



Web-COSI
Web Communities for
Statistics for Social Innovation
INCREASING TRUST IN COLLECTIVELY
GENERATED STATISTICS

Web-COSI “Web COmmunities for Statistics for Social Innovation”

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Report on the social entrepreneur focus groups

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I. Introduction

The focus groups took place in Vilnius, Riga, Amsterdam and Ljubljana. They played an important part of the Web-COSI project. They complemented previous activities on social entrepreneurship which included a workshop in London¹, a policy seminar in Brussels², report and mapping exercise with survey³, along with a forthcoming video in the run up to the final conference in Paris. This series of focus groups explored areas such as: i) the access to data ii) how different types of data are utilised for social ventures iii) trust and security issues.

II. Purpose and overview

Gain a sample perspective on how data is utilised in the locality of the focus group destinations

Seeking to comprehend the use of data and statistics by social entrepreneurs and more specifically to catch the local experience these businesses are confronted with. During the focus groups, i-genius sought to raise specific issues, some of which arose from the survey, to get specific insights about social entrepreneurs' experience in the field of data analyses and collection. Particular attention was devoted to how social entrepreneurs utilised data in the key areas around: i) starting their business, ii) fostering their on-going venture, iii) measuring their impact. It evaluated usage of different types of data for example governmental or official data and commercial or citizen's data. This usage covered all aspects including collection, storage, manipulation and communication of data and statistics.

Derive a better understanding on the likely future usage of data by social entrepreneurs

Examine how social entrepreneurs foresee the development of their business driven by new technologies and usages of data and statistics. Whether or not their usage was going to increase in the next years and how its features will change.

Identify areas of opportunity and concern expressed by social entrepreneurs, which may include implications for policy.

The focus groups explored issues that arose from the dialogue such as new business models, access, visualisation, capacity, regulation, trust and security.

Six conclusions or recommendations are listed at the end of this Report.

III. Format

The focus groups were held in Vilnius, Riga, Amsterdam and Ljubljana. These cities were chosen for their diversity and because they had substantial social entrepreneurs communities, especially start-ups. The focus groups were located in a range of locations such as in restaurants, a college or in co-working spaces. They typically comprised small groups usually six to twelve attendees (two in Riga). A series of questions were presented by i-genius' facilitator to engage the discussion and stimulate debate. The attendees were generally groups drawn from social entrepreneurs who in some cases were specialists in data production or manipulation. Some were researchers, or graduated students starting new social ventures. The focus group in Riga provided an in-depth account of two social

¹ To know more see <http://www.webcosi.eu/web-cosi-news/multimedia-available-workshop-on-the-usage-of-data-for-driving-social-entrepreneurship/> and http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2013/11/Web-COSI_Deliverable4.5.pdf

² To know more see <http://www.webcosi.eu/web-cosi-news/multimedia-available-eu-policy-seminar-on-the-usage-of-data-for-driving-social-entrepreneurship/> and http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2015/09/Web-COSI_Deliverable4.7.pdf

³ See http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2014/12/WeB_COSI_Deliverable2.5.pdf

entrepreneurs who have high usage of data, one in tourism and the other an expert in innovation with a specialist insight into transformative data applications.

All focus groups were held under the Chatham House rules and therefore quotations may be transcribed but not attributed to specific individuals. The dialogue is at times illustrated by specific quotations, and an effort is made to draw some conclusions. The authors would like to thank all participants for their openness in expressing their views and whilst every effort is made to accurately reflect their views, any inaccuracy that may exist, lies with the authors rather than the participants.

IV. Communication

Each focus group was promoted on the Web-COSI website, newsletters and social media channels. A photographer and note taker was present at all.

V. Focus groups

Focus Group 1 – Vilnius, 18th June 2015

“Every government official should have to run a start-up.”

The focus group was attended by 6 social entrepreneurs who were experts in various fields (plus 4 i-genius). Key points to emerge from the discussion were:

Why data usage is crucial in social business development and management

Data is used by social entrepreneurs for two main reasons: firstly in order to create a business, often prior to the start of the business; secondly to assist everyday decision-making. Overall, it enables the creation of schemes for a long-term efficient running of the business. The use of data is increasingly used at the concept and development stage of the business or product life cycle.

Uses of data and trust

Social entrepreneurs use data from official/governmental/public sources (e.g. local city, Lithuanian governmental, or the European Union) as well as unofficial/private data (from company head offices, universities, think tanks, etc).

Concerning official data, the participants used data from the state department of tourism under the Ministry of Economy to compare trends of customers, nationality, and impact of the euro. Data was used to compare business trends to also make future market predictions. As regards non-official data, these seem to be mainly testimonies or extracted from the press such as for example the situation in Ukraine, which has reduced the share of tourist from that country of 50%.

Trusting the data was a major preoccupation for social entrepreneurs. It applies to all data, whether official or not. Generally, however, public data seemed more trustworthy and is more used than private data. Indeed, the Lithuanian social entrepreneurs accused private sources of data of being more likely to be ‘corrupt’, inexact or outdated (e.g. so-called “new studies” are often based on mere updated previous studies). “New studies always seem exciting and reliable but are not always true”. Many also expressed their low level of trust towards data from the health industry as different organisations are involved with varying interests. Data from all sources “should always be double-checked.” The low trust in innovative digital data was also expressed, especially in the form of electronic voting which was viewed with suspicion due to the possibility of it being corrupted.

They were wary of making their own data open sourced as it gave their enterprises a comparative advantage, for instance, in the field of game production.

Entrepreneurs are more likely trust their own data or that produced by organisations, which share their ethos. “We trust the data when we know the community”

The website and practices of AirBnB (the communitarian platform of temporary accommodation rent and bookings) was discussed in some detail. It was described as being very “data driven” and using data well to guide users during their booking. “The most useful data was from customer reviews”, which are generally comprehensive and insightful. It is however wise to discount those starred 1 ‘the haters’ and 5 ‘the fans’. Comments from customers who give stars 2, 3, 4 provide a more useful understanding. The complex identification system used by AirBnB ensures the reviews are relatively reliable. It was high on visualisation and easy to use - a key challenge of our time.

The consequence of the general lack of trust for data is inefficiency, causing a lengthy process of collection and analysis - need “at least 3 sources” to be sure of the reliability. “We get as many independent sources as possible and make an idea out of it”. More generally, the lack of instantaneity in the production of data makes data inherently out-dated, again participating in the inefficiency of the provision of social welfare by social enterprises.

Suggestions to improve the trust in data included the compulsory indication of the sources and the age of data, to avoid outdated unreliable content.

Access to data

Access to data and its ease of utilisation is a major frustration. Collecting data was “especially time consuming”.

Government data is difficult to navigate. “You can get a data package but not know how to use it”. It is frustrating when different official sources contradict each other.

The easy access to data to be re-used in the everyday running of a social business is also challenging due to the amount of data available and its complex visualisation. “Data needs to be simplified.” The strength of this frustration was expressed by one who said, “Every government official should have to run a start-up.”

There is a need to develop an efficient standardised framework for data gathering and distribution (using *API Application Programming Interface*, the format conversion of old data...), especially for official data. It was recognised, however, that the problem relies on “who should be in charge of doing this?” and, “What is the best way to present data and make it easy to use.” reflects the desire for “well designed and visual” data.

The future evolution from the traditional use of data:

The short-term prospects concerning data and its usage in social businesses in general is that people and especially entrepreneurs are increasingly getting used to using data, and a global democratization in the access is expected. Over time, this will lead to a smarter, more understandable and more efficient way of using data and running businesses. “We can’t avoid using data”, and this is becoming increasingly true on the global scale. It has taken on a crucial role in the daily and weekly business routine, necessary to maximise competitiveness. Businesses evolve through a process of natural selection, where “businesses not using data or not using data efficiently will tend to be less competitive, fail and disappear over time”.

Education plays a central role, as people running businesses need to be taught how to use data to improve their lives and make wisest decisions. It was also suggested “government officials should be

forced to use data” and “all governmental institutional data should be public, open-data”. People need to be shown how to “develop a habit of using data”, that ensures regular use and greater understanding. “We should take seriously educating us on data usage”. The group foresaw quantitative data becoming more used than qualitative data. A new trend of data usage is in ‘quantified-self data movement’ (e.g. FitBit, SHealth, Facebook).

To maximise data accuracy, comparisons between businesses and government data should become more prominent, although genuine data accuracy would mean having only one source that would be updated and completely reliable.

Finally, entrepreneurs believe that globalizing economics will make data expand and shared amongst other countries, within and outside the European Union. Unlike commercial entrepreneurs, it was important to the social entrepreneurs that the data collected would also be used to influence the decision makers and politicians on social policy.

Overview of the focus group

Trust: was particularly low in privately produced data, but official data often lacked clarity. There is a need for more transparency and measures that will tend to increase the reliability on data and its legitimacy. To foster the trust through the accuracy of data, collaboration between official and non-official producers of data would be a recommended measure.

Education: there is a need to train social entrepreneurs on use of data in order to enhance competitiveness of social businesses. This should include exchanging knowledge between those who know and those who don’t know how to manipulate data.

Simplicity and data visualization: entrepreneur’s desire data presented in a more simplified format and in data packages, which are more easily manipulated. This supports the democratization of the use of data amongst entrepreneurs.

Focus Group 2 – Riga, 19th June 2015

“When we mention this type of test a wave of anger rises in the media”

This interview brought together a specialist in education and another in the field of tourism and short-term housing (plus 4 i-genius). In contrast to the larger focus groups that covered broader, more general issues, this focus group sought to sharpen our gaze on particular areas such as authority and security. Special attention was given to new ways of measurement, especially in “behavioural data”.

Increased application of behavioural data

Education is undergoing considerable change both in the methodology of delivery and the desired outcomes. These goals are often achieved by measuring statistically and methodologically the need of the potential consumers through psychological interface for monitoring or psycho-training. For instance, a representative sample is taken and put in a specific situation. While they think they are playing, they are being studied. “The aim is not to measure level of knowledge but people’s ability to learn”. In reality this process measures three things: the ability to memorise, to understand and the ability to reuse the knowledge acquired.

The ethical debate

This method of atypical data collection and usage raised ethical questions such as whether or not the people being assessed were aware that they were being measured and for what purpose. It was said, “when we mention this type of test a wave of anger rises in the media”. These reactions are comprehensible in the way it often leads individuals to question their privacy, the restriction of

individual liberties. Certainly the “dangerousness of this type of data is not the data itself but the actual purpose for which you use it...it depends on the intentions of the human beings. Data is only an instrument”. The main advantage of such practices is to reach a larger public in more diverse ways but one might risk the charge of being manipulative but “what is education if not manipulation”.

Maximisation of social effectiveness

The use of behavioural data is a “genuine help” in areas such as education where the impact of training, a class or any educational project benefits from being measured. For example, researches in this area have shown that educational videos should not exceed about 7 minutes instead of the 15 minutes normally produced. For organisations such as the TED talks (www.ted.com), seminars should not overpass the 10 people to enable the best communication and transfer of knowledge. For examination centres, using data to measure students’ natural abilities is permitted to “not only assess knowledge but more importantly, the abilities to learn. This enables parents and teachers to focus on the underlying weaknesses of the students”.

The impact on customer/public trust

A contentious aspect is whether this form of data usage and collection would undermine trust between individuals and citizens. New models and ways of behavioural data usage are likely to increase, for example “data-driven CVs” where an employer would be able to review a potential employee’s real abilities when based on measurable behavioural tests. This could actually enhance honesty around recruitment, “the end of lying” and the beginning of “true CVs”. Not only would we observe an increase in the trust in data thanks to standardised means of measuring human abilities but it would increase the social link between individuals which are often undermined by the inherent lack of evidence based trust. However a world dominated by data could become a world dominated by manipulation. This fear is often related to a problem of accessibility of the personal data collected and who had the means for collecting and using the databases. The people could easily have access to these new technologies but there is a problem of decision-making. This problem is double-sided. On the one hand, “elites feel responsible for the slaves of the system”. On the other hand, it is easier for people to be passive in this system because they do not bear the responsibility. Therefore, the demand for the open source faces a dual complexity, the want to keep things controlled by elites, be they economic or political elites, and the want for a more democratic access to data.

Need for transparency in models and their purpose

How can social entrepreneurs, policy-makers or other individuals convince of their good intentions? Not knowing the actual goals of such data undermines public trust. There is a need to inform people about the reasons and the means used to collect such data. Data is a tool that is a response to a demand. It exists when there is an interest for it to exist in a particular situation. To produce a data implies creating a demand for such data by communicative means. This not only implies the role of decision-making but also a real need to empower social entrepreneurs who tend to have a more ethical and social approach and therefore more convincing to a wider population to counter the risk of misinterpretation and miscalculation of such data usage.

World leadership in data innovation

When asked which countries in the world is likely to lead the way in data innovation, the attendees answered Asian, because they are “more submitted to authority” and have a strong sense of it. “The allowance for the use of data implies a strong sense of authority”. One should always question data in term of source, of who is funding the data and who the consumers will be. New methods of increasing the trust in governmental data should be found; for instance, it could be by outsourced to independent organisations. “Whether you fear or you follow it does not matter because when you follow you always fear”. This quotation seems to underline the fact that whether or not data is trusted, the public will always possess an element of fear. The question remains what is the determinant point for which citizens cease to use a data because they fear it.

Overview of the focus group

This focus group was of great interest in casting light upon new forms of collating data, in particular, behavioural data. Its collection and usage raises many ethical questions, but also whether this type of data can bring a new belief in the veracity of data, whether this data can serve good or bad intentions and how can it be used in a secure and democratic way. Enhanced communication and public awareness is likely to be a precondition for creating trust.

Focus Group 3 – Amsterdam, 6th July 2015

“Data is a great tool, but it is always a simplification of life.”

17 student social entrepreneurs (plus 3 i-genius) from the Knowmads Alternative Business School took part in the discussion.

The impact on the use of data

The social entrepreneurs discussed the use of data whilst running a business. Data “gives direction”, assists the decision-making processes by giving information on “what has already been done and what issues to stress” in future, identify the needs and targets, and therefore directly impacts productivity and increases the efficiency of leadership. Data on workplaces themselves can be used as a tool for a better “life and business coaching”, through a collaborative awareness of the internal functioning of a company.

Gathering data from different communities on a large scale and subjecting it to mapping is useful to promote wellbeing. Examples quoted were the best environments for homeless persons, mobile phone alarm functions to maximize the sleep efficiency, calculating the most productive workday of the week, the time when a recipient is the most likely to answer to a professional email, or the periods of the year when suicides experience peaks.

Data is also used by campaigners in areas such as human rights, wildlife, and consumer awareness on ethically produced goods e.g. slavery footprint initiative – ‘how many slaves do you employ’”.

Trust, reliability, integrity

There is: “Trust, Half-trust, Lie, Statistics”. The reliability of data was described as the major issue faced by social entrepreneurs. The question “who should we trust?” has become central to the use of data by entrepreneurs. “Who is implementing the data?” is also an issue.

The idea of trust can sometimes appear irrational and liable to change over time. In its early days, television was not considered to be a reliable source of information whereas newspapers were regarded as more trustworthy. This has been reversed in many countries. Trust is often an evolving factor. Negative comments such as website reviews often receive an exaggerated following as they often appear more memorable than positive reviews – relevant for instance in film or travel reviews.

“We don’t verify, we just check the source” was mentioned, as was “I can’t check 100%”, due to a lack of time. “I can risk that I’m wrong” reflects this overriding need for business efficiency.

The future of data as a potential threat

Social entrepreneurs believe that data will be easier to use overtime due to scientific and technological advances, for instance, “algorithms to predict people’s behaviour will increasingly develop”. “This is where companies want to go”. Concerning the issue of the trust in data, entrepreneurs believe that “young people are getting better on reliability”. Social entrepreneurs see an evolution in the traditional use of data. “Data property” will become a principal issue, as someone creating data also owns this data. This concept of citizen’s data property, which is already being debating around social media channels such as Facebook, could develop further in the public mindset. Will we see “class action court cases against abuse of privacy?” New innovative ways to deal with these different issues will have to be found, especially concerning the private ownership of one’s own data, as “all your own data should be yours, you should be able to sell it” to social networks.

People and employers will, in the future, tend to be able to fully track individuals whether they like it or not. Inventiveness creates “new dangers” that we are not already aware of (e.g. drones leading to a series of ethical issues). Even “clouds” contains private information, which can be threatened through hacking.

Simplification

The oversimplification of data is seen as being potentially problematic. “Data is a great tool, but it is always a simplification of life.” Its presentation reflects a subjective point of view and a certain choice, in order to demonstrate something, as for example infographics “that are becoming increasingly popular”. Data can become subject to a certain opinion and hide one part of the reality, according to the way it is presented. Data should be carefully manipulated, not to create oversimplification around an important social issue. It was said, “all stats that we use are based on assumptions. We should care about (these) assumptions”. The underlying assumptions that are at the basis of data should be clarified and studied, in order to have the most accurate outlook on a issues explained by the data. This was summarized by the declaration of a social entrepreneur: “the most important thing is what lies beyond the data”. For example, “if the GDP increases by 20% because of bad reasons” (e.g. environmental damage), these underlying reasons should be identified. As for the analysis of data, for example that “crimes are decreasing”, we should be careful about the interpretation of this data, as many factors are likely to underlying this change.

Models in the financial sector are increasingly used to evaluate risk models sometimes in an overly simplified form and with at times, risky consequences. The increasing number of scientists working in the financial sector, as opposed to economists and social scientists gave rise to an overly mathematical approach to banking innovation with little understanding for the wider social consequences. This it is believed by many was an underlying factor, which caused the 1998 crash. These models were based on the assumption that efficiency, often requiring simplicity is a good to conduct business. School assessments, which only take into account academic achievement, fail to give adequate regard to wider, but important, social and life skills.

Overview of the focus group

The relationship between data and entrepreneurship as an “ethical and sustainable way” of doing business was emphasized throughout. Threats that an exponential use of data could bring in the future was a serious concern. Data must be reliable for sustainable business. This view was encapsulated by a participant who said that social businesses is “something that should not exist”, on the grounds that it exists only in response to the current economic system that is “not properly functioning”. Whether increased data usage in business life will enhance sustainability or not is open to conjecture.

Focus Group 4 – Ljubljana, 28th August 2015

“Very scared when you realise all the things you can manipulate using data”

This focus group of 7 social entrepreneurs (plus 2 i-genius), held at the Poligon co-working hub, attempted to broaden the horizon both geographically (participants from South East Europe) looking at areas such as crowd funding where Slovenia has one of the highest activity rates in Europe. The focus group united several social entrepreneurs and some students who recently started their social entrepreneurship career. The group embraced a wide diversity with people coming from Slovenia, Poland, Estonia, Greece and Spain.

Elusiveness and purpose

As in the previous focus groups, social entrepreneurs expressed concern about the difficulty to find appropriate data on specific subjects. As one of them said, “[social entrepreneurs] need data from the beginning” right at the imagination of the product or service. Social entrepreneurs know that people do not only want stories but also need facts to be convinced about the positive effects of the social venture; especially in this sector as it is a relatively recent model of business, which people do not necessarily know or appreciate. Nevertheless, social entrepreneurs are faced with enormous difficulties. Some students recently engaged in social entrepreneurship affirmed that official data was most often hidden, meaning not accessible from common Internet search engines. In Poland, one needs to have some knowledge of data manipulation to finding it. It is even more difficult to have data from small Landers governments even though such data would be especially relevant for social entrepreneurs seeking to affect their local environment. Some Latvian universities have courses on accessing governmental data. “Why do they collect it if they don’t open source”. One of the reasons this data is hard to find is often due to the inappropriate format in which the data is published. Data published by governments are generally in PDF format or scanning of researches. This type of format does not allow social entrepreneurs who tend to use Internet more than librarians (“it is much easier just to go on the internet from home”) to search data on the Internet easily. Likewise, when the data is available it is not always updated.

Commercial corporations are a good source of data e.g. sales, but it is often incomplete. Commercial data however does not aim at identifying needs of common citizens but rather just explicit the benefits of a certain enterprise. This data is often quantitative focusing mostly on financial or economic benefits and only applies to a restrained business area, which makes it difficult to conceptualize, generalize or manipulate. Alternatively, “[social entrepreneurs] use data to educate the communities [they] communicate with” and that it tends to be in depth, qualitative, data.

Even though government data tends to be more detailed and accessible, there is a problem of trustworthiness of the data that is often seen as manipulated. For example as a quick survey, the attendees were asked how high they would trust their official government data on a scale from 1 to 5, responses ranged the trustworthiness between only 1 and 3. On the other hand statistics from independent researchers appears more trustful. But many variables influence the trust social entrepreneurs put in the data as it often depends on who has financed the research e.g. political polls were least trusted, as was research supported by strong commercial interests such as GM food. “You have to look why for example a government is publishing that data”. Paradoxically a certain sense of fatality dominates among social entrepreneurs. One mentioned, “You have to trust the data you find because you don’t have enough resources to check it.” Another said that “there is no such thing as un-manipulated data” adding that even though they were not overtly manipulated, norms and values in society would determine their interpretation.

Social economy and new data uses

The social economy has become an important part of data production. Its innovative outlook has not only participated in creating social innovation in terms of products and services but has also been engaged in the creation of new sets of data and new methodologies of measurement. Data around 'well being' is such an example. Social entrepreneurship developed successfully because of its potential to prove its impact in measuring well being. Social economy has therefore an important place in creating new ways of measuring needs or impact, or in more convincing methodologies. "You often know what you want to measure but you don't quite know how to do it and social entrepreneurs can be a solution in finding these new ways of measurement" said one of the interviewees. She mentioned as well that during an agricultural project, the data available was most often elusive but when they started research they always found new parameters to take into account. These parameters typically involved the number of partnerships created; the number of new jobs created even though this was quite a challenge; attendance and satisfaction of the outcomes of the project.

Furthermore, as in the other focus groups special attention was given to issues of data protection and security surrounding the collection but also the use of data. One of the social entrepreneurs reported that he was "very scared when you realise all the things you can manipulate using data". This relates to the data spread (or communication) and not so much the data collection according to some. However, it also came up in the discussion that the security issues inherent to the usage of data are an area in which social entrepreneurs seem the most able businesses to find solutions. Whereas there was a feeling that only-for-profit businesses do not always secure the data they handle because they lack of time, money and knowledge; social entrepreneurs have a more "ethical" approach to data both in the collection and usage. Social entrepreneurs collect data only for what would help them personally improve their social solutions for the communities, so if they sometimes manipulate it, it is most often unintentionally. Such ethical driven data products may give social businesses a potential competitive advantage over commercial operators.

Privacy

Personal protection of data is a worry. The most attended event at the Slovenian Polygon social entrepreneurs co-working space was a seminar on the protection of personal data (<http://www.poligon.si/program/>). It attracted not only social entrepreneurs interested in the protection of their own venture's data but also social entrepreneurship interested in creating new solutions to overcome this danger.

The needs of social entrepreneurs

Social entrepreneurs try hard to collect good data but often lack resources such as money to conduct proper research or most often lack the time. Each product or service the social entrepreneurs seeks to put on a market is a response to sometimes conjectural needs of citizens seeking short-term solutions, therefore time is often a precious parameter. In parallel, good data collection and manipulation is often a time-consuming activity that seeks to picture not only instant needs or impacts but also trends over a longer period of time.

Future usage

Most of group felt that their use of data was going to increase in the coming years. This is a strong feeling arising from the certitude that capitalism fails to empower communities and the individual, often because of negative externalities. Therefore the social entrepreneurs present foresee a return to a more local dimension and that internationalism of businesses cannot subsist without a focus on local

needs of citizens. This would imply more data based research in understanding local experiences and needs. A reaction caused by the lack of ethics in the business world regards the over crowdedness of a too fast changing technology sector. One of the social entrepreneurs said that data can also help social entrepreneurs understand their genuine needs in terms of skills they lack. It is not enough to provide them with the opportunity to learn new business skills but one has to make them conscious of their need for improved management and sales skills.

Overview of the focus group

In conclusion several issues were raised during the focus group, which deserve special attention. We have seen that social entrepreneurs in Slovenia lack as in other parts of Europe access to data in general. Social entrepreneurs tend to use more government data because of the expensive costs of outsourcing data collection or using commercial data. However, it is difficult to source and fully trust, especially in the political arena. Many social entrepreneurs have dedicated themselves to finding new solutions around data collection, usage and most importantly, data ‘securitisation’. This is liable to be a growth area for social businesses. Providing them with incentives and useful education in managerial skills and sales would enable them to produce more accessible and trustworthy data together with improving their overall business efficiently.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations from the focus groups

The focus groups provided a fascinating insight into the present day attitudes which a selection of social entrepreneurs had towards data and statistics. They reflect this period of time when people’s everyday usage of data is undergoing profound change, both personally and professionally. It should be noted that three of the focus groups were held in eastern European countries, which were previously under the old Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. This may account for some scepticism expressed towards official data in these locations although trust (or lack of trust) in certain sources of data was a common theme articulated all locations, including Amsterdam.

Overall, conclusions are as follows:

1. Data is used throughout the product life cycle.

The days when social entrepreneurs solely used data to measure impact are over! All the participants felt that data and statistics play an important part in the effectiveness of their ventures. Its usage was just as important in the early planning of their businesses as it was in the measuring of outcomes. The usage of data is a feature throughout the lifecycle of the product and is often built into the conception and research phase of a new venture.

2. Data and statistics, helps to drive social value.

Perhaps unlike mainstream commercial entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs view data as a driver of wider social goals even beyond the specific focus of their own business. This breath of focus could make them a valuable partner for policy makers especially when sourcing partners via public procurement initiatives.

3. Access to quality data remains a challenge and undermines the competitive economy. Improved visualisation is a priority.

Difficulties around access, was raised throughout the deliberations. Official data generally lacked clarity and visibility. Data from local sources was particularly hard to obtain; a concern given that many social businesses are community focused. Poor access hampers efficiency and competitiveness, especially for smaller social businesses, which operate with severe resource constraints. There was a desire for greater synergy or standardisation in the presentation of official and unofficial data. Enhanced visualisation of data and statistics ought to be a major priority for policy makers and data providers.

4. Ethical and trustworthy data is necessary for efficiency and sustainability

Trust, or rather the lack of trust in data and its sources, was a feature mentioned in all the focus groups, especially with regard to statistics produced by organisations which harboured a strong commercial or political agenda. Whilst the social entrepreneurs were typically savvy in being able to distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy data, they generally found that they had to carry out multiple checks before they could be confident in the credibility of the data. This was often a time consuming process and undermines efficiency. It was generally felt that the production of trustworthy data was essential for the longer-term sustainability of any venture.

5. New models of business usage were identified

- a) The focus groups were enlightening in identifying new business models around the generation and usage of data. Areas mentioned were:
- b) Behavioural data changing the focus in the delivery of health and education
- c) Ethical consumer tools
- d) Personal security and privacy protection products
- e) Business efficiency applications
- f) Localised data generation
- g) Advanced impact measurement methodologies
- h) Selling of personalised 'data property'
- i) Measuring personal and collective wellbeing

6. Data usage should be at the heart of business education

Data and statistics has become so important for the development of social businesses and the wider social economy that its generation and usage ought to be a key feature in business schools and other forms of education.



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Focus group: Vilnius, 18th June, 2015

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Web-COSI
Web Communities for
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