

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Bath		
Unit of Assessment: C17 Business and Management Studies		
Title of case study: Enabling entrepreneurial capacity for social and organisational impact		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dimo Dimov	Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation	August 2012 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Research in the University of Bath’s Centre for Research on Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CREI) by Professor Dimov has generated new ideas about entrepreneurship and new designs for entrepreneurial action. The research was embedded within the design and delivery of the Social Enterprise and Innovation Programme (SEIP): a 3-year, GBP1,500,000 European-funded programme, that supported social entrepreneurs in the West of England. A key success feature of SEIP was its future-oriented approach, which helped to ensure a broad outreach and the identification of those projects with the greatest chance of success. Independent evaluation has shown that this programme created substantial economic and social benefits. The economic benefits were estimated at GBP16,300,000. Social impacts, which included improved inclusivity and societal benefits such as improved quality of life, were valued at approximately GBP212,000,000.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Entrepreneurial success is a powerful beacon for both policy and practice and an engine for economic development and social transformation. It starts with an initial business idea and ends with a viable venture. Understood in traditional terms, what transpires in between is a matter of having a clear, high-potential idea that is then diligently implemented. Such reasoning encounters a simple but difficult pragmatic question: why are entrepreneurial developments obvious and logical in hindsight and uncertain and ambiguous in foresight? Dimov’s research at the University of Bath has opened two new major frontiers in entrepreneurship: the first has focused on entrepreneurial thinking, language, discourse and action, and the second on future-focused entrepreneurial action and design.</p>		
<i>Aligning how we think and talk about entrepreneurship with its frontline experience</i>		
<p>Dimov’s research has established that enabling entrepreneurship is not a question of more and better – more information, better models – but of engaged, probing and reflective ways of thinking and acting as an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship can be understood as an open-ended journey, driven by individual initiative but shaped by the broader system (R1). In addition, the research established a critical role for language and discourse in articulating entrepreneurial visions (R2). It affirmed the crucial value of being playful, of action for its own sake, because it can generate positive consequences that cannot be anticipated beforehand (R3). Finally, the research provides an integrative model of entrepreneurial action as a</p>		

recursive interplay of perception and action, engaged in active discourse to clarify, refine, and evolve visions for entrepreneurial impact (R4).

How the conception of entrepreneurship as a journey can be made operable

How do we enable and design entrepreneurial action in a forward sense? The past is something that can be taken for granted and described, but the future is something to be enacted and thus created. Dimov has articulated a new paradigm for engaging with entrepreneurship in a design, future-oriented sense (R5). It focuses the entrepreneurial journey on a core design problem of market desirability, operational feasibility, and financial viability, driven by recursive, reflective action.

Both streams of ideas have been synthesized to formulate specific principles for entrepreneurial action (R5) and for the design of early-phase support systems (R6). Both aim to leverage the interplay between individual participation and collective outcome (i.e. not everyone can succeed, but success can come from anywhere). This requires openness, self-selection, visibility, and connectivity of actors and ideas. These principles have become central pillars for Dimov's contribution to the design of support interventions, such as the Social Enterprise and Innovation Programme (SEIP). Promoting entrepreneurship combines the nurturing of early ideas and aspirations with the discipline of business model design and focus on successive milestones.

3. References to the research

- R1 McMullen, J. S. & Dimov, D. (2013) 'Time and the entrepreneurial journey: The problems and promise of studying entrepreneurship as a process', *Journal of Management Studies* 50(8), pp. 1481–1512. DOI: [10.1111/joms.12049](https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12049)
- R2 Dimov, D. (2020). 'Opportunities, language, and time', *Academy of Management Perspectives* 34(3), pp. 333–351. DOI: [10.5465/amp.2017.0135](https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2017.0135)
- R3 Lerner, D., Hunt, R. & Dimov, D. (2018). 'Action! Moving beyond the intendedly-rational logics of entrepreneurship' *Journal of Business Venturing* 33(1), pp. 52–69. DOI: [10.1016/j.jbusvent.2017.10.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2017.10.002)
- R4 Dimov, D. & Pistrui, J. (2019) Recursive and discursive model of and for entrepreneurial action. *European Management Review* 17(1), pp. 267–277. DOI: [10.1111/emre.12360](https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12360)
- R5 Dimov, D. (2017) *The reflective entrepreneur*. London: Routledge.
- R6 Nair, S., Gaim, M. & Dimov, D. (2020) 'Toward the emergence of entrepreneurial opportunities: Organizing early-phase new-venture creation support systems' *Academy of Management Review*, Published online 5 October 2020. DOI: [10.5465/amr.2019.0040](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2019.0040)

4. Details of the impact

Research by Professor Dimov has generated new ideas about entrepreneurship and new designs for entrepreneurial action, as the programme delivery partner at CVS South Gloucestershire indicated: "*The future focused approach of the programme helped to effectively identify projects with the greatest chance of success*" (S1). This has led to significant economic and social benefits.

Social Enterprise and Innovation Programme (SEIP)

The Social Enterprise and Innovation Programme (SEIP) (Dimov, Principal Investigator) supported social entrepreneurs, social start-up enterprises and existing social SMEs in the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area. SEIP provided advice, upskilling and selection (AUS) support to potential entrepreneurs and new businesses, and business

incubation (BI) and acceleration to businesses with growth potential (S2). The programme ran between October 2016 and December 2019, and involved 503 participants (329 individuals and 174 enterprises). It was independently evaluated by Social Impact Consulting and the University of Bangor. Their report notes: *“the growth, investment and optimism seen amongst SEIP participants... Compared to social enterprises or SMEs generally, far more SEIP participants have grown, attracted investment, and increased their workforce in the past 12 months; and more are seeking investment and anticipating growth in the next 12 months”* (S3 p.11).

Impact through programme design

A key benefit of the design of the SEIP programme is the idea of entrepreneurial impact as emergent. Iterative development enables entrepreneurial action through broadening participation and successive milestones. According to the SETSquared Partnership Innovation Director, the SEIP programme was developed following the *“future oriented design approach, based on Professor Dimov's research, which enabled us to quickly identify those social enterprises that were likely to succeed”* (S4). SEIP had 4 specific support elements reflecting the gradual unfolding of an entrepreneurial journey: (1) network outreach, (2) training and selection, (3) business incubation (BI), and (4) investment readiness support (S2). Outreach activities focused on geographic areas, sectors and demographics with low levels of enterprise activity, as well as underrepresented groups. The project supported 329 individuals under its AUS support, and 174 social enterprises under its BI support (S5). Compared to the broader populations of SMEs and social enterprises, the project had more women than men participating (68% for AUS; 58% for BI). It engaged particularly well with minority ethnic communities (21% of AUS participants). Finally, 19% of the AUS participants recorded their status as unemployed, compared to a UK unemployment rate of 4%. This suggests that setting up a social enterprise with the support of the project was particularly attractive and beneficial to the unemployed (S3).

The impact of Bath's research on the design is evidenced by the comments of the Director of the Dartington Social Enterprise Hub and Head of School of Social Entrepreneurs, Dartington Hall Trust:

“The programme's design, informed by Professor Dimov's research [on] the value of openness, connectivity, reflective practice, and iterative development in [the] entrepreneurial journey was a key part of its success. The programme's research design allowed broad outreach and the early identification of prospective social entrepreneurs and was critical in creating and sustaining a pipeline to enable social entrepreneurs to advance their ventures or ideas” (S6).

Impact on entrepreneurial process

Follow-up feedback indicated that the support increased participants' understanding of the challenges of the entrepreneurial journey. Six months after receiving support, the majority acknowledged improved understanding of market (93%), operational (90%), personal (86%), and financial (84%) challenges as well as increased understanding of social enterprise (91%) and contribution to their opportunity development efforts (89%) (S7). Participants' comments included *“[Being] challenged by others to answer basic questions helped me clarify what I was trying to do”*, and *“I came with an idea and I am leaving with a project”* (S8). Compared to social enterprises or SMEs in general, project participants have grown, attracted investment, and increased their workforces. Most acknowledged the role of the support in identifying new opportunities (84%) and developing new processes (84%) (S7). On average, participants attributed 47% of their success to the project, which suggests that they perceive significant value in the services offered.

Wider economic and social impact

The project has delivered broader economic and social impact through an increased number of social enterprises, increased investment in social enterprises, increased employment in social enterprises, and contribution to the communities that social enterprises serve. The

independent impact assessment report suggested that participants on the programme have started 188 new businesses and have an estimated 4,000,000 beneficiaries across the South of England every year (S3). The key impact outcomes for the participants in the project include GBP27,200,000 in increased turnover, GBP16,900,000 in leveraged funding and investments, and 164 net headcount disadvantaged jobs created. In addition, they have used 582 volunteers and 118,000 volunteer hours. After accounting for attribution and loss of economic efficiency, the economic impact of the project is estimated at GBP16,300,000, which includes GBP5,300,000 in increased turnover, GBP3,300,000 in increased spend in local area, GBP5,600,000 in funding and investment, GBP1,700,000 in employment benefits, and GBP395,000 in volunteer hours worked (S3). The independent evaluation valued the social impact of the project at GBP212,400,000, based on best-practice social value metrics (e.g. Global Value Exchange). It included improved mental health, improved educational attainment, improved employability, qualifications, self-confidence, reduced social isolation, sense of community, full and part-time jobs, and self-employment (S3).

The success of SEIP also led to significant changes in the SETsquared approach to incubation, allowing it to reach a significant number of entrepreneurs across the South of England (328 in 2019 alone), as described by the SETsquared Partnership Innovation Director:

“Professor Dimov’s research led SETsquared to adopt and develop new techniques for supporting entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial businesses with the ‘programme-based’ approach developed by the SEIP. SETsquared has since rolled-out Entrepreneurs’ Programmes for the advanced engineering and digital innovation sectors with European Regional Development Funding; for health innovation, funded by the NHS’s Academic Health Science Networks; and for space technology, in partnership with the UK Space Agency” (S4).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1 Testimonial letter from a consultant to Social Enterprise and Innovation Programme via CVS South Gloucestershire [umbrella body for over 1,000 voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations operating across South Gloucestershire], dated 30 September 2020.
- S2 European Regional Development Fund application for the Social Enterprise and Innovation Programme (SEIP), dated 29 January 2016.
- S3 University of Bangor & Social Impact Consulting. Social Enterprise and Innovation Programme (SEIP) Impact Independent Evaluation report, 2019.
- S4 Testimonial letter from the Innovation Director, SETsquared Partnership [The SETsquared Partnership is the global no. 1 business incubator and enterprise partnership comprising five research-intensive universities: Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Southampton and Surrey], dated 30 November 2020.
- S5 Summative plan submitted to European Regional Development Fund, 9 August 2017.
- S6 Testimonial letter from the Director of the Dartington Social Enterprise Hub and Head of School of Social Entrepreneurs, Dartington Hall Trust, dated 30 November 2020.
- S7 Survey with participants of the Social Enterprise and Innovation Programme (SEIP), December 2018.
- S8 Qualitative action research with the Social Enterprise and Innovation Programme (SEIP) participants, December 2018, November 2020. [Data available on request].