IBESI

D2.1 Overview report of the training pilots

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Introduction

The main objective of the training pilots was to inform traditional startups and businesses about social entrepreneurship and social innovation concepts. The selected and piloted approach was to bring these ideas and methods directly to already existing entrepreneurial hubs, e.g. business support programs, incubators, accelerators, networks of startups, etc. The project approached the hubs and offered them a training module that could be incorporated within their programme or event series. Thus, the secondary goal was to also transfer knowledge to and build capacities among traditional innovation actors, e.g. hub managers, about social entrepreneurship. Three pilots were conducted, once in each Baltic State

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the training pilots to assess the success of the training and whether it is a useful tool for promoting social entrepreneurship and social innovation and for creating greater linkages between innovation ecosystem actors.

This report is based on the work carried out in Work Package 2 of the IBESI project: "Social entrepreneurship and innovation training module for existing hubs". This report falls under task 2.3, "Evaluation of the pilot", led by Baltic Innovation Agency (BIA). Other members of the IBESI consortium - Reach for Change (RfC) and Social Enterprise Estonia (SEE) – also contributed to preparing the report both as interviewees and reviewers of the final text. SEE, as the Work Package lead, provided an overview of the training programme framework and the trainings.

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1. Overview of the Training Pilots

1.1 Description of the Training Programme Framework

The training module **"Social Enterprise from Niche to Norm"**, coordinated by Social Enterprise Estonia (SEE), was piloted three times. The pilots took place on 13.09.2023 in Estonia, 24.10.2023 in Latvia, and 26.10.2023 in Lithuania. The aim of the training was **to inform traditional startups and businesses about social entrepreneurship and social innovation** concepts. The backbone of the training module were successful **social enterprise case studies**, through which the trainers shared theoretical knowledge and showed the participants how it is possible to turn their existing ideas into social enterprises.

The most important part for SEE when creating the training module was that it had to be **as practical as possible**. It had to include different success stories from all three Baltic countries, an explanation of what social entrepreneurship is, and what kind of problems it can solve. The second part of the training was about comparing social enterprises to for-profit enterprises and understanding that they are not so different.

The training was structured according to the **Kolb method**, which SEE has used for years in their trainings. First, the theory is discussed with the participants, then there is the practical part, and after that, it all comes together with reflection. SEE's long experience has shown that this is the best way to retain the material. Therefore, the training starts with discussing expectations so the trainer understands what to focus on. Then, the participants' knowledge about social entrepreneurship is clarified, and the formal definition is introduced. They move on to examples together, and the participants are constantly accompanied. The participants are asked why they think this way or what other examples they can give. At the end of the first half, the participants reflect together on the state of social entrepreneurship in their country.

In the second half, they must compare themselves and the social entrepreneurs. There is a brainstorming session on how to turn their existing business into a social enterprise. Finally, the training will be summarised with questions, feedback, and reflection. Throughout the training, there are various engagement methods, i.e., asking questions, using a Mentimeter for gauging opinions in real-time, discussing, debating, and brainstorming.

Initially, SEE created a version intended for a three-hour training. Based on the needs and feedback from some of the hubs, the training was also adjusted to an hour-and-a-half format. The training module concept can be found in Annex 1.

1.2 Overview of the Trainings

Estonia – Tartu Centre for Creative Industries

The first training took palce in Estonia on 13.09.2023 at the Tartu Centre for Creative Industries. This was the shorter, one-and-a-half-hour version, as their members are used to this length of training. The main focus was on the stories of social enterprises from different Baltic countries and learning about the SEE's activities to understand how they can be helpful to them. The hub explicitly requested a presentation about SEE. 8 entrepreneurs attended the training.

About the trainer: The training was conducted by Merili Ginter from Social Enterprise Estonia. She is the initiator and community leader of the Baltic's biggest sustainability festival, Impact Day. She raised 100,000 euros for people with diabetes with her friend in high school, was chosen as Estonia's influential young person #14 in 2017 and has been transforming social entrepreneurship for over 5 years.

Latvia – Riga Technical University

The second training occurred in Latvia on 24.10.2023 at the Riga Technical University (RTU) Science and Innovation Centre. It was the three-hour format of the training, and it was attended by 4 students and the IdeaLAB program manager. The RTU IdeaLAB is a pre-incubator that supports new or existing business ideas of RTU students, promotes the initiation of new business activities, and helps students develop and validate a business idea. The IdeaLAB mainly works with "traditional" business ideas. Most of the student attendees came from the IdeaLab programme.

About the trainers: It was conducted by Marija Mažič and Kristīne Vērpēja from Reach for Change (RfC). Marija is a Global Project Manager at RfC and has supported social entrepreneurs in developing their capacities for over five years. During this time, she primarily focused on early-stage SEs, helping them set up their businesses, mapping their impact measurement and management practices, and growing their teams and internal capacities. She also supported teams in the areas of scaling and system change. The focus of her work recently has been implementing and aligning project management tools and practices for the teams to ensure quality implementation and feasible scaling of programs. Kristīne's bio can be found below.

Lithuania – as part of an event organised by LISVA and Lithuanian Innovation Centre

The third training took place in Lithuania on 26.10.2023 as part of the "Businesses creating change and social innovation: a closer look" seminar, co-organised with the Lithuanian Social

Business Association (LISVA) and Lithuanian Innovation Centre. This training targeted different Lithuanian hubs that do not typically work with social enterprises. Entrepreneurs from the traditional tech as well as the social economy ecosystem were represented. Furthermore, there were tech consultants from different agencies that support businesses in general and mainly work with traditional hubs. For them, the training was adapted to include more examples and discussions on the topic of social entrepreneurship, as it was most relevant for this target group. It was a one-and-a-half-hour format. 22 people attended the training.

About the trainer: It was conducted by Kristīne Vērpēja, the Baltic Country Manager at the RfC. Kristīne has managed a business incubator, training programme, and mentoring for Latvian and Lithuanian social entrepreneurs. She also has experience conducting lectures and workshops on social entrepreneurship and social impact for a wide range of audiences, including students, foreign delegations, and specialists in various industries. She is also an Advisory Board member of the Latvian Social Entrepreneurship Association, and her areas of responsibility include impact measuring and management, as well as promoting cooperation between social entrepreneurs in the Baltic States.

2. Evaluation of the Training Pilots

2.1 Methodological Approach to Evaluation

Data has been collected from various parties involved in the training pilots – hosts of the hubs, trainers, and the Work Package leader - to help assess whether the pilot met its goals and how one should adjust the approach if replicated in the future. Data was collected via a survey and interviews. The survey and interview questionnaires are available in Annexes 2 and 3.

Each element of the evaluation framework served a specific purpose:

- The **participant survey** collected basic feedback on the training session, including content and setup. The purpose was to understand how the attendees liked the session. This input is valuable when designing similar short introductory training courses on social entrepreneurship. The survey was shared at the end of the training session, with specific time allocated on-site to fill it in. Although the trainings varied in length, trainers and context, the questions in the survey were kept the same. However, the survey was translated to Estonian for the pilot in Tartu, as the training was also conducted in Estonian. The other two trainings were conducted in English, so the questionnaire was also in English. The survey was carried out on Google Forms. Considering the small sample size (N=19, response rate 51%), the results of the three surveys have been merged to provide a more practical and comprehensive overview.

- **Interviews with the hubs' representatives** - the hosts of the training programmes - were carried out. These were the co-collaborators who welcomed the idea of an externally offered training module. The interviews aimed to hear whether the experience met their expectations and to collect input on how the training module could be further improved. The interviews were held on 09.10.2023, 10.11.2023 and 27.11.2023.

- **A group interview with trainers** was held to discuss what went well and what could be improved in the training module. The interview allowed to elaborate on some topics and results of the participants' and hosts' feedback. The one-hour semi-structured interview took place on 27.11.2023.

- **A separate interview** was also held with the Work Package leader on 05.01.2024 to get her take on how everything went overall.

2.2 Participant Survey

The data from the post-participation survey mainly gives an overview of the participants' profiles and general satisfaction with the experience. The results say little about whether such pilots held in pre-existing hubs achieve their broader goals; this aspect will be covered in the next sub-chapter on interview input.

Background

The participant profiles varied in terms of self-assessed prior knowledge on the topic (Figure 1) and were split regarding their previous experience with educational programmes on social entrepreneurship (Figure 2).
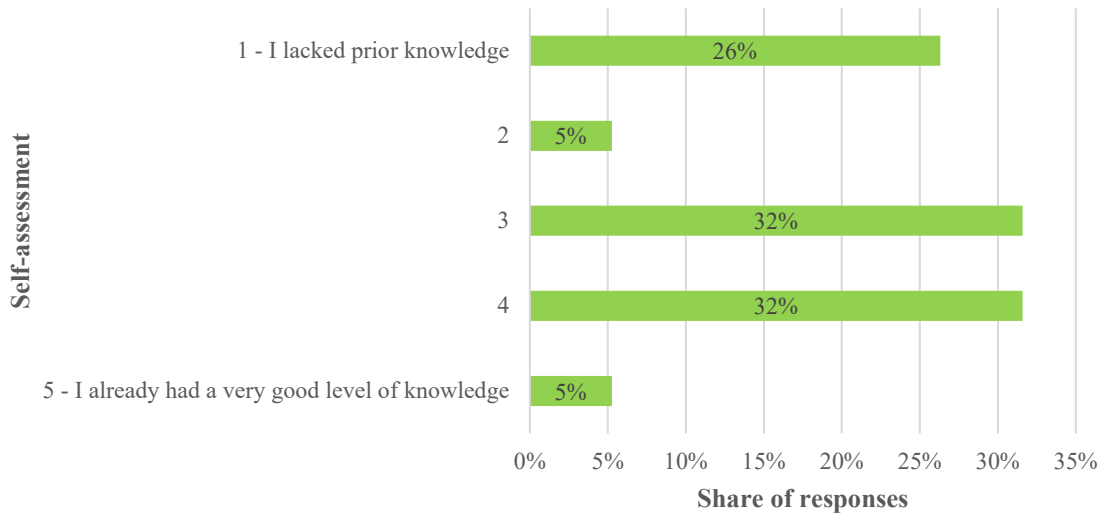

Figure 1: *Results to survey question: How much did you know about the specifics of social entrepreneurship before the session? (N=19)*
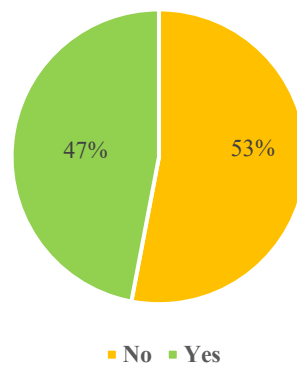
Figure 2: *Results to survey question: Have you participated in other social entrepreneurship programmes (e.g. trainings, courses, incubators, hackathons, accelerators)? (N=19)*

Impact of the training

Despite the varied profiles, it is good to know that the trainings nonetheless increased the knowledge of most attendees, with 85% of respondents (participants who selected "4" or "5" on a five-point scale) having rated highly the increase of their knowledge (Figure 3). The key learnings indicated by the participants were a general better understanding of what social enterprises are, but also how to get funding, assistance for social enterprise creation, how to market a social enterprise, etc. A few respondents also mentioned that the training encouraged and motivated them to put more emphasis on the social aspects of their businesses.

Figure 3: *Results to survey question: How much did the session improve your knowledge of the specifics of social entrepreneurship? (N=19)*
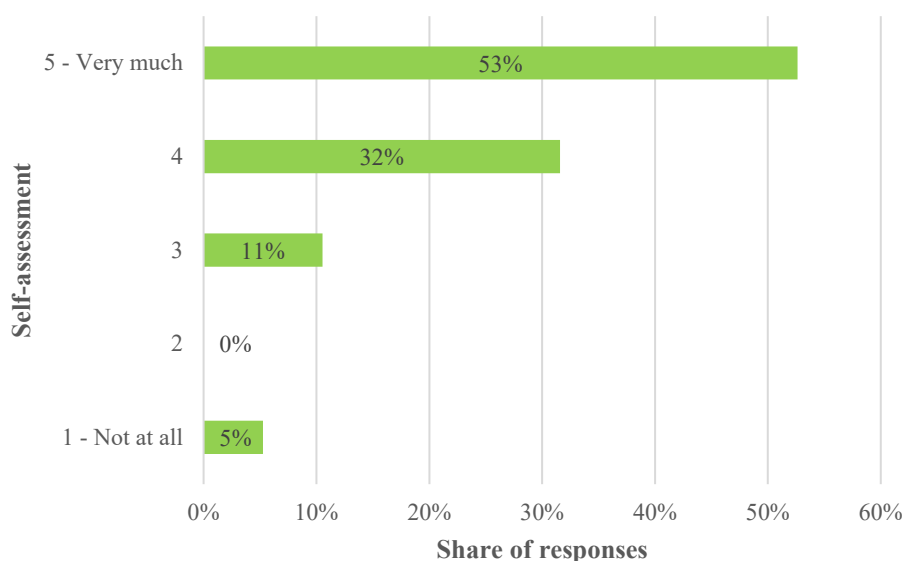
The survey also gauged how the respondents saw the principles of social entrepreneurship align with the participant's startups and/or whether they plan to move in that direction. A positive takeaway from this small sample is that after the training, 67% of participants were considering integrating some of the principles in their startup (see Figure 4). Respondents were also asked to elaborate on their selection. Here are a few examples:

- "I currently have an NGO for young people that does not directly generate income. We are thinking about how to make it comply with the principles of social entrepreneurship."
- "I'm a bit social, but I would like to make the business fully social."
- "I'm thinking about an application that could integrate some principles of SE."

The rest of the respondents already felt that the startup was fully aligned with the principles (33%). For example, this is how two of them rationalised it:

- "I was reassured that the company is guided by the values of a social enterprise, and that the intention is to develop the future business model accordingly."
- "My company addresses the problem of post-consumer waste and raw material production."

This question in the survey also indicated that the participants were engaged in the training and were the appropriate target group, as none selected the option of outright rejecting SE principles nor not knowing how to answer.
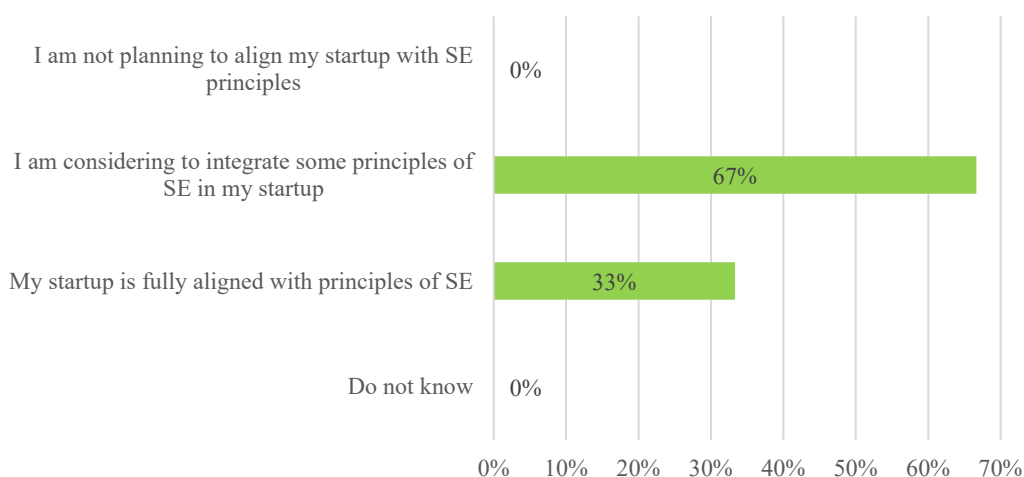
Figure 4: *Results to survey question: How does your startup idea align with the principles of social entrepreneurship? (N=12[1])*

The survey also asked how the participants currently approach social impact. For 42%, the largest share, social impact was not yet defined for their startups, but the picture was more varied overall (see Figure 5). This graph shows that the training reached the correct audience.
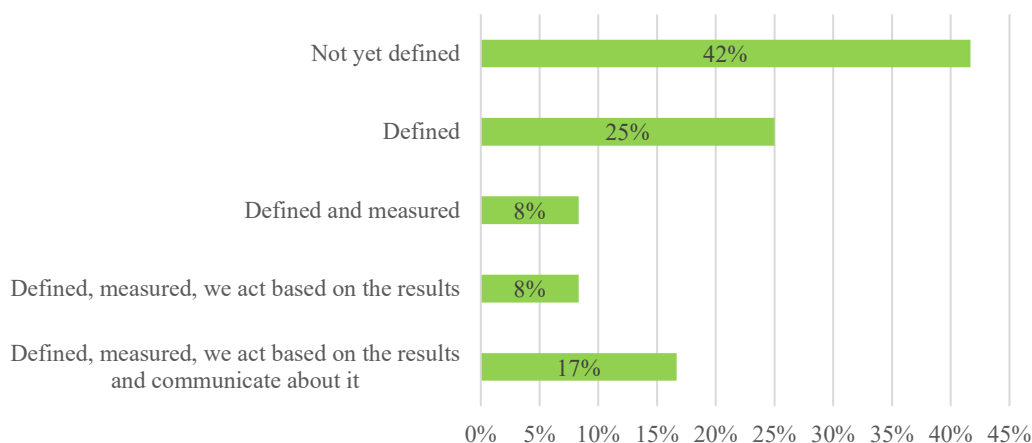
Figure 5: *Results to survey question: Please select the best-fitting statement about the approach to social impact in your startup/team. (N=12)*

Suggestions for improvement

The fact that the participants received the trainings positively can also be seen in how they rated their experience. 80% of respondents deemed the quality of the training as very good

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[1] There are less respondents in Figures 4 and 5 (N=12 vs N=19) as considering the attendee profile of the 26.10.2023 training the question was made visible only to those who had previously selected "Yes" when responding to the question: "Do you have an existing startup?".

(Figure 6). In addition, all but one attendee selected "Yes" when answering whether they would recommend the training to their peers.
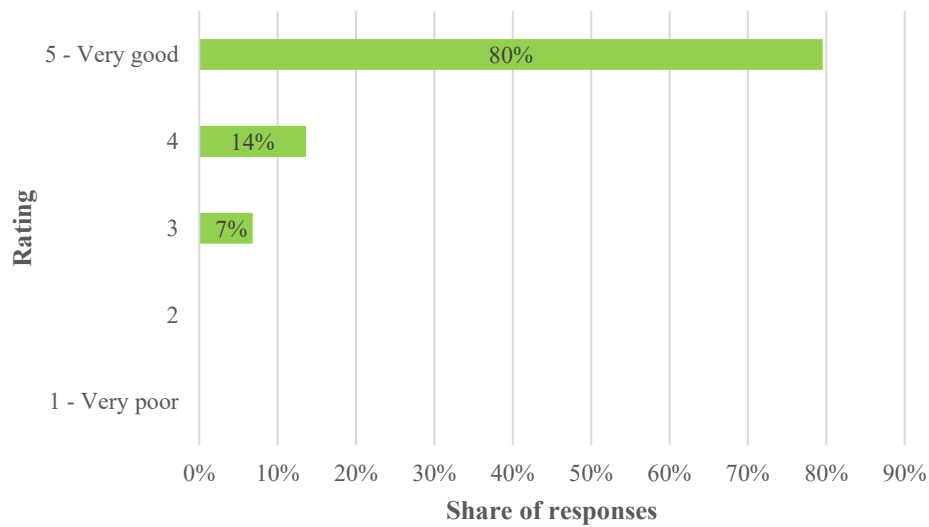
Figure 6: Results to survey question: How would you rate the overall quality of the session? (N=19)

Lastly, the participants were asked to reflect on what could be improved in the session to be entirely comfortable recommending the training. Most respondents opted not to share a recommendation but just reiterated that they thought the training was okay/fine/great/perfect as is. The person who indicated that they would not recommend the training currently would have liked to see more focus on "how to analyse the market and present product with focus to both social impact and profit." Another respondent suggested adding more "real case analysis" to the training.

Conclusion

Based on the survey results above, the training module worked as intended. Participants were pleased with the content and quality. Most participants increased their knowledge of social entrepreneurship, which was the main intended goal. Although the long-term impact of just one short training is hard to assess and predict, and one should also be realistically modest in their expectations, it is nonetheless a nice signal that a large share of participants claimed to (now) consider integrating social entrepreneurship principles in their business model. Currently, only the first seeds of thought have been planted. But even if just a few participants truly commit and go forward with the change, the project team can consider the trainings a success as the ultimate broader goal of the project is to make social entrepreneurship the mainstream and social considerations a natural part of any business model.

2.3   Insights from Interviews

As described in the methodology section, interviews were conducted with the trainers, the hosts of the trainings and the Work Package leader. All these interviews were semi-structured and used the same interview template as a starting point (see Annex 3). Depending on the interviewee's profile, the questions were adjusted and elaborated on the go.

The results of the interviews have been combined below in one synthesised narrative as they touched upon the same aspects and often came to similar conclusions. The synthesis nonetheless clarifies from whom such input was collected from. The input has been structured around two main topics: 1. reflection on the training sessions as such and 2. reflection on the overall approach of offering these training modules. This way, a holistic overview is given to the reader immediately, making it easier to grasp the key insights.

Reflections on the training sessions as such

General setup

- Overall, the hosts were very **pleased with the content and professionalism** of the trainers. More specifically, the **interactive exercises** and activating questions for the listeners were appreciated. This enabled fruitful interactions, and the hosts, together with trainers, appreciated that the participants were actively asking questions.
  - o "One good thing was that the participants were included in the training model. They shared among themselves how they related to the SE topic. They were listening and engaged throughout the session." – trainer.
- One of the hosts also **suggested additional methods** that could be used in the future to increase interactivity further.
  - o "I like giving people things to do, even if it is two-three minutes. Like a test: which one of these three is a social innovation example? To see how people rationalise. I would not have only used questions but also a thing to do." – host.
- The trainers also saw **the motivation of the hosts as a success factor.** The training went exceptionally smoothly if the trainer and host had previously collaborated on similar topics.
  - o "Part of the discussion was around a lack of legal framework. Some participants thought there was a contradiction in the definition. So, you need to know the local context. Having a co-trainer who could take an active part is important. In our case it was the co-organiser who took this role. It influences the set-up very much." – trainer.
- As each pre-existing programme is different (in terms of focus, structure, target group) the training programme was designed **to be piloted flexibly**. Therefore, the length of

the training was adjusted based on the wishes of the hosts to fit into their usual format. The hosts certainly appreciated this flexible approach. However, it is hard to say whether the training should have been longer as it was observed that some of the trainees would have liked to stay longer while others were rushing off.

- As the training module and slide deck were put together by SEE, the RfC trainers appreciated that they were given such **a readily usable toolkit**. While the presentations and content still needed to be adjusted based on the context and the speakers' individual style, the thorough preparation simplified the life of trainers. Going forward, one of the trainers suggested that it would help to have clear guidelines regarding where the trainer has the liberty to adjust the content, e.g. sequence of slides, visuals, formulation of questions and local examples and which should stay the same, e.g. overall content, definitions, structure according to the time format.
  - "I felt that the preparation of the workshop was amazing, both the curriculum and slides. While I wanted to make it my own, it was really easy to get to that stage thanks to the preparation." – trainer.
- The Work Package leader also reflected on the success of the training module:
  - "A comprehensive programme was put together that really conveys the necessary information and at the same time is not boring and can be done in a multi-stakeholder and engaging way. It was possible to make several formats out of one training. We also had good quality trainers within the consortium which we could leverage." – Work Package leader.
- The fact that the training was held **in person** was also seen as a strength by one of the hosts and a trainer. In some contexts, there have still been limited physical interactions in the post-Covid world. In other instances, people are "fed-up" with online events and welcome the opportunity to meet in person.

Content

- All hosts **appreciated a rich selection of examples of existing social enterprises** from the Baltics that were used to illustrate what a social enterprise looks like. However, the trainers also emphasised that one needs to know the selected cases - their business and impact - **in sufficient detail** to provide a convincing and interesting story to the participants. Experience showed that participants had sometimes quite detailed follow-up questions on the examples. Therefore, if someone replicates the training model, the trainer must feel confident with the examples used.
- The **business model spectrum infographic** used to explain the difference between traditional businesses, social enterprises and non-profit associations was also valued by hosts and participants. One of the hosts said the participants had even posted it on their social media channels after the training.

- In the case of the training in Lithuania, it was specifically appreciated that the trainer was from Latvia and could, therefore, facilitate **pan-Baltic learning**.
  - o "Gauging perspectives from Estonian and Latvian was the added value. There is limited info you can get from websites. Having somebody from the Baltic States who knows the local context is very important. Having not lived in the region for so long, I would not have been able to bring the examples in similar detail." – host.
- While it was evident already in the planning phase of the activity that the context of each hub or pilot needs to be considered when adjusting the training content, the practice also proved that **being aware of the local context is crucial** within such international programmes. This was illustrated by the discussions that emerged in Lithuania, where the training took place at a time when there had been a more tense policy discussion around the topic of social economy, and the participants had questions for the trainer based on that backdrop. In this case, the trainer was well-prepared thanks to her prior experience in Lithuania, the excellent preparation with the host and having the host on-site to complement the discussion. But certainly, something to keep in mind for the future in case international speakers from other regions are invited to do the trainings.
- One of the trainers indicated that a host had also asked about what type of funding is available to social enterprises. Therefore, in the future, covering **funding opportunities** could be incorporated into the training materials. European-level instruments are especially less well-known by the local stakeholders. She also added that in another previous programme organised for incubators, a good "hook" or approach had been the focus on **consumer preferences and regulations**, emphasising that enterprises should be prepared in a timely manner to react to such trends and changes. In this way, the discussion starts on a broader and likely more relatable level for the "traditional" sector attendees. It is then easier to build on that and show how their challenges very much relate to the social economy and social entrepreneurship.

Attendance

The attendance numbers were slightly low in the Estonian and Latvian trainings. The reasons for this differed.

- In the training in Estonia, there was a lack of initial interest from those for whom the session was promoted, and **the challenge was related to getting the message across** why the training benefits them.
  - o "When I think of the network of people in our building and the people who rent the space, they're all entrepreneurs. And because they don't know about social entrepreneurship, they don't know why they should come. How can we do it in

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a way that immediately in the invitation you can understand [the value of the training]?" – host.

- The training in Latvia was organised in the university context, where students primarily focus on their studies. **The offer also competed with other extracurricular activities** that were promoted to them. As attendance was optional for the students involved in the preincubation programme, it was unsurprising for the host that fewer people showed up than had registered.
    - o "It is quite hard to retain their attention on some topics. Their focus is on studies. (…) As it was not a mandatory part of the preincubation programme, it was a little bit challenging." – host.

- Interestingly, the hosts of the two trainings had various takes on the experience. In the Estonian case, the host was a bit let down as, in her view, it was a very interesting and useful training, and it was a shame that other enterprises missed it. Conversely, the Latvian host saw lower attendance as a strength as it made the session more personalised and engaging.

- The low attendance was, however, seen as a drawback by the trainers involved. Mainly from the aspect that with fewer people, **the trainer is more dependent on each participant's active involvement and individual interest**. Giving out group work tasks is also more challenging, especially if the workshop has been prepared with an expectation of higher attendance numbers. Therefore, the trainers needed to adapt and adjust on the go depending on how many people had arrived by the start of the session.
    - o "What would be very helpful for me to know the number of participants in advance. Workshop is hugely different if there are five attendees instead of 15." – trainer.

- However, it needs to be kept in mind that this activity never had a concrete target value for attendees. When offering a module to external hubs, one has less control over the attendees than when organising a separate lecture open to all. Therefore, the considerations around attendance are more on **how much effort is proportionate to the impact one tries to achieve in the ecosystem**.
    - o "Engagement level of those who participated was really high. We need to assess whether it is important to reach a large number of people or add value to those who join, who deeply connect to the topic." – trainer.

Terminology

The interviews with the hosts also touched upon the aspect of terminology and whether the word 'social' had been problematic. Here, the opinions varied based on the national context.

- Regarding the Estonian training, the host agreed that 'impact entrepreneurship' would have worked better than 'social.'

- o "So that this business aspect remains just as strong. From the training it became evident [for me] that the social as well as the entrepreneurial side are equally relevant. [That it is] not just for social purposes. Maybe 'impact entrepreneurship' would resonate better." – host.

- However, in the Lithuanian case, the term 'social company' was for nearly two decades used narrowly for work integration social enterprises (WISE), and the term has had a negative connotation as some companies had been using loopholes in the system just to get subsidies from the state. At the same time, 'impact organisation' is also not the best term in Lithuania. Thus, 'social enterprise' had been the right choice for the training.

  - o "Social enterprise and innovation are a good choice [of terminology], focusing on the positive impact on society. This language is good, also in line with current legislative realities. We don't use "impact organisations" that much [in Lithuania] because the non-profit sector sort of has monopolised it." – host.

- It is also worth **re-wording the way the session is communicated**. One of the trainers shared her experience where a similar social entrepreneurship training for business incubators had been called "Business with added value - creating a sustainable impact as the key to success" by-stepping the word social. A similar suggestion came from one of the hosts:

  - o "They're already entrepreneurs, and then this 'social' prefix doesn't appeal as they want to do business. Maybe next time, it could be something along the lines of "Come and learn about entrepreneurship from another angle."" – host.

Reflection on the overall approach of offering such training modules

The entire idea behind this activity in the IBESI project was to bring the social entrepreneurship ecosystem closer to the so-called "traditional" innovation ecosystem. Whereas other project activities are intended to bring knowledge and networks from the traditional ecosystem to social entrepreneurs, the reverse was tested here. It was unclear whether pre-existing hubs would take up the IBESI project offer from the get-go.

As it turns out, finding a location for the pilot was sometimes challenging, as many business hubs rejected the offer or have yet to get back to the project team. While the project was lucky to get on board the first hub that was reached out to in Estonia, there were a total of six cases across Latvia and Lithuania where reaching out to well-known hubs did not lead to a co-organisation of the training.

Therefore, the questions arise: Why did the three hubs/hosts accept the IBESI offer? What should be the value proposition of the session for other hubs and programmes? And are such trainings the best way to raise awareness on the topic within the traditional ecosystem?

Accepting the offer

- The Estonian host accepted the offer in part due to their **earlier professional relationship** with project partner SEE. It also fits well with the hub's activities, where the incubation programme is very tailored, and there are few joint events for the incubator participants. For the host, it was a nice opportunity to have teams come together. Interestingly, the offer was also attractive partly because it was **not seen as an extra burden** to the host.
  - "I realised that it was not a burden for me. I was not expected to guarantee 20 or so attendees. There is no point in saying no to a free training." – host.
- In the case of the Latvian pilot, **the offer came in at the right time** as RTU was starting a new Interreg Baltic Sea Region project on social innovation, and therefore the topic, of the training aligned with the interests of the host. The RfC team had previously met the RTU representative at other events, but no formal collaboration had been in place before.
  - "It was the right time and the right context at the moment. Usually, universities are very busy with the projects we run. Super to have this training!" – host.
- In Lithuania, **the offer aligned with the activities of another ongoing project** that, similarly to IBESI, seeks to bring together the more traditional tech sector and social innovation. It was attractive for them to get Estonian and Latvian insights into the ongoing discussions in Lithuania.
- **The terminology used to promote the training session might have also played a part,** according to the Work Package leader and some of the trainers. While the title of the training module stayed the same, the Work Package leader already started experimenting with different phrases in the description of the event after the first rejections from hubs.
  - "I was surprised that people said that this topic is not relevant for them because those are the same people who share ESGs [environmental, social, and governance] and sustainability-related posts on their LinkedIn. I think it is still about communication. Using more buzzwords: impact, sustainability, ESGs." - trainer
- Lastly, it should be said that it is **unclear** whether the rejections to the initial offer came from the topic or whether some of the programmes, in general, are not open to externally offered modules. According to the Work Package leader, there was at least

one rejection where **just the project timeframe** did not suit the hub as they did not have any ongoing or starting incubation programmes in Fall 2023. The offer might have been accepted had it not been for the concrete timeline of the project.

Value proposition

Some thoughts were also shared on what would make the offer more attractive to existing hubs.
- One of the hosts suggested that such training programmes should be **co-created with the target group**. Although the training programme was created after review existing training programmes and gathering input from all project partners across four countries, and the programme length was adjusted depending on the needs of the hosts and in the case of Lithuania, the host also offered some additional examples of SEs to the training materials, indeed, the content was never reviewed together with "traditional" startups, and this could be considered in the future.
- One of the trainers found that the training benefitted from the fact that the attendees came **from the same sector,** enabling them to make examples more relatable. A similar approach is worth pursuing in the future.
  - "For me, the industry specific listeners worked well. Concrete examples could be given. Certainly, a success factor." – trainer.
- One of the takeaways for the Work Package leader was that **one should not shy away from reaching out to other actors in the social economy ecosystem** to check whether they have any relevant ongoing projects or connections to recommend. The pilot in Lithuania became realistic only after she had reached out to actors in the Lithuanian social economy ecosystem. "Cold calling" members of the traditional business ecosystem had not yielded results. However, the collaboration still enabled the project to reach the intended target group, who thus far had limited knowledge of the topic.
- During the group discussion with the trainers, an idea emerged that there could be **a pre-programme for the hub managers**, a sort of exclusive round table format, to educate them beforehand so they would better understand the added value to their members and would more likely accept the offer of incorporating a social entrepreneurship training module. Such an offer should be presented to them as a networking opportunity and a chance to develop their business further and stand out. The event could also feature an element of co-creation where the hub managers help design the offered curriculum. This approach can be supported by the feedback given by one of the hosts when she indicated that after attending the training, she had a much better understanding of the topic herself and could promote it better to enterprises in the future.

> o "In order for this to work, we need the organisers to be passionate about it or that they would resonate with this somehow. There are certain value points for them if they use it. Right now, they don't see it. They see it as an additional thing they need to include, and they have an entire timeline set." – trainer.
>
> o "I can say that perhaps the programme wasn't attractive enough because I couldn't convey it properly. [Now I know that] all companies could listen to it." – host.

Pivot or persevere?

- The hubs that accepted the offer generally **did not see a problem with such an approach**. As described earlier, the timing and offer matched well with their interest. Therefore, they were also supportive of the idea on a general level.
    - o "I agree that it seems very logical to go to where there are already entrepreneurial people; give them another angle as well." – host.
- One of the trainers had a similar takeaway from the experience. Offering **tailored training to a concrete set of entrepreneurs can have a more profound effect** on the actual social entrepreneurship changes implemented within the business than in other formats. Furthermore, providing such training to people outside the social economy ecosystem made one of the trainers reflect on how people who work on the topic daily might underestimate what they have to offer.
    - o "We operate in our bubble, but people actually don't know about it [social entrepreneurship], and we can provide added value. There is value in reaching out to people we don't normally interact with. However, the format is still unclear which would work best with these external stakeholders." – trainer.
- The trainers also agreed that the best-case scenario was the experience in Lithuania, where the training was **part of another larger event**. Such opportunities should be sought in the future as this helps guarantee attendees. It is more demanding for the organisers and hubs to promote something separate, and a separately organised additional session also demands the businesses to find even more free time to attend trainings. When collaborating with incubators and accelerators, having the training module before or after the hub's typically planned session would be beneficial.
- One of the hosts also suggested **reaching out to community movements** and providing them with similar training where social goals are achieved through entrepreneurship. As the person was not aware of the other project tasks, namely the hackathons and accelerator programmes, where non-profit association s were also welcome or even the explicit target group in the case of the "Impact Crash Course", it was good to receive such external validation to the project approach.

- As one of the pilots was held at RTU, the thought emerged that it might be strategically wise **to offer such a training module to more universities**, especially technical ones. Collaborating with universities would help plant the seeds of social entrepreneurship and social innovation early on. This way, the concepts would already be familiar to young people when they work on their first business models.
    - o "For most students, it was the first time they realised that entrepreneurship can go outside of calculations and financial statements and it can include a little bit broader impact of the company on the environment and societal changes." – host.
- One of the hosts proposed that **a networking meeting between traditional and social businesses or a study visit** might be more interesting for entrepreneurs than attending training as the personal benefits are more tangible (e.g. networking, collaboration, visibility). An event where one could come and get some coffee and snacks and hear peer presentations on the experiences of social entrepreneurs. In her experience, business owners value the experience of other practitioners the most. This type of approach could potentially lead to collaborations between the different companies as well.
- Further options on how the approach could be adjusted were shared by the Work Package leader. She pondered whether **a simpler approach where one organises the training as a separate event** but keeps it open to all teams across multiple hubs in the region would lead to better results. Another idea she had was that perhaps the **topic should be narrower** to attract attendees with that particular need or interest, e.g. how to choose employees and/or employ people with special needs. In other words, to select concrete topics to show how they could contribute more to society with their pre-existing enterprises and, in doing so, transform into social enterprises themselves.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

The broader **goal of the activity was achieved** – introductory trainings on social entrepreneurship were brought to hubs and participants from the "traditional" innovation ecosystem. A specifically developed curriculum and methodology were piloted.

Based on the survey results and interview reflections above, the trainings worked well in the contexts in which they were held. There are some considerations in terms of allowing even more interaction and adjusting the content, but otherwise, **no major deviations in the developed curriculum would be necessary should more trainings be conducted**.

However, there is still room for experimentation regarding how to approach hubs and what to offer to them so that they could see added value in such trainings. Here are the main recommendations and takeaways from the experience:

- All stakeholders – participants, hosts, and trainers – felt the training **worked well**. Therefore, the curriculum developed for the pilot is well suited for introducing social entrepreneurship to audiences not familiar with the topic beforehand. As the backbone of the programme is a rich selection of local SE examples and the training incorporates interactive learning methods, it also increases the knowledge of those who have some prior knowledge on the topic. Therefore, **the training module can be effectively replicated beyond the project lifetime and in other contexts and regions.** One should only remember that a topically skilled trainer who clearly understands the local case studies and a motivated host are important for a high-quality experience.
- One of the key takeaways from reaching out to traditional hubs with the offer was that **prior contact with the hub managers and the right timing are important for sparking interest**. Cold calling pre-existing incubators, accelerators, and other training programmes with an offer on a topic unfamiliar to the hub managers tends to get quick rejections or will just be ignored. However, building trust with pre-existing hubs can also take time and might not be so easily achieved within short projects with rigid deadlines.
- Therefore, **developing a separate pre-programme for the hub managers** could go a long way in setting up such collaborations. A dedicated event towards hub managers would also have a broader impact because these people work daily with many different entrepreneurs and stakeholders and can spread the message of social entrepreneurship and innovation. However, with such an event, one would still need to attract initial interest from the hubs. The offer would need to be presented as a networking opportunity and a chance to improve the hub's competitive advantage in the market.
- When reaching out to traditional hubs, it is worthwhile **to carefully consider the title of the training module as well as the accompanying description**. The terminology

used for the pilots might have contributed both to lower-than-expected attendance as well as rejections from some of the hubs that were approached. Thus, the offer should **easily convey the benefit the hub and its residents will get** when accepting the training module. In Estonia and Latvia, the "social" prefix does not seem to go down well. Using buzzwords like "impact" and "sustainability" or providing an attractive, practical hook by addressing (European) funding opportunities, regulations, or customer preferences could potentially open more doors.

- Other alternative approaches worth considering for raising awareness on social entrepreneurship within the traditional ecosystem include **networking events between social enterprises and traditional businesses, study visits, tailored programmes for (technical) universities and stand-alone training programmes open to companies from all hubs within one region**.

Annexes

Annex 1 – Training Programme Schedule[2]

00-00.10 Introduction

00.10-00.15 Expectations

- What do you want to get out of this seminar? They write their thoughts on sticky notes, and we discuss some answers

00.15-1.30 Social entrepreneurship & the situation in your country

- 00.15-00.20 They answer the question, "What does social entrepreneurship mean to you?"
  - Why do you see it that way?
- 00.20-00.40 Our definition
  - A social enterprise is a company that is committed to creating a positive impact through a business model
  - Examples - 3 from each Baltic country
- 00.40-1.00 What are the characteristics of a social enterprise?
  - The main goal is to positively influence people's livelihood, well-being, or the environment, which is measured
  - A sustainable economic model
    - The company offers goods or services for a fee, earning a profit
    - 50.1% of the profit is reinvested in achieving the main goal
- 1.00-1.15 They answer the question, "How well are we doing with social entrepreneurship?" - On a scale of 1-10, where 10 - is really good, 1 - really bad
  - We can use the Mentimeter
  - Discussion why they think like that
- 1.15-1.30 Our explanation of the situation in your country

1.30-1.40 Break

1.40-1.45 What are the key skills or characteristics required of successful entrepreneurs (both social and for-profit)?

1.45-1.50 What are social and for-profit entrepreneurs' main similarities and differences?

- Different sources of motivation
- Different measure of success
- Very similar otherwise
- A lot can be learned from successful for-profit entrepreneurs

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[2] The training module was used in two version. Originally created as a 3h programme it was adjusted to a 1.5h format to cater the needs of two of the hubs. The components of the shorter version are highlighted in gray.

1.50-2.10 Debate on "Social entrepreneurship will be the most common form of entrepreneurship in the future"

- 1.50-2.00 Preparation in groups
- 2.00-2.10 Debate

2.10-2.20 How can you change your company into a social enterprise

- 2.10-2.15 Brainstorm
- 2.15-2.20 Sharing the ideas

2.20-2.30 Your organisation introduction (the organisation that is doing the workshop) & IBESI project introduction (hackathons and accelerators)

2.30-2.45 Questions, feedback & reflection

- Do you have any questions
- Feedback survey
- Reflection - What word would you use to sum up today's workshop?
- Key Takeaway - The primary work of every entrepreneur, social and for-profit, involves solving problems. Together, we can change social entrepreneurship from a niche to the norm

Annex 2 – Participant Survey

1. How much did you know about the specifics of social entrepreneurship before the session? (*scale 1-5, 1 signifying "I lacked prior knowledge" and 5 "I already had a very good level of knowledge"*)

2. Have you participated in other social entrepreneurship programmes (e.g. trainings, courses, incubators, hackathons, accelerators)? (*Yes/No*)

3. How much did the session improve your knowledge of the specifics of social entrepreneurship? (*scale 1-5, 1 signifying "Not at all" and 5 "Very much"*)

4. How does your startup idea align with the principles of social entrepreneurship?[3]
   - I am not planning to align my startup with SE principles
   - I am considering to integrate some principles of SE in my startup
   - My startup is fully aligned with principles of SE
   - Do not know
   - Other

5. Please briefly explain your precious answer

6. Please select the best-fitting statement about the approach to social impact in your startup/team. Our social impact is:
   - Not yet defined
   - Defined
   - Defined and measured
   - Defined, measured, we act based on the results
   - Defined, measured, we act based on the results and communicate about it
   - Do not know how to answer

7. Please outline 2-3 key learning points for you from the session?

8. How would you rate the overall quality of the session? (*scale 1-5, 1 signifying "Very poor" and 5 "Very good"*)

9. Would you recommend this sort of training to your peers? (*Yes/No*)

10. What could be improved in the session in order to be fully comfortable with recommending the training onwards?

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[3] For the 26.10.23 training in Lithuania, an additional question was added before Q4: "Do you have an existing startup?". This was done as there were also NPAs attending the session. Only those who selected "Yes" got to answer Q4-6.

Annex 3 – Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire

1. Does your programme or your other programmes in general have components of what was touched upon in this session?
2. What worked well in the context of the session, in your opinion?
3. What did not work that well, what were the main challenges?
4. Does the approach of providing a tailored session within a pre-existing programme work in your opinion? What are the benefits, drawbacks?
5. How interested were the teams in the session in your opinion? (Also considering the feedback you received beforehand)
6. What could be improved in the setup and content of the session to offer higher value to the participants?
   - Value proposition of the session for other hubs
   - The way the topic was presented
   - Terminology used - "impact" vs "social"
   - Quality of trainers
   - Format of the sessions, tools used, tasks given
   - Are training the best way to go about raising awareness on the topic? How could we better share information with your programme participants?