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Building a transdisciplinary learning community around a SE minor program

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Building a transdisciplinary learning community around a SE minor program

Paper for EMES conference 2021

Line 11. Advancements on epistemological, methodological and pedagogic aspects of SE

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Abstract

'Entrepreneurship for Society' is a new transdisciplinary minor program on social entrepreneurship (SE), offered by Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. Students, teachers, researchers and partners from the field of SE collaborate in minor, with the aim of reinforcing a new perspective on the economy by offering students an experience-based introduction in SE. We report on how a transdisciplinary learning community is being built around this minor program, and what lessons can be learned from this process. A successful transdisciplinary learning community needs to be based on the core values of trust, transparency and flexibility. In addition; a problem solving orientation with multiple forms of value creation. On the organizational side, clarity is needed about facilitation and institutional support.

1. Introduction

'Entrepreneurship for Society' (EfS) is a transdisciplinary minor program on social entrepreneurship (SE), developed and offered by Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) in the Netherlands. The aim of the program is to reinforce a new perspective on the economy by offering students an experience-based introduction in SE. To achieve this aim, an important element is the development of a transdisciplinary learning community around the minor program. This community aims to structurally involve AUAS students, teachers and researchers as well as partners from the SE ecosystem, into the creation of new knowledge and insights relevant to the SE community and for SE education.

The development of the learning community has gone hand-in-hand with the development of the minor program itself. In the period 2018-2021, the minor program has gone through a development process of building, experimenting and refining, in several loops. In this paper, we report on the process and the challenges faced, in order encourage and enable others to build similar programs and learning communities, while taking into account lessons learned in the process.

Developing the minor program has been made possible by internal AUAS funding, coming directly from the Deans of two faculties: Business and Economics, and Applied Social Sciences and Law. The development is considered a pilot project, with the minor providing an experimental setting for three aspects:

1. Strengthening connections between research and education;
2. Transdisciplinary ways of working;
3. Interdepartmental organization.

During the full development process, these experimental aspects were and are closely monitored, in order to be able to adjust during the process when necessary, and learn lessons that could be valuable for similar projects within and outside of AUAS (Sprenger et al., 2019).

2. Theoretical background of the minor program

The one-semester full-time minor program Entrepreneurship for Society (30 ECTS) is focused on social entrepreneurship. The point of departure for the minor program is formed by new economic ways of thinking focusing on multiple value creation and awareness of planetary boundaries. The principles of 'Doughnut Economics' as introduced by Kate

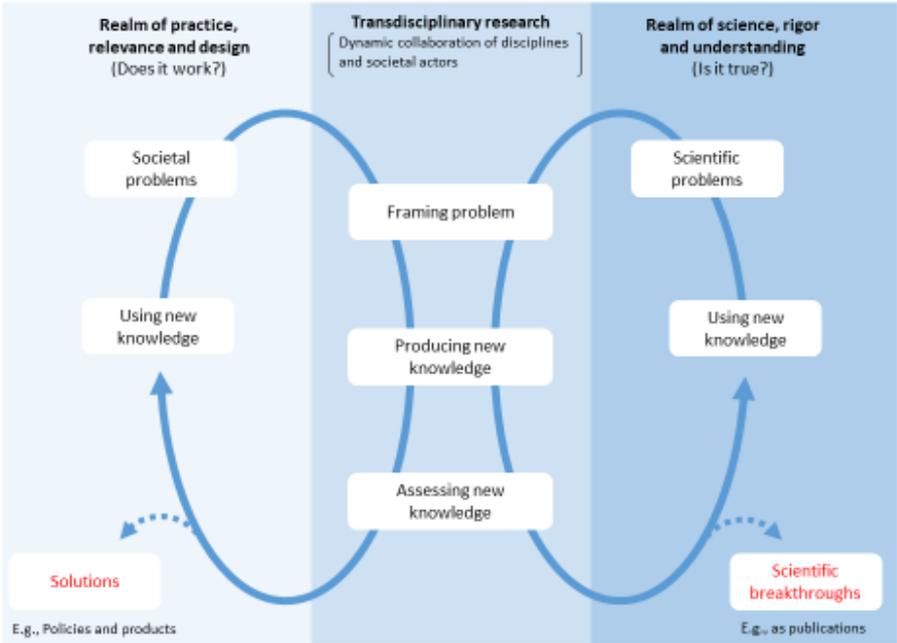
Raworth (2017) feature prominently in the minor, while other forms of new economic thinking such as purpose economy (Hurst, 2014) and Economy for the Common Good (Felber, 2019) are also explored. The choice for Doughnut Economics as an important theoretical backbone of the minor is logical within the context: Raworth was appointed 'Professor of Practice' at AUAS in 2020, and the City of Amsterdam has adopted Doughnut Economics as one of its guiding principles, releasing an 'Amsterdam City Doughnut' in 2020 (Doughnut Economics Action Lab, Biomimicry 3.8, Circle Economy, & C40, 2020).

In its pedagogical and didactical approach, EfS uses principles of high impact learning (Dochy & Seegers, 2018) and powerful learning environments (Miltenburg and Weerheijm, 2018). Another important focal point is the aim to transcend disciplinary boundaries. Cross-overs between disciplines such as economics, social sciences, technical sciences and the care and welfare domains are seen as necessary to solve societal issues.

Following the above, one of the main experimental aspects for the minor EfS is applying the principle of transdisciplinarity. This is interpreted as going 'beyond disciplines' (Nicolescu, 2014), involving not only students and teachers from different disciplines, but also partners from 'practice' (Pohl et al., 2018). In a 2020 OECD report, transdisciplinarity is defined by 'the integration of academic researchers from different disciplines with non-academic participants in co-creating new knowledge and theory to achieve a common goal' (OECD, 2020, p. 15, referring to a definition by the Swiss Academy of arts and sciences).

At first glance, the subject of SE seems to fit well with a transdisciplinary approach. Social entrepreneurship is often interpreted as a subject involving different disciplinary perspectives and approaches to challenges encountered. In the context of a university of applied sciences such as AUAS, it is fitting to adopt an applied approach with a problem-solving orientation (Wernli & Darbellay 2016), implying close collaboration between academic institutions and other actors. In the transdisciplinary learning community envisaged for the minor, a process takes place in which people from different disciplinary backgrounds work and learn with partners from SE practice to solve common problems. This proved to be in line with the OECD approach of Transdisciplinary Research (TDR)(see figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual model of a typical interactive and iterative transdisciplinary research project



Source: OECD 2020, p. 18

In this model, transdisciplinary research brings together the realms of practice and science, creating both solutions for the realms of practice and breakthroughs for the realm of science.

While this looks logical on paper, it is not immediately clear how to put this into practice. The minor program is not a project aimed at solving one issue, but rather aims to build a structure for SE practice, education and research to interact on a variety of issues. Therefore we add the concept of a learning community to the concept of transdisciplinarity.

While a lot has been written about learning communities, this is mostly regarded as a community based within a school and/or a vehicle for capacity building within schools (see for example Hord, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Antinluoma et al., 2018). One paper explicitly linking transdisciplinarity and learning communities is written by a group of Mexican scholars, who define the purpose of a transdisciplinary learning community (TDLC) as follows: 'The purpose of TDLC is to challenge students to find solutions to real problems in transcendental learning environments in collaboration with colleagues from different subject areas, from different universities, and in close cooperation with industry' (Lozoya-Santos et al., 2019, p. 622).

Departing from this problem-solving approach, we aim to operationalize the transdisciplinary learning community in the minor program. Therefore, the main question is:
How can we build a structural learning community around a SE-focused educational program, using a transdisciplinary approach?

To answer this question, we first detail the development process of the minor EfS in the next section. We then focus specifically on the development of the transdisciplinary learning community. We reflect on how far we have come and what lessons were learned in the process so far.

3. Developing the minor in three phases

In the Netherlands, forms of social entrepreneurship have existed for a long time, but the phenomenon has only gained prominence and recognition in the last decade (Hogenstijn, 2019). Following a pioneering report in 2011, national platform organisation Social Enterprise NL was formed in 2012 and the influential Social and Economic Council published a first report on the sector in 2015 (SER, 2015). This culminated in the first policy initiatives by the national government in 2020 (Keijzer, 2020) and moves towards a form of legal recognition (see Hogenstijn, 2021).

The first ideas to develop a minor program focused on social entrepreneurship at AUAS came to the fore in 2016. This followed the establishment of a (small-scale) social entrepreneurship research lab, as well as the taking on board of the concept of social entrepreneurship in the curriculum of Social Work¹ in 2015. In the same year, the City of Amsterdam adopted a first action plan on social entrepreneurship (Oetelmans, 2015). However, after initial discussions, the plan to develop a minor on SE was considered too complicated in the short term and the idea was put aside.

In 2018, the plan resurfaced. The researchers in the social entrepreneurship lab and the former curriculum manager and the main social entrepreneurship teacher in Social Work came together and decided to pursue the idea. It was decided right at the start that the minor should not be exclusively connected to one specific department or degree program. In this respect, it helped that the SE Lab was already connected to two faculties: Business and Economics, and Applied Social Sciences and Law.

¹ In 2015 Social Work at AUAS was still divided into three separate degree programs, but it was already known that these would merge in the coming years. Social entrepreneurship was concentrated in the program of Cultural and Social Studies

In November 2018, a proposal for a development budget was presented to the two Deans of these faculties. Some basic choices were made: the minor had to be officially connected to the Teaching and Examination Regulations of one existing degree program. The connection was made to Social Work. The Deans granted the budget in December 2018, and delegated daily oversight of the development process to the Social Work programme manager and the scientific director of the Entrepreneurship program.

Then, the development of the minor EfS could really start. This was divided in three phases:

1. Program design (2019). This included developing the pedagogical and didactical principles; involving different stakeholders inside and outside the institution; and course design and evaluation.
2. Two experimental runs (2020). In the period February 2020 - February 2021, the program was run in two consecutive semesters.
3. Further development and roll-out (2021-2022). In the period February-June 2021, the minor was not offered, providing time for reflection and redesign. From September 2021- February 2022, the minor program is run for a third time, after which a final evaluation is made. After that, EfS is treated as a regular minor program.

At the time of writing, phase 2 is completed and we are around midway in phase 3.

3.1 Phase 1: Program design

Once the budget to develop the minor was granted, things started to move. A draft program for the minor had to be finished quickly, in order to include the minor in the university's educational offer for 2019-2020. When this was completed, the choice was made to further develop the minor in a core team in a number of long sessions (one, two or three full days) over a number of months, rather than by spending a few hours each week. The core team consisted of six people: a former programme manager of Social Work, an entrepreneurship teacher from Social Work, two researchers and the project manager of the lab Social Entrepreneurship, and finally a teacher from Business Administration. The decision to work in intensive dedicated sessions proved to work well. In March, the team met for a three-day work session in which the pedagogical and didactical principles were set; and a division of tasks was made regarding for example the involvement of different stakeholders inside and outside the institution, the details of course design, as well as student evaluations and examinations. In a number of interviews and sessions, social entrepreneurs and other actors in the SE ecosystem were consulted about their ideas and needs. By May 2019, an 'initiative report' (Sprenger et al., 2019) was presented to the Deans and daily supervisors. On the basis of the report, they gave the final green light for the minor to start in the Spring semester of 2020.

After being given the green light, the team worked hard to prepare all details: from involving guest lecturers and social entrepreneurs with assignments to designing an intensive two-day introduction; and from recruiting students to preparing exams.

Just two months before the start of the program, the minor team was shocked by the sudden passing of one of the team members, who died after an unfortunate accident. Her position in the core team could not be taken over at this short notice. However, an experienced teacher from Business Administration was found to replace her planned role in coaching the students.

The design of the minor was based on the following main principles:

1. Focus is on multiple forms of value creation (social, economic, ecological, other) through entrepreneurship;
2. Learning is seen as a social process;
3. Working and learning together takes place in a community, based on principles of transdisciplinarity.

These principles presuppose an 'urgent and authentic learning environment', and are directly connected to the competencies 'motivation and perseverance', 'coping with ambiguity,

uncertainty and risk', 'spotting opportunities' and 'creativity' as identified in the Entrecomp model (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). The Entrecomp model is used to give students direction in formulating learning goals.

The main features of the minor program are a division in four phases (orientation, design, implementation and delivery) and in four major program elements (theory and tools; practice and partners; assignment; and personal development); all built onto one foundation of a common work culture built on trust, safety and equality (see table 1).

Table 1. The phases of the EfS minor program and the main program elements

	Orientation phase	Design phase	Implementation phase	Delivery phase
Main feature	Broad introduction into SE	Choose route and write action plan	Execute action plan in chosen route	Delivery of products and examination
Period²	Week 1-4	Week 5-6	Week 7-18	Week 19-20
Theory and tools	Introducing context and elements of SE	Introducing tools to build action plan; (test 1)	General part and specific question-driven input per route; (test 2)	Reflection on integration of theory and tools into final product (portfolio)
Practice and partners	Exploration of SE contexts through site visits, guest lectures	Ecosystem approach (exploration continued)	SE context exploration continued, room for question-driven elements	Reflection on network building and relevance for ecosystem (portfolio)
Assignment	Exploration of types of assignment	Writing an action plan	Executing the action plan, coaching	Delivery and presentation of final product
Personal development	Setting of personal learning goals (Entrecomp)	Final group formation for assignment	Coaching; reflection on collaboration and relation to learning goals	Reflection on process and learning goals (portfolio)
Work culture (foundation)	Designing and applying code of conduct; based on principles of trust, safety and equality			

The students can choose one of three routes for the implementation and delivery phases in the minor:

1. Work on their own SE idea;
2. Work on an assignment coming from the SE ecosystem;
3. Work on a research project for the SE Lab.

3.2 Phase 2: Two experimental runs

Finally, the minor program was ready for its premiere in the Spring semester of 2020. Fourteen students enrolled for this first experimental run. A two-day introduction program was organised outside of Amsterdam, where students and teachers / researchers got to know each other well and the foundation for a positive work culture was laid.

² In practice, the semester is not always exactly 20 weeks due to holidays etc. Flexibility is then sought in the implementation phase being one week shorter or longer

But then, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic shocked the world and all classes had to be moved online. This remained the case for the duration of this first run of the minor program. Of course, this presented difficulties and emergency management was required. Still, the group of students was able to continue working on their assignment and the atmosphere remained positive. After the examinations were done, measures were somewhat relaxed and students and staff were able to meet in a park for a (socially distanced) goodbye session. One student abandoned the program early, but all others were able to successfully finish it.

Regarding the team, there were some changes at the end of this semester. One of the researchers decided to refocus her work and quit regular teaching. The new team member who focused on coaching went back to her original work place. The project manager decided to leave AUAS to pursue a career as social entrepreneur. This meant that a remaining core team of three moved into the next semester.

Late August 2020, the second run of the program started with a group of 21 students. The planned two-day introduction on location was not possible due to COVID-19 measures, but the team and the students met for one day in a park. In the first few weeks of the minor, a few more events were organized face-to-face, but some students fell sick, needed to quarantine and/or felt increasingly uncomfortable about physical meetings. Therefore, even before a new ban on face-to-face education was announced by the government, the minor team decided to move all education online at the end of October. From mid-November until the end of the semester, face-to-face meetings were not allowed, so the semester again had to be finished online. While both students and teachers grew tired of this situation, spirits generally remained positive. Two students dropped out of the program for personal reasons; all others successfully finished it.

The 35 students in these two first editions of the minor came from 15 different degree programs, originating in five out of AUAS' seven faculties (see for a full overview table 2 in the next section). It was clear that the minor program attracted a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds.

In both experimental runs, the minor team put a lot of emphasis on evaluation. An intake interview and final interview were held with all students individually. Also, anonymous evaluation questionnaires were sent out mid-term and at the end of term. This was on top of the regular course evaluations sent out by AUAS.

In addition, staff had weekly meetings to discuss current issues and noted these in a log. All these sources were used during the semesters to make quick adjustments, as well as in the full program evaluation afterwards.

3.3 Phase 3: Further development and roll-out

The pandemic meant that in phase 2 the educational program had not been executed as originally envisaged. In addition, it remained unclear what the situation would be from September. This meant that the team had to work with a lot of uncertainties in the next phase. From February 2021, the minor program was not offered for one semester, allowing the team to focus on development. At that time, the SE lab project manager quit working at AUAS to pursue a career as social entrepreneur. Her successor joined the team.

In the development phase from February-August 2021, four main issues were addressed:

1. Refining program content. Building on evaluations of students, teachers and partners, the team set about to refine the program for the future. The evaluation results from the first two groups of students were positive, but improvements could be made in small things, such as providing more clarity on the detailed content of each route.
2. Refining recruitment strategies. Recruitment of students required more attention, as it proved difficult to reach the wide audience of students from all disciplines. This was partly due to the fact that information about minors at AUAS is mainly spread through degree programs and faculties; minor programs aiming at a broad set of students do

not have 'natural' recruitment channels available. As the minor EfS is formally attached to the Social Work degree program, the faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Law was considered its 'home' in the bureaucratic sense. However, two bureaucratic breakthroughs were achieved. First, within AUAS, the minor team was finally allowed to be officially linked to two faculties. This meant that the visibility of the minor for Business and Economics students was increased. Second, the minor was opened for students from outside AUAS. In addition, extra efforts were made to 'market' the minor among students, including the use of former minor students as ambassadors, the development of a one-minute video clip to introduce the minor on the minor's (internal) homepage, and the organization of extra online Q&A sessions for potentially interested students (note that in the period of recruitment all educational activities were still online due to the pandemic).

3. Exploring internationalization and English-language version. Even though the minor has an English title, it is currently offered in Dutch only. The growing interest in the topic of SE in general, and for the minor in particular meant that development of an English-language version was explored. Connections were sought with the Amsterdam School of International Business (AMSIB), which is also part of AUAS. While exploratory talks are promising, no decisions have been taken yet. In addition, the minor team reached out to international partners to explore collaboration and managed to arrange with support of the City of Amsterdam that all minor students could take part in the global Social Enterprise World Forum (SEWF Online), both in September 2020 and September 2021.
4. Action research on building a learning community. From mid-2020, a Social Work teacher interested in social entrepreneurship decided to focus his Master's degree on the minor and on the building of a learning community in particular. From February to May 2021, he organised an action research project, resulting in a thesis which was presented in July (Jacobs, 2021). In the next section, we elaborate on conclusions and implications.

The Social Work teacher who finished his thesis on the action research on the minor's learning community joined the minor team for the third run of the minor program from September 2021. The focus on recruitment paid out in the application process for this third run. The full capacity of 50 students was reached and a waiting list had to be created.

In the third run, more students from Economics-oriented degree programs joined the program, but the variety of major programs in the student population remained. A full overview of the disciplinary backgrounds of students in the minor is in table 2. The group for the third run includes four students from other universities of applied sciences, who had to go through a number of bureaucratic hurdles to enrol.

Table 2. Students in minor Entrepreneurship for Society by major

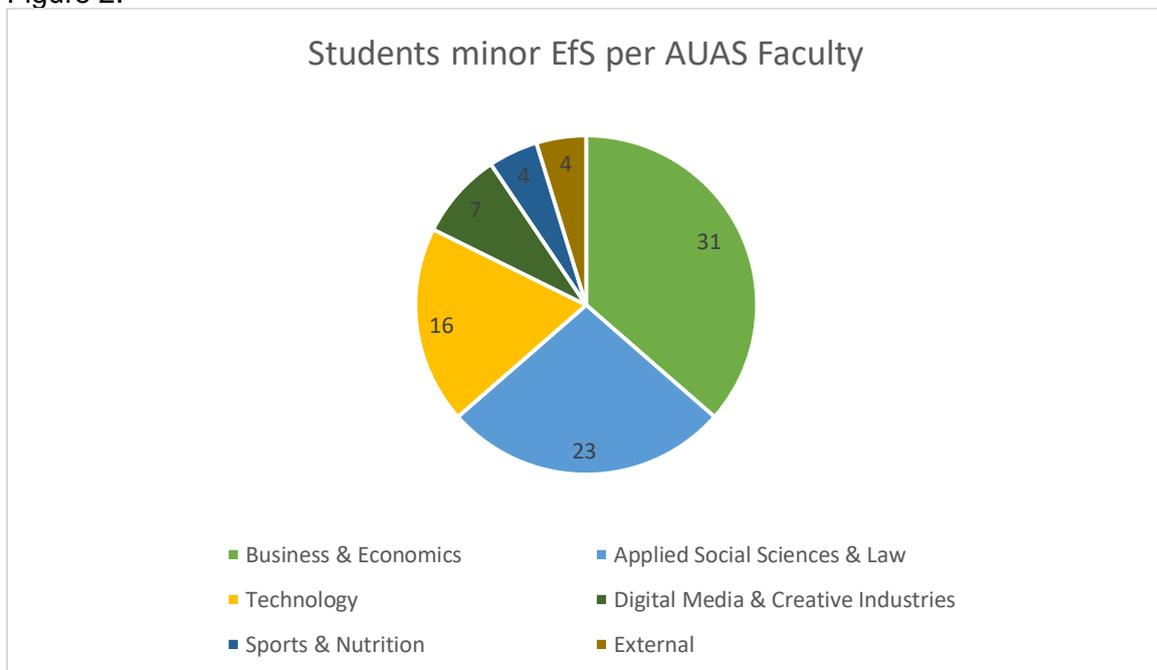
Degree program	Faculty at AUAS*	Students run 1 + 2	Students run 3	Total
Commercial Economics	Business & Economics	5	11 (1 external)	16
Business Administration	Business & Economics	3	8 (1 external)	11
Social Work*	Applied Social Sciences and Law	5	5 (2 external)	10
Engineering	Technology	2	5	7
Applied Psychology	Applied Social Sciences and Law	5		5
Public Administration	Applied Social Sciences and Law		5	5
Logistics Management	Technology	2	2	4

Built Environment	Technology		4	4
Law	Applied Social Sciences and Law	3		3
Finance & Control	Business & Economics	1	2	3
Sport Studies	Sports & Nutrition	2		2
Food & Nutrition	Sports & Nutrition	2		2
Social-legal Studies	Applied Social Sciences and Law	2		2
Creative Business	Digital Media & Creative Industries	1	1	2
Finance, Tax and Advice	Business & Economics		2	2
Communication	Digital Media & Creative Industries		2	2
Fashion & Textile Technologies	Digital Media & Creative Industries	1		1
Communication and Multimedia Design	Digital Media & Creative Industries	1		1
Aviation	Technology		1	1
Human Resource Management	Business & Economics		1	1
International Fashion and Branding	Digital Media & Creative Industries		1	1
Total		35	50	85

**Social Work includes the degree programs that merged into Social Work

The division of students per AUAS Faculty is shown in figure 2. Here it is clear that most students come from the two 'home' Faculties of Business & Economics and Applied Social Sciences & Law respectively.

Figure 2.



In the three runs, it has become clear that the program attracts interest from students representing a wide variety of degree programs. This implies that one necessary condition

for the forming of a transdisciplinary learning community is fulfilled: the presence of a multitude of disciplines. But did a transdisciplinary learning community actually take shape?

4. Building a transdisciplinary learning community

Applying the concept of transdisciplinarity implies dynamic collaboration of disciplines and societal actors (OECD 2020, p. 18). The different *disciplines* are present in the student population (as detailed above) and also in the backgrounds of the minor team. The *societal actors* are present through guest lectures, visits and assignments. In the minor's regular schedule, around 20 guest lectures and / or visits to SE actors are planned each semester. In the orientation and design phases, this is most intensive. The SE actors also provide assignments for the students to work on in the implementation phase. Throughout this phase, students, SE actors and teaching staff have a lot of contact, before the students' final product is presented in the delivery phase. In addition, new research results coming from the SE lab are also shared with the SE actors.

Departing from this basic setup, *dynamic collaboration* is sought as much as possible. The SE ecosystem actors were already involved in the design phase. Now that the minor is running, guest lectures and site visits are planned in dialogue with SE actors. Preparatory talks identify current issues and recent experiences they can report on, to keep the minor content up-to-date. Subsequently, lectures and visits are planned to fit in the build-up of the 'theory and tools' line in the minor program. The (virtual) visits are carefully introduced and prepared with the students. In some cases students are asked to complete an assignment relating to the entrepreneur that is visited. For example, students worked in small groups to build a basic Theory of Change (ToC) for a social enterprise based on the information they could find online. They subsequently presented this during the visit, which resulted in a rich dialogue with the entrepreneur. Eventually three students did assignments for this company in the implementation phase of the minor program, focusing on improving the way the mission of the SE was presented online. This led to mutual learning experiences, as evidenced by remarks in the final evaluation:

'[The entrepreneur] has taught me a lot about the practical, day-to-day running of a social enterprise' (student)

'The students taught me a lot about digital marketing and digital analytics. We were impressed by their hard work, research and expertise' (social entrepreneur)

However, while such anecdotal evidence sounds hopeful, the aim was to build a more structural transdisciplinary learning community. This was the starting point for the action research project on building a learning community around the minor program by Jacobs (2021), as briefly introduced in the previous section. His theoretical focus was on combining the concepts of the professional learning community, cocreation and interdisciplinarity³. In his words: 'we experimented with a number of partners of the minor Entrepreneurship for Society with a professional learning community. In three sessions we jointly investigated and partially solved a concrete problem from the practice of one of these participants in co-creation. The lessons we have jointly learned from this exercise have led to a prototype for a structural learning community around this minor with various actors around social entrepreneurship' (p. 4).

Jacobs' action research project was executed online with seven participants in three three-hour sessions. Results were positive, regarding both content and process. However, based on the sessions, Jacobs also identified 'seven important areas of tension surrounding

³ In building his theoretical framework, Jacobs found that combining the concepts of professional learning community, cocreation and transdisciplinarity did not give enough evidence to build on. Therefore he chose interdisciplinarity instead of transdisciplinarity.

interdisciplinary collaboration in the learning community of the minor EfS'. The areas of tensions are:

1. Differing learning goals and possibilities
2. 'Giving' and 'taking' in the community
3. Available time and necessary time investment
4. Frequency and length of meetings
5. Desired and realistic role for students in the community
6. Research-oriented and action-oriented participants
7. The role of the process supervisor in relation to the full group

(Jacobs 2021, p. 43-47).

Jacobs finished his action research by proposing a prototype for a structural learning community around the minor EfS. This learning community 'must enable the various stakeholders around social entrepreneurship to jointly investigate, understand and solve complex issues from their own practice' (p. 4). Careful coordination is needed, and in first instance this role lies with the minor team. However, the aim is that this develops into a shared responsibility among all learning community participants.

5. Lessons learned and implications

The teaching team of the new minor program Entrepreneurship for Society at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences aimed for an educational program which offers students an introduction in the world of social entrepreneurship. On top of that another aim was to build a structural transdisciplinary learning community for the SE ecosystem in the Amsterdam area. Important steps were taken in building such a transdisciplinary learning community. However, the process is far from finished. Over the past few years important lessons were learned, which are grouped here under three headings: core values, orientation and organization.

5.1 Core values: trust, transparency and flexibility

Following the areas of tensions as identified by Jacobs (2021), it is important to note that participants in the learning community have different learning goals and consequently a different and changing balance in what they 'give to' and 'take from' the community. This can partly be solved by being very open towards each other. A precondition for this is trust. For the minor team, this is a core value built into the design of the program. In the introduction phase, a lot of effort is put into building this relationship of trust with the students. In the two experimental runs of the program this worked quite well and led to an open atmosphere which also extended to the interaction with the SE ecosystem. Regarding the participants in the learning community from the SE ecosystem, it is clear that goals and levels of engagement can vary. Experience so far shows that if there is a broad shared goal, but different actors have different subgoals, collaboration in the learning community can be fine. Regarding trust, the minor team can build on relationships that have been built over years, even before the minor started. SE ecosystem participants are generally transparent about their wishes and needs. Flexibility is however needed in order to address imbalances in 'giving' and 'taking' that can occur for the SE ecosystem participants. This flexibility is mostly needed from the minor team and the SE ecosystem, as the students are tied to educational organizational structures.

5.2 Orientation: Multiple value creation and problem solving

For social enterprises, it is common to have a broad definition of value creation in their business model with a focus on social value creation (see Choi & Majumdar 2014). The social value proposition is key and can be seen as a point of entry: '[It] legitimates the social entrepreneurs' discourse in order to convince the value network of its social utility for the ecosystem and to capture revenue streams from institutions and private stakeholders. It appeals to the beneficiaries, inviting them to become part of a community (Seelos and Mair 2005) as the promise becomes reality' (Hlady-Rispal & Servantie 2018, p. 12). The transdisciplinary approach recognizes the room for multiple outcomes: the result can be both

a solution to a practical problem on the SE side, and a new insight providing scientific and educational value on the side of the higher education institution. This works best if the basic orientation of a learning community is focused on problem solving. Luckily this fits well with the orientation of social enterprises, which are focused on ‘the ability to mix social goals and financial performance [...], the production of goods and services for the benefit of the community [...] and innovation and the exploration of opportunities to generate social value’ (Alegre et al. 2017, p. 14). It also fits well with the mission of a university of applied sciences, aimed at generating knowledge through an applied approach.

5.3 Organization: Clarity about facilitation and institutional support

Returning to the areas of tensions of Jacobs (2021), one important question regards the practical organization of the learning community. Somebody needs to arrange that the people involved can find each other, that meetings are planned and that participants are able to provide input. Ideally, this role of ‘process supervisor’ is shared among participants, but in reality this role is taken by the minor team, and it is not yet clear if and how this role can be developed into a more shared responsibility.

For the time being, it is therefore crucial that this role is taken up and facilitated by the university. While institutional support for development of the minor is clearly present, facilitation of this specific task is not obvious. It needs to be tied directly to educational and/or research goals. One way to handle this issue is by making smart combinations: for example by introducing into the learning community a new research theme that needs to be developed, or by combining the learning community activities with existing events in the SE ecosystem.

5.4 Remaining questions

While valuable lessons have been learned in building the minor program and the transdisciplinary learning community around it, a lot of questions remain. These questions relate to size, intensity, the social aspect and links to other communities or networks.

Regarding *size*, it is not yet clear how many people can be part of the learning community for it to function effectively. The literature on learning communities in schools suggests that a community can operate at different scales (Hord 2004, Verbiest 2014); but it is not clear how this works when a transdisciplinary approach is applied. In its first two complete runs, the minor team has worked with a maximum of 21 students and 10-15 participants from the SE ecosystem at the same time. In its third run, the minor program has grown to 50 students and over 20 partners from the SE ecosystem. Clearly, not everyone can participate in the same discussion at the same time. Jacobs suggests balance between actors and thus more-or-less equal representation of students, teachers, researchers, policy makers, social entrepreneurs and corporates – with room for other stakeholders relevant to the nature of the problem at hand. The question of finding balance in the learning community is becoming more prominent, but it is too early for conclusions.

Regarding *intensity*, a balance needs to be found for all participants. In his prototype for a learning community, Jacobs proposes to organize two day-long sessions per semester and give the students a prominent role in the organizational aspects of this (Jacobs 2021, p. 48-53). While this seems a logical recommendation from the content side, it is not clear how participants from the SE ecosystem view this time investment.

Regarding the *social aspect*, it is important to first note that almost all the work done so far in building the community was done online, due to COVID-19. This implied that a lot was based on existing relationships, as the remote working made it more difficult to engage new people. The upcoming period will show a new balance in working online and offline, and new ways to invest in the social aspects of the community.

Finally, many questions remain with regard to *links to other communities and networks*. It is clear that there are many opportunities. Within the Netherlands, a knowledge network on social entrepreneurship at higher education institutions (KSON) is active; and a new project called 'City Deal Impact Entrepreneurship' (started early 2021) now unites almost all important players in the SE ecosystem. On the international side, the possibility to build an international learning community, connecting to both other Higher Education Institutions and international SE partners, will be explored. Hopefully this paper provides some insights and input for building an international transdisciplinary learning community on social entrepreneurship.

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