. A., Martin Goncalves H., da Conceicao Gonsalves V., 2013), birth and essence of hybrid organisations (Doherty B., Haugh H., Lyon F., 2014). But is important to emphasize that complex research still lacking, especially than focusing on context (for example, rural areas (Bencheva et al., 2017). Researchers try to identify management models of social entrepreneurship, analysing added value, competition conditions, consumption tendencies, etc.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Social entrepreneurship in EU

In the EU social business is acting in three spheres: integration to labour market, personal services, and development of socially abandoned territories. According to social economy development and tendencies social

entrepreneurship and social business is developing in two directions: traditional business is involved in social problems solving. The other way is for non-governmental organisations to apply traditional business models¹. Appropriate business models is business logic which allows to explain how organisation created, presents and fix the value. Social business creates dual value: economic and social one.

Social economy is the essence of EU. UK, Germany, Spain, France, Finland are those countries, where the biggest part of revenue is generated by social enterprises. The countries have different economy construct but in every of them social entrepreneurship and social enterprises are promoted and have huge positive effect.

Tendencies could be provided in other EU countries such as Denmark, Malta, Cyprus, Latvia, In these countries there is small interest in social entrepreneurship, social business and its development. Denmark is more focusing on high technologies sector, research, and this has correlation with business. In other hand, Malta, Cyprus or Latvia according to their economic data and indexes are close to each other. The economic situation in these countries is lower than average of the EU. Still these countries have small interest in social business models.

Lithuania according to social economy data generated results is in the same level as Slovakia, Romania, Ireland, Bulgaria. Situation is changing in these countries, still initiatives are developed slowly. Every country has different situation of its economy and decisions are different. Still good practices examples could be useful, especially in idea generation level. The same idea can be implemented differently, and it especially depends on legal system, support structure, management practice, social and cultural context in the countries. Franchising, international partnership, other forms of business can be used. Still social entrepreneurship implementation models and conditions often remain unique because of idea itself.

The result of social business can be created in public and private sectors. Social innovations can be implemented in both sectors as well (Ney et al., 2014). For example, Slovenia has difficulties implementing social innovation. The main barriers are supporting system, lack of recourses, risk, public support. There is management culture which does not support social innovation.

In Czech Republic, Italy, Hungary, Portugal, Estonia, Sweden, and Poland are quite successful implementing social economy principles. Overall situation analysis of the EU countries reveals that social economy implementation is in different levels. It could be provided some parallels that countries, which were stronger economically, has and more effectively implemented social economy and social entrepreneurship. The engine of social economy is small and medium-sized enterprises, which consist of more than 99 percentage of all enterprises in the EU. SMEs are priority of the EU business policy, but many problems and development inequalities. The main problems remain with lack of financial resources, tax burden, low added value created by SMEs, lack of innovative managerial approaches and solutions.

Situational analysis of Lithuanian environment of social entrepreneurship

For the development of the appropriate scenario of social entrepreneurship development, the external environment analysis is essential. The identification of the most important environmental factors will provide assumptions forming the background of the scenario environment.

Economic environment

Lithuanian economic situation remains complicated in recent years. Many efforts have been taken for the situation's improvement. The minimum salary was raised, salaries in public and private sectors were growing. Pension for retired people were raised, but still, it remains as one of the lowest in the EU countries². The structural reform still is planned due to pensions. The average salary remains one of the lowest in EU countries. Even GDP was growing constantly it did not provide integrated economic growth in Lithuania. The gap between the richest and the poorest is growing. According "Doing business" report 2023³ Lithuania has 34th place valuating conditions for establishing business and reform in here. The situation not improved much, still the most important barriers for creating and developing enterprises are:

- **Bureaucracy barriers.** The Lithuanian mechanism of establishing business is simplified for quite some time. But it might be complicated for the start-ups or for creating new enterprises. Electronic services are provided in special portal (www.valdziosvartai.lt) and more public services are provided online. Quality of services might be medium or not in a very useful and easy to use way for a customer. Legal regulation of business and enterprise activity is changed often, and recent bureaucratic conditions might be overwhelming especially than you do not have experience.
- **Tax system.** The Lithuanian taxation system is constantly under reforming process. Laws are changing often. Consequently, the tax rates are changing. The taxes for business are medium high in comparison with the other EU countries and this is not going in favour for foreign investors and new businesses. Especially, in terms of social entrepreneurship, in such countries as UK, France, Spain, the environment is more favourable for social entrepreneurs. The concept of social business much more developed, and the social economy flourishes in bigger amounts.
- **Intolerance of bankruptcy.** This barrier is not pure economic but conditioned by economic factors as well as the society's attitude. The Lithuanian Personal bankruptcy law is active but not very successful end of

¹ <https://ukmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/verslo-aplinka/smulkiojo-ir-vidutinio-verslo-politika/socialinis-verslas>

² <https://www.oecd.org/economy/lithuania-economic-snapshot/> Accessed at 2023 03 05.

³ <https://archive.doingbusiness.org/en/rankings> Accessed at 2023 05 06.

business is maintained due to failure for long time. Society attitude to bankruptcy becomes more favourable but changes from being unsuccessful to going to a new start can be difficult in many ways.

- **Lack of management experience and culture.** In Lithuania SMEs are short of the newest management knowledge due to the shortage of financial resources. Frequently, the enterprises with high revenue are not willing to invest in technologies or competencies. In rural areas or regional enterprises, it is popular to have one manager for all the managerial functions within the enterprise. The situation is the same even within the enterprises that are not on the micro level. In fact, the business owners believe that one manager could solve all the problems and that it is enough to have more human resources as labour force for implementing these functions. Such concentration of management functions creates problems related with time, effectiveness, competence etc.
- **Lack of ideas and innovations.** Ideas to start-up a business often arise not from the economic motives but as personal self-realisation issues. It is especially related with self-independence and self-esteem, but research discloses that young people quite often lack ideas for the entrepreneurial beginning (GUESSS Report, 2021). In the case of social entrepreneurship, ideas must be innovative and creative. On the other hand, it is vital for the ideas to be practical and useful.

Legal environment

In Lithuania political legal initiatives related to social entrepreneurship were adopted 8 years ago. The concept of social entrepreneurship was adopted in 2015 (LR Ūkio ministerija, 2015). It has main three aims: 1) create favourable legal environment to social business; 2) create favourable to social business financial and tax support system; 3) enforce popularity of social entrepreneurship. Concept of social entrepreneurship opened discussions about the phenomena. Attention to social innovation, social clusters, development of social business became more active. Social business concept must be integrated with other conceptions in political level, in the EU level and other organisation. It means that integrity and concept levelling with international level creates similar conditions and environment. The Law of Social enterprises provided just narrow part of overall social entrepreneurship and social business concept that limited the activity of potential enterprises. And now this act has been not functioning (from 2023 January 1). In Lithuania social enterprise is described as business model which is using market mechanism; profit is related to social aims and priorities, based on social responsibility and partnership between public and private sectors; social innovations are applied. In 2016 recommendations for social business development were adopted/ Here the biggest attention was paid to young people, social business orientation to society, positive effect to overall socioeconomic situation of the country.

But the new study about legal regulation environment for social entrepreneurship still shows challenges in using and interpretation of legal concepts (Pastorelli et al., 2022).

Sociocultural environment

Sociocultural environment is very important for creation and development of social entrepreneurship in the country, The vast of social problems, the gap between the richest and the poor, socially sensible groups 'variety and number promote to develop complex approach to social entrepreneurship. Social business activity models condition the complexity of business as much as involves all interest groups in such kind of business. Every group has its one interest (creates product, solves social problem, improves sociocultural climate in an enterprise or community, change's view to social business, etc.).

Sociocultural environment is conditioned by demographic citizen criteria. The number of citizens, migration flows, work force flows, demand for work force, salary system, low income are the factors which condition emigration form the country. For that reason, the demand for products and services can be reducing. On the other hand, ageing society provides opportunities for particular social business creation.

Technological and research environment

Technological environment remains as one of the most unfavourable environments for social entrepreneurship in Lithuania. There is not sufficient progress of science and research and development activity implementation in business companies, co-operation with science institutions. Lithuania has the gap from the countries with similar economic conditions and indexes. For example, Estonia is very friendly for innovations and is one of the leaders in EU. Latvia was showing better results as well even in 2015 (LR Ūkio ministerija, 2015) In Lithuania in business sector there are 18 percentage of employed research and development employees. In 2013 EU countries average was 52 (Lietuvos mokslo būklės apžvalga, 2013). By European Innovation Scoreboard in 2023 Lithuania remains as moderate innovator together with Estonia, Slovenia, Czechia, Italy, Spain, Malta, Portugal. Hungary, and Greece⁴. The main reason for rather high position is related with the number of citizens with higher education in the country. The number of research is growing as well.

Lithuania has rather low financing for research and development activity. Too little attention is paid to social innovation. SMEs were oriented to traditional business. Recent years changes can be seen in the market. New start-ups are created, and innovative ideas implemented. For social entrepreneurship social innovations are important as well as high value-added products and services could improve the situation. The challenge for social entrepreneurship is to raise competitiveness of the country creating social and economic value. In Lithuania the main reasons for innovative activity in enterprises are reaction to market changes, profit, product quality and market share growth (Balkienė, Jagminas,

⁴ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard_en Accessed at 2023.07.02.

2014). Lithuania is leading comparing with Poland, Romania, Latvia and Bulgaria with innovation implementation, but still is just improved by some points during evaluated time period⁵The main barriers of slow innovativeness of SMEs is related to high risk of investing in innovations, weak entrepreneurial skills, lack of qualified human resources. Lithuania is trying to reach 1,9 percentage for research and development from GDP from 2013 (Lietuvos mokslo būklės apžvalga, 2013).⁶From the other hand, social entrepreneurship innovations should be of special kind, they should have complex content, sociocultural integration, etc. That decisions make even more difficult to implement.

Natural environment

Sustainable consumption and sustainable development is inseparable from today business tendencies in EU. Lithuania has the same priorities. Social entrepreneurship especially oriented to sustainability. It provides for countries as Lithuania with limited natural resources possibilities to seek for new activities and ideas in rural areas. Agricultural enterprises diversify their activity integrating it with educational, tourism, sport activities based on social activity principles. Social business principles are inseparable from natural environment, landscape, historical heritage. Here it is possible to find various interesting ideas for social business creation and social entrepreneurship development (Titko et al., 2023).

Combining all the situational analysis results the overall evaluation of situation of macro environment for social entrepreneurship is provided below (see Table).

1 table. Evaluation of macroenvironment for social entrepreneurship in Lithuania

Types of environments	Evaluation of environment			
	Unfavourable	Weakly favourable	Moderate favourable	Highly favourable
Economic	-	+	-	-
Technological and research	-	+ (especially for SMEs)	+	-
Sociocultural	-	-	+	-
Natural	-	-	+	-

Source. Created by author.

The analysis provides that generally in Lithuania macroenvironment is moderate favourable for social business development, but legal and economic environment provide more barriers.

CONCLUSIONS

Socioeconomic culture in the EU provides favourable conditions for social entrepreneurship development. Social cohesion and social policy in member states provides the green light for positive interactions between business and society. Social entrepreneurship is developing strongly in part of EU countries, other are catching up understanding the strong impact on social interactions and integrity and long-term perspective as sustainable business. In Lithuania situational analysis of social entrepreneurship environment provides insight and conditions moderately favourable in sociocultural and natural environment for social entrepreneurs and their business development. Economic and technological environments still consist of more barriers than possibilities but have positive tendencies for improvement.

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⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/assets/rtd/eis/2023/ec_rtd_eis-country-profile-lt.pdf

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