



**SOCIAL
SEED**

INCUBATION METHODOLOGY FOR SOCIALLY EXCLUDED ENTREPRENEURS
SUPPORTED BY COMPANIES



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ANALYSIS OF THE TRAINING NEEDS OF EXCLUDED GROUPS

2



INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 2 | DESIGN OF FORMATIVE CONTENT
COURSE FOR SOCIALLY EXCLUDED GROUPS TO ENTREPRENEUR

Intellectual Output 2: Design of formative content course for socially excluded groups to entrepreneur

2.2 ANALYSIS OF THE TRAINING NEEDS OF EXCLUDED GROUPS



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INTRODUCTION

A study has been carried out on the specific training needs that disadvantaged people may require to enter an incubation process.



First, an analysis of the global scientific literature has been carried out: reports, scientific articles, handbooks and research available in the field of entrepreneurship targeting people at risk of exclusion. The aim was to identify abilities, needs and the basic knowledge of the learners, in order to develop a training approach targeting specific needs of vulnerable participants. Furthermore, the main purpose of this analysis was to orientate and prepare an empirical research on the subject within the Social Seed project.

The result of this study was the first step of information on which two questionnaires were developed. Interviews have been carried out both to entrepreneurs of disadvantaged groups and to experts in entrepreneurship support to validate the results of the analysis. The questions, referred to the same topic but through different perspectives, were raised to the two groups in different ways to gain their points of view Investigating the same topics. The empirical research on training needs was based on the results of the data collected by the submission of questionnaires in each partner country where were involved at least 3 entrepreneurs who have undertaken a path of business incubation, for a total of 12 entrepreneurs, and at least 3 experts working in the field of support for business start-up's working with these target groups, for a total of 16 professionals.

The present report, regarding training needs analysis of groups at risk of exclusion, is the final work of both the revision of academic papers and the results of empirical research carried out by all Social Seed's partners.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The analysis of the training needs of people at risk of social exclusion who followed an incubation process started with profiling the targeted population, considering the implications that the personal, professional and social life have in the incubation process.

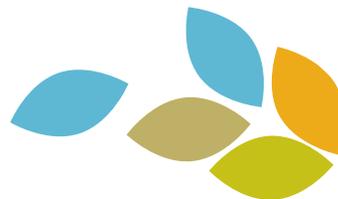
Job Profiles

Different point of views can be considered in this kind of analysis, including different **job Profiles**:

- **Professionals working in the incubation process**

Professionals working in the field of support for business start-ups working with disadvantaged groups can have different job profiles, such as expert in job orientation, coaches, mentors, trainers, practitioners, and professional from the world of work.

Their contribution to the incubation process is different, according to their knowledge, skills and experiences; they can be responsible for education, making contacts, facilitating the start-up process, etc. But specific competences are required to address the need of their incubates.



- **Social entrepreneurs who have a vulnerable background**

Disadvantaged entrepreneurs can be the following categories running a business: women, youths, seniors, unemployed, disabled, ethnic minorities and immigrants. These may be self-employed or entrepreneurs running businesses that employs others. Generally, the evidence suggests that that businesses established by these groups encounter greater barriers to sustaining their businesses (Alves, 2013; Boden and Nucci, 2000). A number of factors are cited in the literature as influential on their survival rates, including the entrepreneur's limited knowledge, skills, labour experience, poor human and social capital and discrimination in terms of ages, race and gender (Irastorza and Pena, 2014; Schoof, 2006; OECD, 2008; Kautonen, 2013).

Educational level

The individual's **education level** has a strong positive effect on entry into self-employment.

Harmon et al. (2003) find that an added year of education increases wage income by on average 6.5 per cent, based on a meta-analysis of micro level studies of wage earners. Similar meta studies of entrepreneurs suggest that an added year of education raises entrepreneurial profits by on average 5.5 per cent in developing countries, and 6.1 per cent in developed economies (van der Sluis et al., 2005; 2008).

Estimates from several countries, however, indicate a generally statistically insignificant relationship between education and self-employment entry (see, for example, Holtz-Eakin and Rosen 2004 for Germany, Blanchflower and Meyer 1994 for Australia, and Lin, Picot and Compton 2001 for Canada).

On the other hand, evidence from East European transition economies indicates a positive relationship between schooling and transitions into self-employment.

Anyway, the **literacy level will affect training methods**, so it's very important to detect and adapt them to participants' need. Depending on the literacy level, it will be chosen different training strategies. For example, if participants face a challenge writing or with very theoretical methods, it could be possible to propose them practical and experiential methods, such as act, dance, or draw instead, or designate a writer for the group.

Gender

Another relevant aspect in the definition of the general profile of entrepreneurs is the **gender**.

In the literature on women's working conditions, Burke (2007: 112–114) summarises the work of various researchers (Stroh et al. 1992; Tharenou et al. 1994; Tharenou and Conroy 1994; Kirchmeyer 1998, 1999; Sturgues 1999) and reaches the general conclusion that women and men need different career models if we are to benefit from women's skills and talents. Despite



the wide variety of approaches and procedures in these studies it is possible to outline some overall results. According to Stroh and Tharenou in particular, the most important determinants of men and women's professional careers and the differences between them are human capital, support from interpersonal relations (relations between equals, mentoring), the role of gender at individual level (personality, sex) and family status and/or set of family obligations.

Clear gender related differences are emerging in women's experience of self-employment and business ownership. These differences are apparent in many aspects of female entrepreneurial activity from pre-venture experience:

- The level of constraints in accessing finance and other resources required for start-up and business growth;
- The use of networking in the management of the ongoing venture;
- The performance of female owned firms. (Carter,2000)

Ashoka, with the support of the Citi Foundation, sought to understand how female social entrepreneurs lead and innovate, and how these insights could help more women and girls drive positive social change. Through a mapping of diverse women social entrepreneurs in Ashoka's network—the largest in the world— Celebrating ChangemakHERS research offers an analysis of the barriers and opportunities related to women's leadership in social innovation, and a roadmap for how the social entrepreneur, business, and donor communities can create enabling environments for women and girls to succeed as changemakers: people who take creative action to solve social problems for the benefit of all. The point is that as long as we refer to the existing leadership model, it will be very difficult for women to actually thrive or flourish. A new leadership model has to be provided, in order for women to bring their full potential, considered necessary because society and the economy need a different leadership model.

Particular vulnerability conditions

In the training needs analysis, were considered **particular vulnerability conditions**:

- **Physical or mental disability**

Earlier studies on entrepreneurship for the disabled suggest that concentrated, customized, one-to-one or small group assistance may produce the most successful outcomes rather than generalized government policy support (Dotson et al. 2013).

Aside from gaining the knowledge required to run a business, educational support can be a stimulating factor that motivates individuals to start their own businesses by enhancing their level of self-confidence.



Entrepreneurship education that exposes students to life applicable issues is capable of boosting their confidence/capacity to risk into venture start-up.

Powell (2013) pointed out that entrepreneurship educators should play a role as a coach rather than a supervisor, so that the students could develop more realistic understandings of their abilities, pursue the applied knowledge particularly useful to them, and learn to adapt rather than blindly imitate examples.

- **Migrant background**

Immigrants and Refugees face unique challenges starting a business and require tailored support that helps them with cultural, financial and legal barriers.

Especially for refugees, usually their experiences are extremely traumatic. These experiences, however, can have a powerful impact on their desires and motivations. In addition, gender-based cultural norms are also a major barrier to entrepreneurship by women refugee, which can in turn be attributed to cultural norms that might hinder women working outside home or running businesses, and which allocate them disproportionate family and childcare commitments.

Even if migrants and refugees often have experience as entrepreneurs in their home countries, they lack specific knowledge of the business environment in host countries. Entrepreneurship education and training is key to developing and expanding the skills and capabilities migrants and refugees need to run a business in a host country; it is important to develop and enhance an entrepreneurial mindset that can enable migrants and refugees to better understand how they can leverage their knowledge, expertise and networks towards more profitable business opportunities. Many migrants and refugees require more targeted support in the early stages of entrepreneurial activity.

Entrepreneurship education should be designed to

- connect aspiring entrepreneurs with the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem
- ensure that programmes are taught by experienced and well-connected entrepreneurs
- connect them to the private sector through vocational training
- integrate programmes providing basic needs of migrants and refugees.

- **Long-term unemployment**

Long-term unemployment refers to the number of people who are out of work and have been actively seeking employment for at least a year. It has implications for society as a whole, with dire social consequences for the persons concerned and a negative impact on growth and public finances. Long-term unemployment is one of the causes of persistent poverty.



Entrepreneurship itself is ultimately a process of creating possible futures and states of being. In the process of setting up their own ventures, many “necessity entrepreneurs” engage with and overcome institutional invisibility, lack of representation in dominant cultural narratives, and the self-doubts emerging from their own personal crises. Against this ‘necessity’ background, many manage to develop creative practices using whatever institutional ‘pores’ they find and challenging entrepreneurial self-narratives that write them out as entrepreneurs because of gender, age, or lack of success to advance their projects. While the future remains uncertain, they succeed in coping with daily changes, focus on short-term goals, feed their families and try to enjoy the process.

- **Ex drug or alcohol addict**

Drug user organisation and drug user participation is characterised by contradictions:

- institutional and cultural practices provide opportunities for drug users
- some overarching ideological and moral schemes tend to limit or remove the legitimacy of drug user organisation and participation.

The existence of a social security system in other words ensures that the energies of drug users may be channelled into activities that are not entirely a matter of physical survival.

Specific restrictions are sometimes applied to the group of drug users, for example, requirements of remaining drug free for a certain period in order to qualify for different kinds of assistance (e.g., housing benefits); differences of this kind between the countries are related to the moral and ideological regimes, which dominate drug policies.

Besides strategies to overcome stigmatisation, another probably more immediate effort to alter the negative perceptions of drug users is by demonstrating their ability to run or participate in running an organisation, to take part in meetings, keep agreements, etc.

Importance for achieving changes on three aspects:

1. lifestyles of individuals or groups
2. the environmental context that induces this
3. the current health and social system.

- **Status of ex-offender**

The limitation of the freedom of movement is accompanied, as a rule, by the individual's immediate inability to produce a series of chain consequences both on the life of the person serving the custodial measure and on that of the family community connected to him.



In addition, upon exiting the criminal circuit, the same condition of "ex-prisoner" exposes to a strong social sanction by the community and the world of work.

For prisoners, both self-employment as an occupational career path and the development of an entrepreneurial mindset serves as an attitudinal foundation to rebuild their future.

Entrepreneurial education programs provide knowledge and understanding about various aspects of bringing a business idea into reality, the characteristics of an entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial intention development, opportunity identification and analysis, business planning, new venture finance, and managing and growing the venture are all aspects of the educational curriculum.

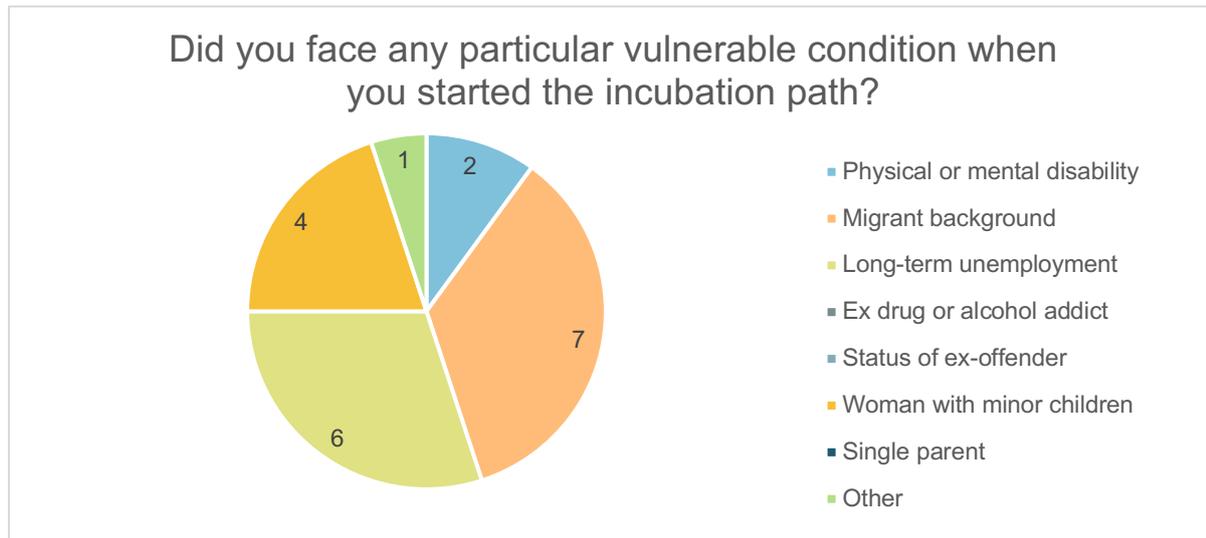
The entrepreneurial mindset does not teach inmates how to be decisive, creative, disciplined, nor do they have to be already passionate, tenacious, or innovative to be taught. However, without the entrepreneurial mindset, prisoners are unable to reorient themselves towards their future, which is a necessary condition for them to transform their attitudes for entrepreneurship education.

- **Woman with minor children and/or Single parent**

Besides the family-derived difficulties, women experience barriers associated with the personal preparation of entrepreneurs. Lack of management experience and training are actually difficulties for enterprising males and females (Borges, Filion, & Simard, 2010; Lituchy & Reavley, 2004; Mathew, 2010; Shragg, Yacuk, & Glass, 1992), particularly scanty knowledge on business plans and specific laws (Zanakis et al., 2012). [...] The main six difficulties for the commerce/service group were lack of family support (a), difficulties due to young children (b); lack of experience (c), lack of time for the participation in networks (h); lack of access to business information (i); difficulties in obtaining initial capital (t). [...] Even there are no significant difficulties in the establishment of industries, it should be highlighted that some difficulties with higher averages, such as lack of experience in that specific industry (c); lack of management experience (d); lack of specific formation (e); lack of money (r); difficulties in obtaining initial capital (t); difficulties in contracting employees (x); lack of money to advertise the business (z). [...] Difficulty with young children, lack of initial assets and lack of family support were the most important difficulties for entrepreneurs in the commerce and service segments, complying with results in previous studies (Mathew, 2010; Rodriguez & Javier, 2009; Shragg et al., 1992; Winn, 2005). In the case of low family support, Rodriguez and Javier (2009) also identified that female entrepreneurs received less family support than their male counterparts. They also underscore that women received less social approval and slight financial support.



In the empirical analysis interviewed entrepreneurs declared that they faced vulnerable conditions in their experience:



All the interviewed professionals had experience with vulnerable target groups, as Disabled people (7), Migrants and Refugees (13), Ex drug addict (4), Ex-offenders (5), Women(8), and other disadvantaged conditions (Long term unemployed/Single parent, Extreme poverty, Long term unemployed people, NEET, Stressed and depressed youth, people living in peripheries).

Work experience

Referring to **previous work experiences**, it has been shown that small firm and same sector experience influence the entrepreneurship decision (Elfenbein et al., 2010; Gompers et al., 2005; Parker, 2009). However, to date, this literature does not distinguish between different modes of entry into entrepreneurship.

Liguori, et al. stated that previous work experience positively influences the self-efficacy as well as entrepreneurial expectation. While Fatoki finds that University students having previous work experience has the greater level of entrepreneur intension versus students having no exposure. However, the difference is not statistically significant.

The empirical research pointed out that entrepreneurs, belonging to different disadvantaged categories such as migrants, unemployed women with children, disabled people, have undertaken different types of entrepreneurial activities. Some of them have managed to undertake independent activities, such as photographers, chefs, nurses or various forms of



entrepreneurship (e.g., in the commercial/marketing area, catering). Others, on the other hand, helped also by integration and employment services, have carried out civil and social services.

Likewise, the *professionals interviewed express how the entrepreneurs who undertook the incubation process with them were then employed in educational, service and catering sectors.*

KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNICAL SKILLS

Entrepreneurial skills refer to the set of cognitive, technical, and interpersonal skills required in the practice of entrepreneurship.

Technical Skills refer to the knowledge and proficiency in a specialized field like computer technology, accounting, marketing, operations research, engineering, medical fields, or other related technical fields. Many technical skills require training and experience to master. They are also typically a type of hard skill.

In the absence of the technical skills, the output of the cognitive skills may not carry any significant value. Without the technical skills, an idea will remain to be an idea and a business opportunity will remain to be a business opportunity.

The technical skills of an entrepreneur include proficiency and ability, among others, in the following areas:

Financing

All entrepreneurs need to know how to manage their finances effectively. Learning how to budget, choosing sensible investments, and borrowing responsibly are three of the most valuable money management skills any entrepreneur can have.

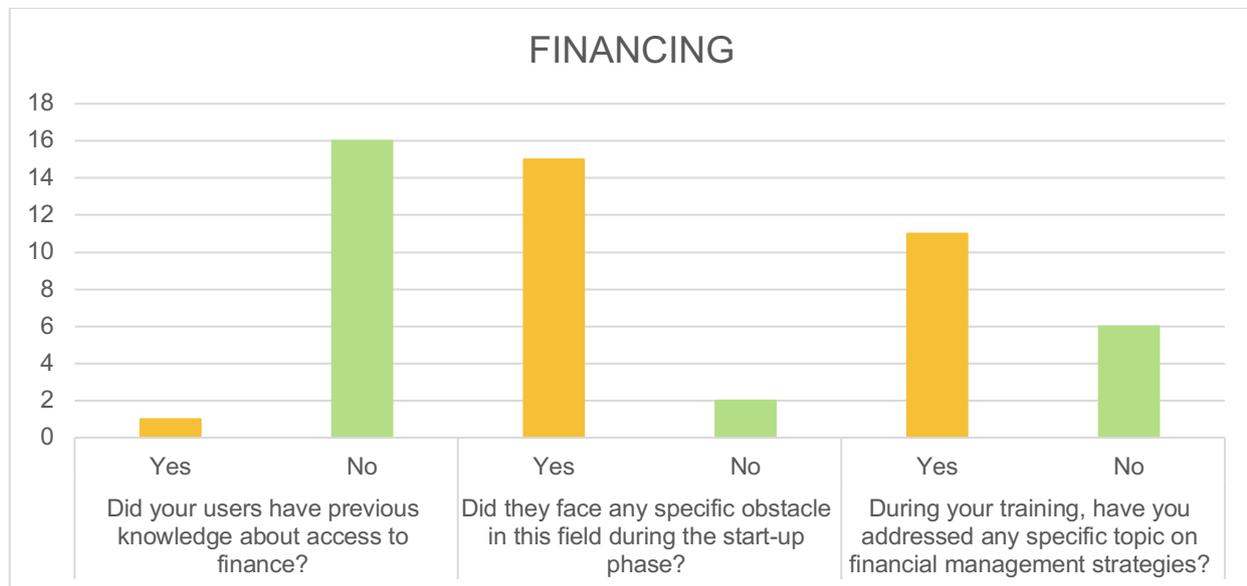
Finance management skills are those that help individuals in this role oversee all aspects of a company's financial transactions, including budget analysis and calculation of return on investment (ROI) as well as purchasing and staffing decisions.

Regarding this point, the lack of knowledge about the financing strategies of women business owners has given rise to a mythology about women entrepreneurs and their access to financing in general, and equity capital in particular. Women-owned businesses are perceived as risky investments because of their choice of industry, firm size, capital requirements, growth expectations and ownership/control issues (Brush, et al. 2001).

Only 3 entrepreneurs among the 12 interviewed persons declared that when they first started their business, they had previous knowledge about access to finance for entrepreneurship; this information is confirmed by professionals (16 on 17 answers).



This lack of knowledge caused specific obstacle in this field during the start-up phase for entrepreneurs (9 on 12), as underlined also by professionals:



So, most of the incubation programs addressed specific topic on financial management strategies, according to the contribution by entrepreneurs, information confirmed also by professionals.

All the entrepreneurs considered useful and necessary the training received on the financial and legal aspects of their future business. In fact, this has given concreteness to their idea, making them understand what to prioritize in order to allow the company to start and continue its path. For example, one of them declare he has learned basics notions about the accountancy for his business, notions about how to register the social economy entity, how to gain access to funds when he organizes new employment possibility for people with special needs. These lessons have therefore been very positively evaluated by all entrepreneurs, who claim to know better how to move in the business world thanks to them.

All professional state that the financial notions have been fundamental for the users who undertook the incubation process. None of them generally assessed the users' skills before the course, as it already provided the basics needed to create a business. One of them declares that the financial module helps them get a clear idea of the income needs and the management of expenses. The training generally gives tools to obtain financial support for the creation of jobs in existing Social Enterprises or Social Economy entities (associations, foundations and others). Grants for the creation of jobs can also be obtained for employment in newly created Social Enterprises, including social cooperatives. For examples, topics covered during the module could be:

- Legal and organizational foundations of Social Economy entities



- Functioning of the Social Economy entities
- Organization of activities and general statutory provisions regarding the rights and obligations of Social Economy entities members (foundations, cooperatives etc) and employees
- Specialist accounting and HR consulting
- Flexible forms of employment in PES
- Bookkeeping and accounting in PES

Networking

General **networking skills** are important for gaining cultural awareness as well as for business so a strategy for developing wider local networks that provide structural support for is important and local networks will help with integration.

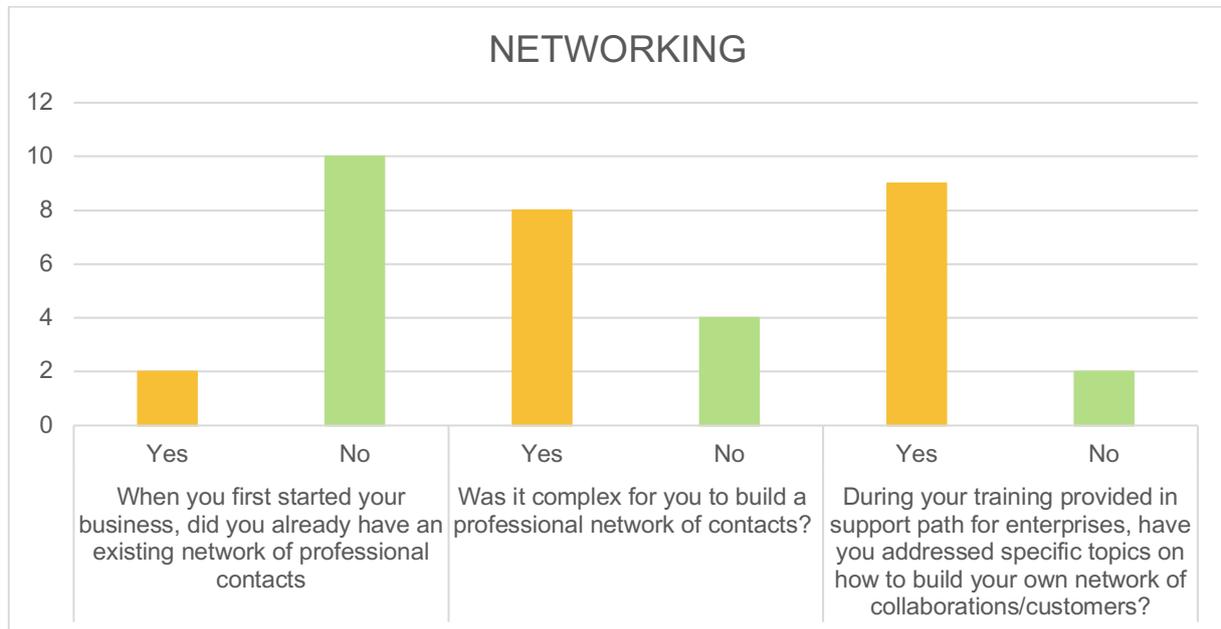
Networking is important because we all prefer to do business with people we know, or who are known to people we know. Broadening your network therefore opens up your business opportunities, whether to sell, buy, recruit or get a job.

In business terms, networking is the process of speaking to professional contacts and sharing information with them.

It should be clear that networking is part of everyday working life. There are a number of ways that to do this. They include industry or professional events, such as conferences, informal events, social media, short courses, email, etc.

When they first started their business, most of entrepreneurs didn't already have an existing network of professional contacts, and they faced difficulties in building a professional network of contacts, but the training provided support path for enterprises, addressing specific topics on how to build their own network of collaborations/customers, as confirmed also by professionals.





All entrepreneur participants who undertook the incubation process report how this was extremely useful in creating a network of professionals, suppliers, consultants who could support them in generating their business idea. The opening of new contacts gives them many possibilities of business; the meeting of other social business owners, NGO activists, people from their own self-government and municipality has made it easier to get started. Some of them are still in touch with their incubator: they feel taken into consideration as whenever possible, the tutor and mentor introduce them to new networks to broaden their possibilities for successful social business.

Professionals state that a main object of the incubation path is to increase awareness of the importance of building a professional network, as it allows to make the business viable. The relationship with their clients, with specialists in the field of production or service design, with possible lenders or investors is indeed fundamental for such social enterprises. One of the respondent states that for this reason the networking module must be integrated to the marketing and sales module, since they are extremely interconnected. For examples, topics covered during the networking module could be:

- Principles of successful cooperation;
- Team building and team working;
- Strengthening mutual relations;
- Communication and division of responsibilities.



Planning and Management

In order to achieve success in the business project, **planning** is a central issue. It is very important that participants have a high degree of involvement during the training. Offering them a moment of exchange, allow participants to share what they would like to learn from the training, as well as explain them what are training goals, the outline and structure of the training. Based on the participants' expectations and on what are the training goals, it will be possible to create two types of plans:

- Business plan - document that gives a complete description of the business and its goals over a period of time. It's like a map showing where the business aims to go and how it will get there
- Personal action plan - a guide to achieving participants' goals and next steps, adapted for their life and for their business project.

It's important to explain planning opportunity in an effective way. For example, it could be effective to explain business planning similarly to other types of planning that people undertake for family and community gatherings and celebrations.

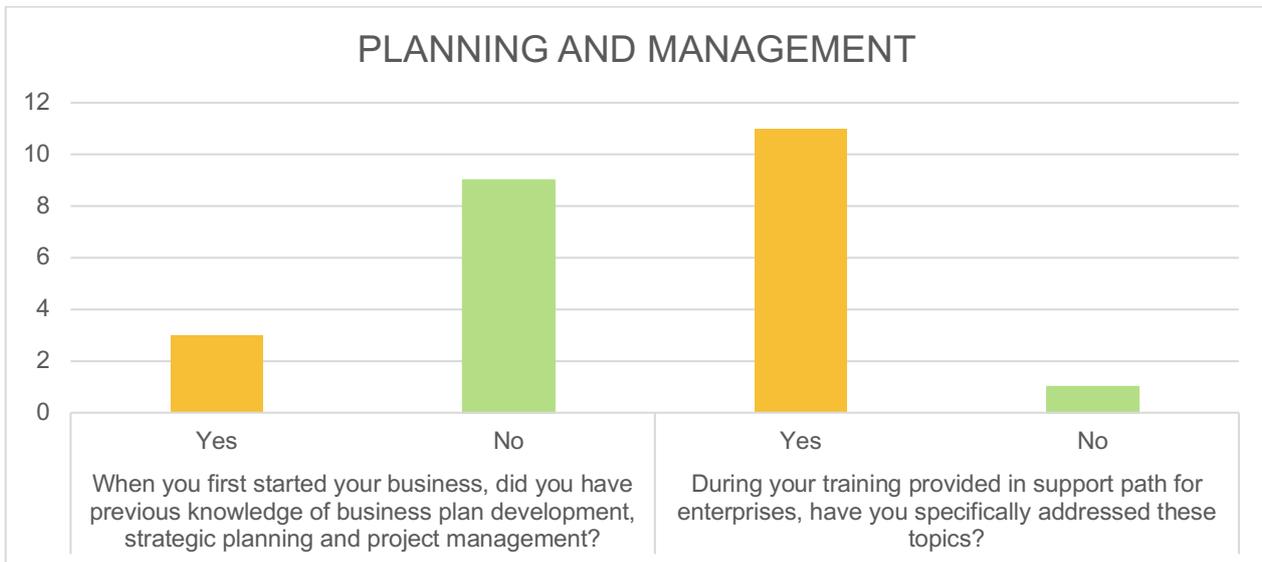
During the training process, it's significant to offer participants the opportunity to experience the creation and management of a business through *numerous exercises*, allowing them to develop specific skills and competencies through practice. It could be helpful offer exercises on topics as business model, marketing skills, customer care, calculating costs, financial planning, managing money, as well as assessment of situations, possibilities, benefits, risk-taking and decision making.

Lack of management experience and training are actually difficulties for enterprising males and females (Borges, Filion, & Simard, 2010; Lituchy & Reavley, 2004; Mathew, 2010; Shragg, Yacuk, & Glass, 1992), particularly scanty knowledge on business plans and specific laws (Zanakis et al., 2012).

In the research "Women entrepreneurs: Reasons and difficulties for starting in business" conducted by Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie emerges that, for women entrepreneurs, even there are no significant difficulties in the establishment of industries, it should be highlighted that some difficulties with higher averages, such as lack of experience in that specific industry, lack of management experience, lack of specific formation.

The same data were registered referring to previous knowledge of business plan development, strategic planning and project management:





The entrepreneurs followed specific training courses related to business and self-training, learning how to write their own project and acquiring skills and notions useful for its implementation. Through model such as the Business Model Canvas they had to prepare a full business plan and a concept for employing other people in their future social company/foundation. They had the chance to participate to business planning, social economy, and creative thinking seminars. One of the entrepreneurs also states that in his incubation path the mentor required him a specific plan to employ people with social/behavioural problems. In addition, starting their business during the incubation phase, they already learned in a practical way how to overcome problems.

Likewise, *for the professionals the business construction and implementation is very useful* and it is a moment that involves them a lot precisely because it is the moment in which they see an idea and a project structured in a concrete way. During the training, therefore, notions on the topic are provided in order to promote a better understanding of those topics and specificities, but not yet with the idea that they can design on their own. This requires time and further growth, with the constant help of the mentors and experts and case studies or scenarios based on real-life. An example of educational modules could be:

- Business models
- Management training
- Basics of strategic planning
- Resources and opportunities
- Searching for new directions of solutions based on a business plan



- Marketing and pricing policy

Marketing & sales

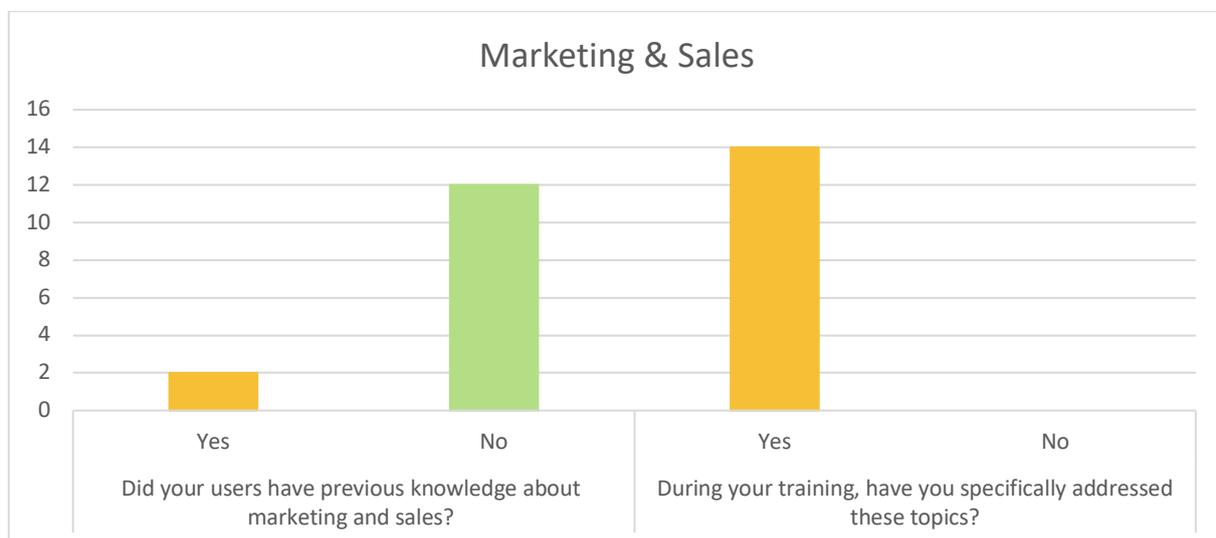
Marketing and sales are critical to an organization because of the direct influence on revenue-generating activities.

Marketing informs and attracts leads and prospects to a company and product or service. Sales, on the other hand, works directly with prospects to reinforce the value of the company's solution to convert prospects into customers.

A carefully crafted combination of sales and marketing is vital for successful business growth. To build a successful business, you must develop a program that combines sales and marketing and reaches out to prospects in all the stages an ongoing basis. Entrepreneurs often get into trouble by choosing only those tactics with which they're most comfortable.

All entrepreneurs received support, during the training, about marketing and sales; in fact, 7 of them didn't have prior knowledge of marketing and sales strategies when they started their business.

Professionals confirmed this data:



All entrepreneurs during the incubation process addressed the topic of Sales and Marketing, learning how to promote their businesses. The strategies learnt during the path have been declined for each specific activity (e.g. cooking, tourism) and concerned for example in marketing strategies and on the creation of a brand, on how to prepare online sales offer, on social media identity (e.g. through Facebook Advertising) and crowdfunding campaigns.

Likewise, professionals declare that notions on the topic of Sales and Marketing provided during the training in order to promote a better understanding of those specificities are useful



for the development of strategies of the users' business plan. Some of the topic addressed are:

- Training on social media use for promotion and fundraising;
- Training on how to present a product and/or a service;
- Training on how to sell a product and/or a service.

However, a professional affirms the importance of facing these challenges during real cases and while you are already starting the activity, not only in a theoretical and notional way.

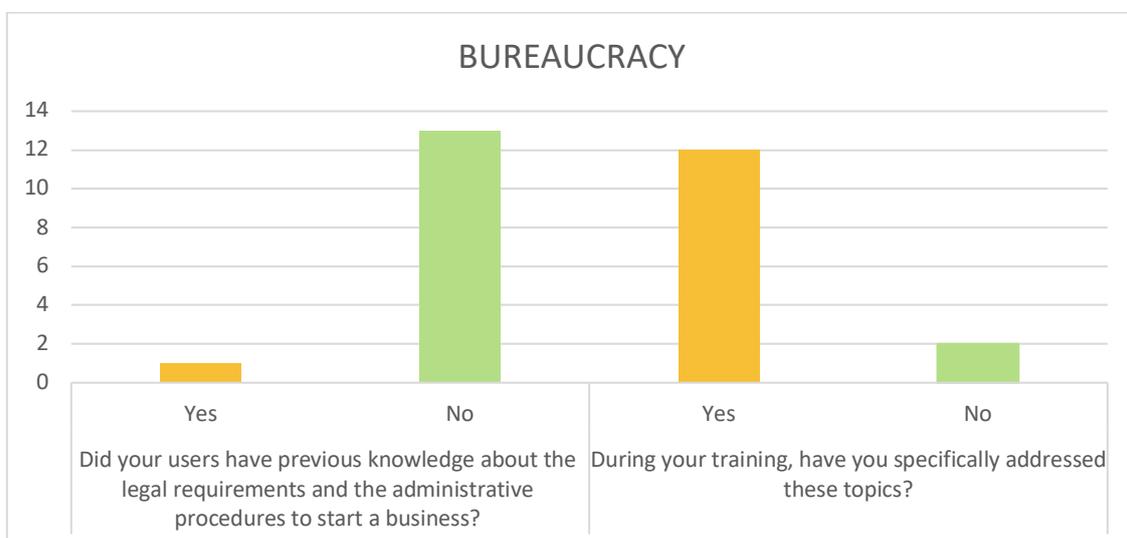
Bureaucracy

A **bureaucracy** typically refers to an organization that is complex with multi-layered systems and processes. These systems and procedures are designed to maintain uniformity and control within an organization. Bureaucracy in business is a hierarchical organization or a company that operates by a set of pre-determined rules.

Understanding business bureaucracy can help better understand the workplace and advance a business. It's possible to use the benefits of bureaucracy to create a fair working environment, institutionalize company's rules, improve processes and facilitate transparency.

Some forms of bureaucracy are helpful, if not vital, to organizing a business, while others can impede the work of an organization.

When they first started your business, most of entrepreneurs didn't have previous knowledge about the legal requirements and the administrative procedures to start a business; 8 on 12 declared that the training provided in support path for enterprises specifically addressed these topics, as confirmed also by professionals:



None of the entrepreneurs had any knowledge of the legal and bureaucratic aspects of setting up a business. The incubators provided a basic knowledge of the subject and also gave access to materials, tools and online courses to deepen the subject. Some entrepreneurs add that the incubator teach them how to ask for information and support from Prosocial Business. They note, however, that the learning process is still ongoing, as this topic is very complicated.

Professionals also note that users generally have no knowledge in this area. Some incubators provide only basic knowledge of the formal requirements necessary to set up the business and possibly apply for funds for it. Others, according to request and if deemed useful, also implement more advanced modules on the subject:

- Establishing a Social Economy entity, taking into account various legal forms and types in each Nation;
- Registering Social Economy entity and activities in the National Registration Court;
- Labour law in social institutions;
- Tax Office and the Statistical Office;
- Stipulating contracts with contractors/clients;
- Conducting paid and unpaid statutory and economic activity by Social Economy entity;
- Applying for funding for establishing a Social Economy entity from local labour office funds / EU funds, external financing, etc.

This path can also be customized, assessing the needs and requests not only of the group of entrepreneurs, but also of each individual user.

ICT (Information and Communications Technology)

Some degree of IT and Internet access is essential to acquire the skills needed to run a business.

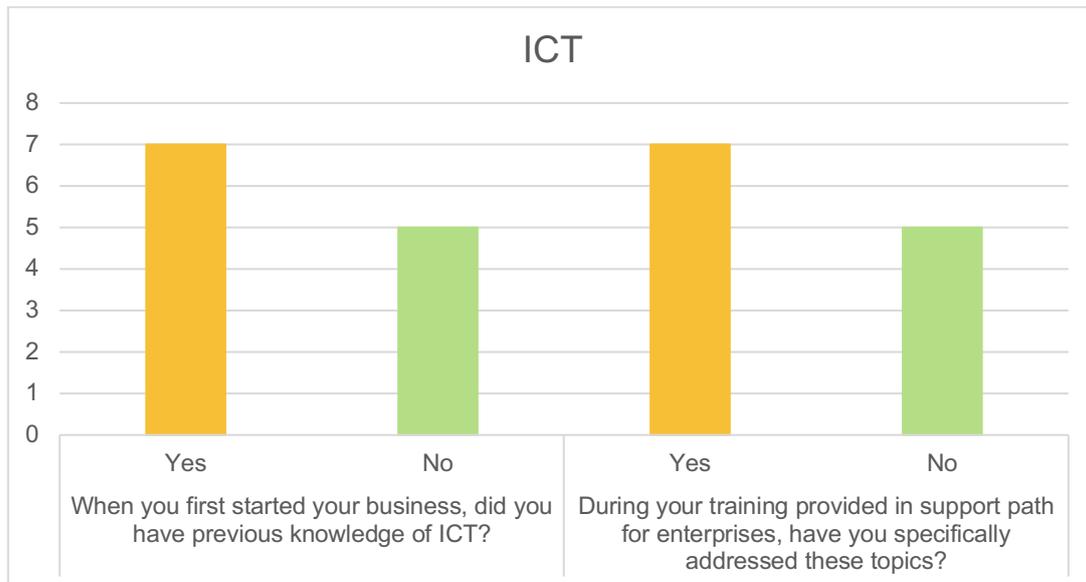
As advancements in technology and automation enter the workplace, entrepreneurs may find themselves working with more than spreadsheets and ledgers. Effective entrepreneurs are comfortable with technology and can easily use various programs and applications to their advantage.

Use of internet, social networks and computer skills are basic ICT considered needful to each kind of entrepreneurship initiative.



The discovery of the importance and the role that today digital skills takes in every aspect of social and individual activities such as life, the society today's knowledge has started an important process that should lead to the diffusion of conscious use of ICT in every context.

A higher percentage of entrepreneurs had previous knowledge of ICT, and many training programs provided support also on this topic:



The same percentage have been declared by professionals.

Entrepreneurs report how the knowledge offered in ICT is basic, often linked to the Sales and Marketing module. They refer to lessons on how to establish an online crowdfunding campaign, how to promote your company via social media, how to activate an online shop area. However, none of them refers to a specific module of the course on how to use ICT. In fact, some of them report that they already had skills in the use of technologies, others that they learned it independently over time. Only some Italian entrepreneurs report having received training on technological and communication tools to support their business.

Even the answers offered by professionals are specular. Some of them state that lessons on the use of ICT, communication strategies and its channels are fundamental and therefore they are often taught across the whole path, as they are essential for entrepreneurship. Others explain how the provision of the course in online mode already implies that users have a basic knowledge of ICT, as it is generally widespread (especially among young people).

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a very important part creating a business project for people from group at risk of exclusion. It's a particularly personal process and trainers should offer to trained a

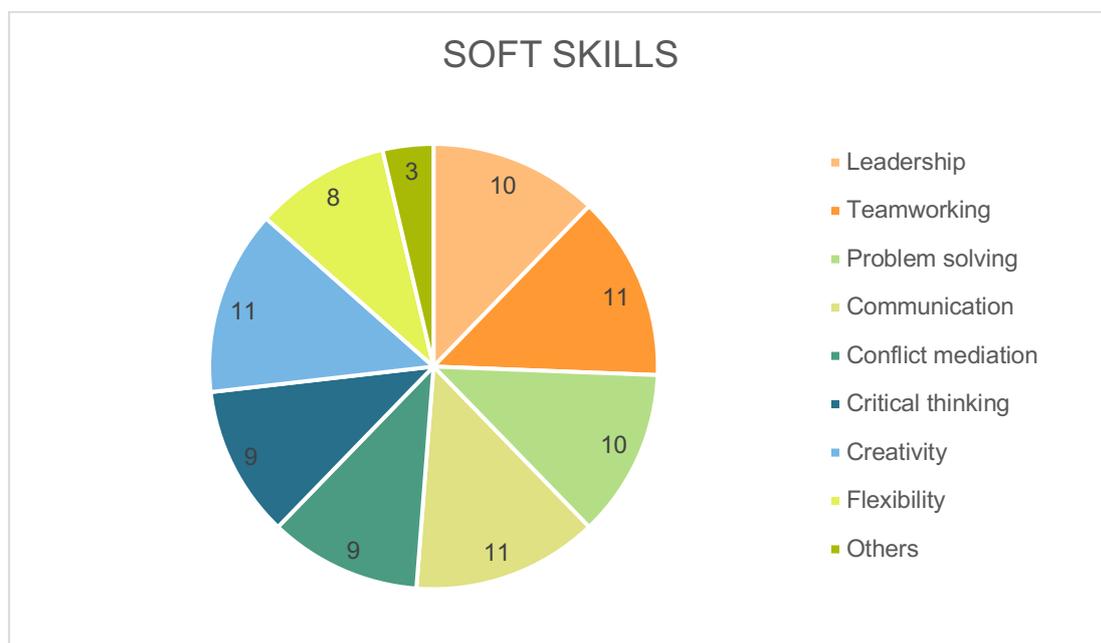


space to empower themselves. Trainers are responsible to anticipate the needs of participants, closely listen to them before and throughout the process, be willing to respond and adapt in order to engage them effectively. It's fundamental to provide participants the condition for empower their personal sphere, promoting cognitive awareness, managing self, independence and self-confidence, assertion/voice and it could therefore be possible to investigate the specific needs of people, through specific questionnaires that help in profiling the participants (Smith & Shankar, 2015).

Soft skills

Based on the literature analysis it emerges that the most important skills needed for jobs of the future point to the necessity of **soft skills**, a combination of personal and social skills, not dependent on acquired knowledge. Among the main soft skills and qualities named as necessary in performing well and in reaching the success in entrepreneurship there are being a good leader and a conflict mediator, being a good communicator and being able to work in team, being a good critical thinker and problem solver, as well as being creative and flexible in order to able to make connections across complex ideas and to find compromises. On the specific case of people at risk of exclusion, was reveal that women take the majority of caregiving roles in society (66%), where soft skills are used on a daily basis, although those roles remain undervalued and largely informal. Moreover, caregiving experiences specifically strengthen soft skills that are instrumental for leadership and entrepreneurship (Ashoka & Citi Foundation, 2019). According to Magree (2007), it's therefore fundamental to give the opportunity to develop the soft skills, through the planning of training modules that are designed to enrich both hard and soft skills.

All the entrepreneurs declared that they had previous knowledge about soft skills:



Also professionals recognized that their users had some soft skills when they started their own business.

Most of the training programme addressed this topic:



Entrepreneurs declare that the incubation process gives them the opportunity to become aware of their skills, increase them and develop new skills in interaction with the other entrepreneurs of their group. For example, skills that both through formal and informal learnings they have acquired and are nowadays reinforcing are communication skills, mediation ability, problem solving, adaptation and flexibility. Concrete and practical cases are for the entrepreneurs useful to acquire these skills, as they allow them to interface with real business problems and to test themselves in finding a solution. Exchange and interaction (between peers, with other entrepreneurs, or with trainers) is therefore very important for developing new skills and facing new challenges.

Professionals also reflect how the acquisition of these skills is crucial. They generally do not dedicate a specific module to soft skills to treat them directly and theoretically but encourage their development through teamwork. Users are invited to cooperate for the creation and management of a business plan, providing a solution to a social problem, such as that of unemployment. They are then encouraged to make their personal skills available to the group, thus eliciting a moment of reflection on one's specific skills that could be useful to the group and on themselves. Among these skills, the ones the incubators try to stimulate most are creativity, divergent thought, communication and teamworking skills, problem solving and conflict mediation.

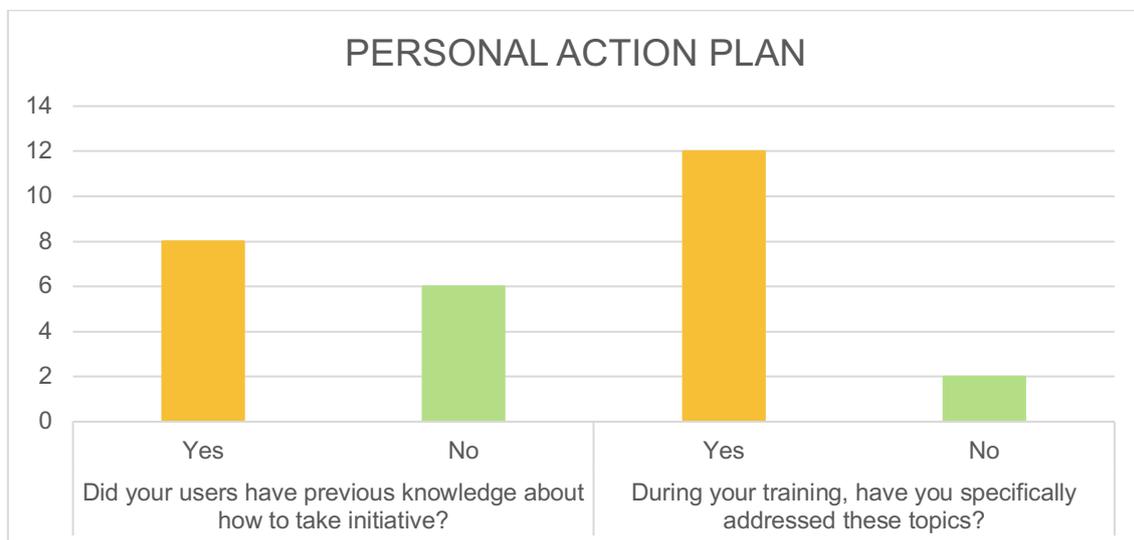
Personal action plan

In order to achieve success in their business project, **planning** is a central issue and it's fundamental that participants have a high degree of involvement during the training. As



mentioned above, it will be possible to create a **personal action plan**, based on the participants' expectations and on what are the training goals and helping on achieving of participants' goals and next steps. In order to ensure the understanding of the planning opportunity, it's important to explain it in an effective way, also using examples of people daily life (Smith & Shankar, 2015). According with the Reshape-team (2016-2018), it's therefore useful to set the conditions for participants to develop skills to assess their prior learning and to help them designing a realistic and fair individual integration and learning plan.

66% of entrepreneurs adopted a personal action plan, in order to achieve your life and work goals during their future business work; most of the professionals declared they addressed this topic during the training:



This question has attracted several responses from entrepreneurs, some more positive and satisfied, others less so. Some entrepreneurs say that the incubation process in which they participated helped them both personally and professionally to think in terms of objectives, for example by providing deadlines and offering a model to inspire them. A respondent state that he/she learned to think by steps, to increase skills with a continuous training path; he/she is now aware of the importance of diversifying knowledge within the entrepreneurial team. Other respondents, on the other hand, state that they have not faced a personal action plan in any way. One of them states that the impossibility of planning is linked to the type of enterprise he/she has decided to undertake. Another respondent said that if he had not already had a precise plan and objectives before embarking on the incubation route, he would probably have been in difficulty, feeling lost.

Even among professionals there are many opinions. Some of them claim that an individual action plan is fundamental, a central part of their business project, even if complex to apply with individuals belonging to categories at risk of exclusion. In these cases, a specific work is done on individual mentoring, building a plan in function of their needs, objectives and



limitations. These professionals state that through the personal action plan the entrepreneurs knew more about their skills and potential and they understand which needs they have, referring to personal and professional life in the start-up process. Other respondents, on the other hand, attach greater importance to the group dimension than to the individual dimension. The individual user therefore assumes value with respect to what he or she can do in the group, the skills and resources he or she can make available. Therefore, the plan is not structured individually, but in an interactive, general dimension.

Psychological challenges

In view of the **challenges** that a business project may result, Centre for Entrepreneurs points out in its report of May 2016 that it's important to impart the general knowledge needed to start a business while also making participants aware of the specific challenges they will face during their path and along their future activity, especially in case of people that may face a **stigma** challenge. With a particular focus on the psychological sphere, it could be necessary to specify that all **emotions** (joy, anger, sadness, happiness, frustration, hope, and more) are welcome. Understanding themselves makes it easier to understand the people around them, including clients, and this helps build positive relationship with others and it will provide mental tools to more effectively manage emotions, helping to take on new challenges (Smith & Shankar, 2015). In fact, during the entrepreneurship support it's fundamental to provide the opportunity to develop competences to deal with values, conflicts and other challenges that arise (Reshape-team, 2016-2018).

Most of entrepreneurs adopted specific strategies for the psychological challenges; most of professionals (11 on 14 answers) declared that training programme didn't address topics as self-awareness and skills to manage psychological difficulties.

All entrepreneurs positively evaluate the contribution that the incubator has given them (in different ways) in managing the psychological impacts that the entrepreneurial path can produce. One of them states he/she has learned how to manage time and to reason by priority, trying to select the productive activities from the superfluous ones. The incubator has taught him to manage rest and to practice regenerating leisure activities. Another one says that the training helped he/she to recognize the challenges and manage them collectively with his/her partners. Many of them recognise that challenges are part of entrepreneurial activity, so a sense of responsibility and pressure are normal feelings, but they need to be managed. Often, in addition to the lessons, it is the real and concrete experience that provides strategies and answers.

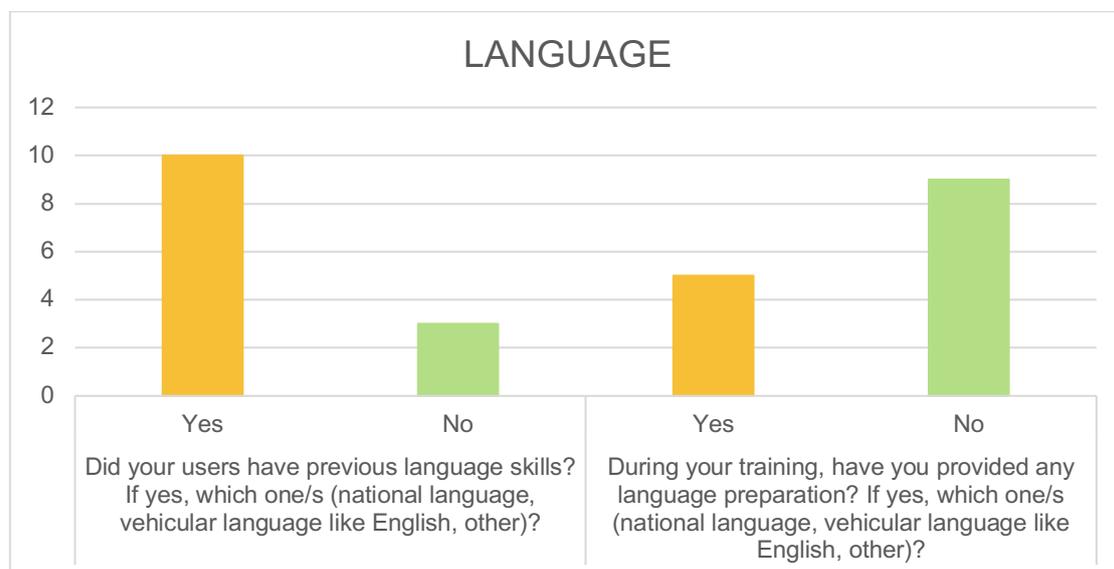
The professionals who responded to this question express how difficult it is to assess users' awareness of their path, such as possible psychological impacts. However, the training could be set up in to work on self-awareness and empowerment, with the possibility to go into specific issues if necessary.



Language

The **language** is a central issue in training, and, through the literature analysis, it has been found that often training is imparted in the local language, without translation services and not considering eventual challenge of lack of language proficiency. As pointed out by Reshape-team along their project (2016-2018), it might be useful to detect the language skill, so that it is possible to combine language with vocational training in order to overcome **language and cultural barriers**, providing teaching materials in different languages. In the specific case of participants with migrant background, Chliova, Farny and Salmivaara (2018) suggest that it could be necessary to offer training in the native languages of prominent immigrant/refugee groups and to hire consultants with varied cultural backgrounds who also speak minority languages. Furthermore, it's suggested to making provision for instructional materials and recorded lectures of EE (for the blind and partially blind students), providing sign language interpretation or information in accessible formats. (Johnmark Dakung, Orobia, Munene & Balunywa, 2017)

Most of entrepreneurs had previous language skills when they started their business; most of the programs don't provide training on it:



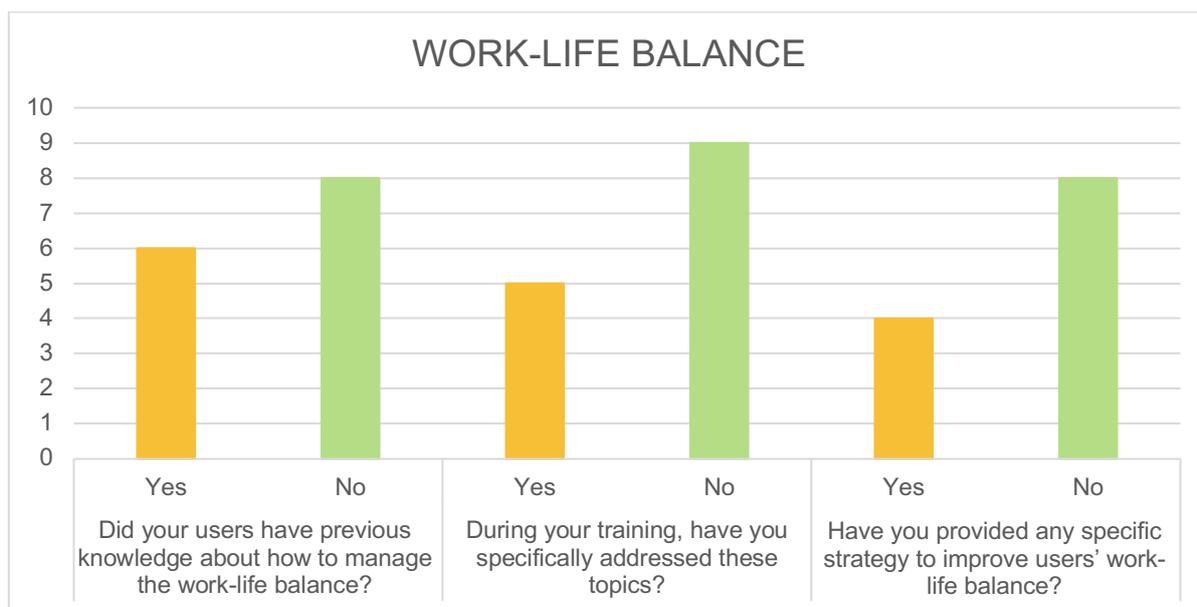
Generally, courses are delivered in the national mother tongue, as specialists, stakeholders and clients will also use this language to communicate with users. However, not all incubators offer the possibility to take the course in English or start a course to learn the national language. This may represent a barrier: indeed, an entrepreneur claims to have learned the language independently during the incubation process because he did not know it previously. In response to this, however, some professionals specify that they can direct their users to specific entities in case a language course is needed.



Work-life balance

An important issue related to managing one's own business is the **work-life reconciliation**, especially when participants have relevant family responsibilities and obligations, such as for single parents or women. It's fundamental to provide initiatives and strategies aimed in balancing work and personal life, in order to help workers, especially women, and to point out the burden that may result in reconciliation of working time and personal life (Peris-Ortiz, M., Rueda-Armengot, C. & Benito Osorio, D., 2012). It's recommended to offer the opportunity to develop skills to self-assess individual situation, supporting participants in **planning in a realistic way** the balance between being a professional, with responsibilities on business managing, and have a personal life, often with family obligations.

Most of entrepreneurs declared that they didn't adopt specific strategies to reconcile their work with their extra-work life (7 on 12), even if professionals underlined that most of the programs addressed this topic:



All entrepreneurs declare that during the incubation process they have not received specific lessons, strategies or tools to reconcile their work and private life. At the same time, however, they explain how the problem is real, since entrepreneurial activity implies a strong commitment in time and therefore a consequent difficulty in reconciling it with the time dedicated to the family. Some of them explain how this is learned only through experience, others how being self-employed means never disconnecting from work.

Professionals claim to address the topic not in terms of a single module, but as a portion of the business plan part. It is more specifically addressed if users' needs arise, but this is rarer as they often do not work during the incubation period. What professionals believe it is



possible to do coincides with working on self-awareness and goal setting (both personal and professional).

SELF-AWARENESS

Literature research has shown that the definition of the contents of entrepreneurial training courses is a key factor to develop and promote entrepreneurship, especially in groups at risk of exclusion (Charney and Libecap, 2003; Hannon, 2005). Indeed, the study of Dakung, J. R. et al. (2017) indicates that the aim in developing the content of entrepreneurship courses should be to **stimulate awareness of entrepreneurship among users**. In this research, which has as a target group disabled student of the Nigerian tertiary institutions, it was observed that to enhance their entrepreneurial action (EA) the disabled learners need customized training in terms of critical thinking, reliance on experience, business-general knowledge, thinking about entrepreneurship as a career, opportunity-specific knowledge, use guest speakers who are experienced entrepreneurs (Brown, 1999; Vesper, 2004). The main finding of the article is that when the entrepreneurship education course content is designed and developed in a manner that is tailored towards the specific needs of disabled students, it will better raise their awareness by providing opportunities for them to learn from real life practical experiences and think of entrepreneurship as a career. This important result can be extended and its implications can be applied to other groups at risk of exclusion.

According to the professionals' perception most of entrepreneurs were aware of their training needs and of the topics to be deepened; this perception is minor in entrepreneurs; however, all of them declared that the final results were evaluated:



Many entrepreneurs were evaluated during the incubation process and were able to observe personal growth in terms of professional skills and abilities (both formally through evaluations and informally through their perception). Generally, they were not aware of the training needs, but it was the training itself that revealed them, also through the work of the mentor. The course has allowed them to think about their business idea, making it more mature and realistic and sometimes abandoning users' ingenuous beliefs. The evaluations were carried out using various methods: interviews with mentors, pre- and post-assessment questionnaire, tests during seminars and courses, coaching.

Likewise, professionals declare how many evaluation methods are used to monitor and evaluate users before, during and at the end of the course. Generally, personal interviews and evaluation questionnaires are proposed, to realize the training needs and knowledge they have; also orientation interviews and Curriculum vitae analysis are tools useful to assess them. Additionally, one of the professionals says that the best assessment is observing whether the social business entity was established and is running or not. At the end of the course, to assess whether the training has been effective, a professional proposes to the participants to write all the words that came to their mind to describe the training and the path taken, thus obtaining a descriptive and non-numerical evaluation, which is also an opportunity for the trainers to grow.

METHODOLOGY

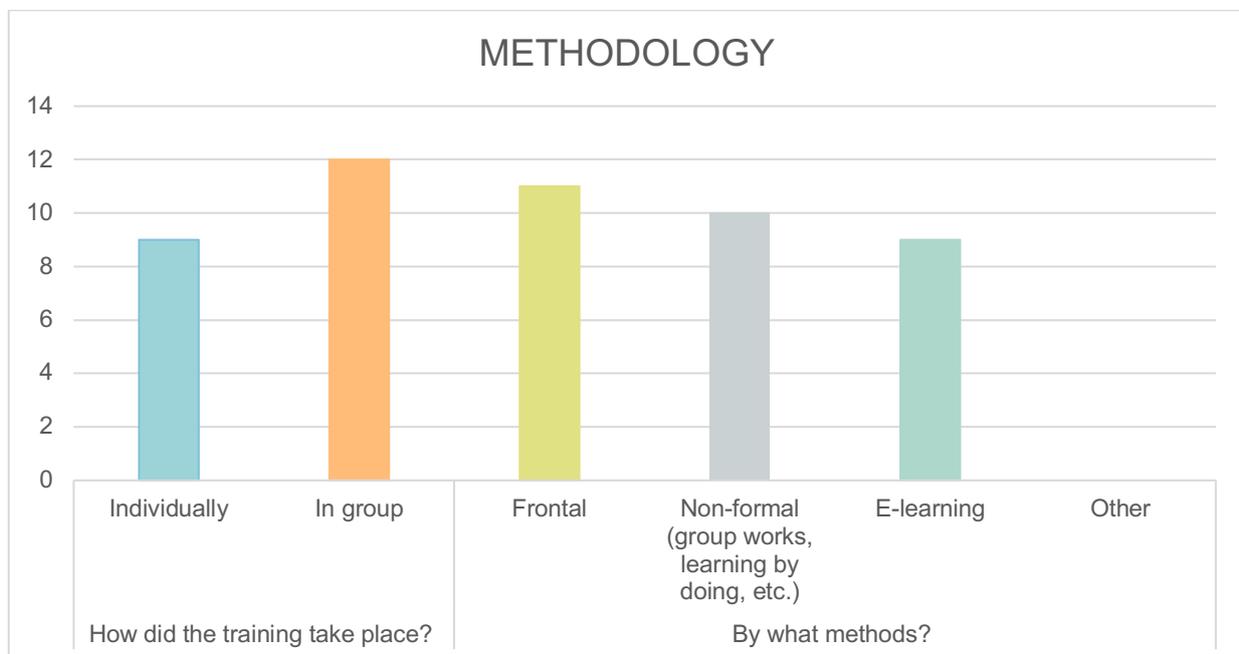
Among the studies in literature of interest in terms of new techniques and methodologies through which to structure the training course, the research of Dotson et al. The study evaluated the effects of a well-established **behavioural teaching procedure** on the acquisition of **skills related to self-employment** (worker, supervisor, and clerical work) in young adults with developmental disabilities. In that research was used a group-based teaching interaction procedure which involved a **7-step process**:

- I. describing the skill
- II. identifying when and where it should be used
- III. providing rationales for why the skill is important
- IV. breaking the skill down into component steps
- V. experimenter modelling of the skill for the group
- VI. individual role-play practice
- VII. experimenter feedback (e.g., praise for accurate completion and correction of errors with additional opportunities to practice the step) throughout the process.



The results suggested that this procedure was effective enough to ensure that three different classes of skills related to self-employment were correctly acquired by participants with developmental disabilities. Research also shows the relevance of **peer-mentoring**. Peers essentially became the job coaches for each other, suggesting that a peer pair model of having people with developmental disabilities work in the community may be an alternative to having a long-term job coach assigned to an individual. This innovative study can provide inspiration and insight for further use, also with other target groups belonging to disadvantaged groups.

According to the received answers the training methodology in incubation process are mixed, as also the evaluation that have been implemented through different methodologies:



CONCLUSIONS

To summarize the key points emerged through the analysis:

1. **Entrepreneurs profile**, including education level, previous working experiences, knowledge and skills already acquired, **have specific implication in the definition of the training needs and the specific training program** in an incubation process. The disadvantaged status of entrepreneurs can be connected with limited knowledge, skills, labour experience, poor human and social capital and discrimination in terms of ages, race and gender. The training program must take in consideration these aspects. **Entrepreneurship education and training is key to developing and expanding their skills and capabilities.**



2. The incubation path is crucial for the success of an entrepreneurship initiative run by vulnerable entrepreneurs for many reasons.

As concluding comments some entrepreneurs want to add that the program was vital for them, not only for the teachings but especially *for the network they managed to weave during the incubation period*. Useful in addition to the notional part in fact is a more practical portion of coaching professionals and specialists in the field. An entrepreneur affirms that the ideal, in his/her opinion, would be to flank different degrees of command, for example from the area of management, to the marketing director and the owner of a small business; this would be useful to understand how to work at different levels of the hierarchy of command.

On the other hand, professionals emphasize two important aspects of the training path. A relevant aspect in the initial training for an Italian professional should be referred to the *personal plan and the motivation* of the person; in fact, disadvantaged users are not usually aware about their skills and potential, are not motivated and they have no confidence in their chances of success.

Another professional, on the other side, underline the importance of the group, enhancing the individuals in the group as bearers of individual values who elaborate through the work of a small group a project of a hypothetical enterprise. *Teamwork* allows disadvantaged and more fragile people to give each other courage, to reflect in others and confront, seeing that some fears or difficulties are shared and are manageable in a group dynamic.

3. Entrepreneurial education programs have to provide knowledge and understanding about various aspects of bringing a business idea into reality, the characteristics of an entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial intention development, technical knowledge, and developing empowerment and self-awareness of participants. Additionally, it is possible to combine language with vocational training in order to overcome language and cultural barriers, in the specific case of participants with migrant background. Through the research, has been pointed out that generally during the training is not provided any language course and participants may decide or need to learn it independently. Moreover, it's suggested to making provision of training materials in accessible formats, for example providing instructional materials and recorded lectures of entrepreneurship education (for blind and partially blind students) or with sign language interpretation.

4. **The lack of technical knowledge caused specific obstacle during the start-up phase for entrepreneurs**, so it is crucial that the training programme address technical topics connected with entrepreneurship: Financing, Networking, Marketing & sales, Bureaucracy and ICT (Information and Communications Technology).

5. During the support to the creation of entrepreneur, **soft skills are considered a central issue** due to the fact that these personal capacities are very useful during the management of one's own business. It emerges that it's not fundamental to dedicate



a specific module to soft skills, but it could be done transversally during the different activities of the program. Professionals should encourage the development of participants' soft skills through teamwork, giving them the opportunity to make their personal skills available to the group. Through formal and informal learnings, entrepreneurs can acquire or reinforce communication skills, mediation ability, problem solving, adaptation and flexibility.

6. In order to achieve success in the business project, **planning is a central issue and it's fundamental that participants have a high degree of involvement during the training: a specific work is required on individual mentoring, building a plan in function of their needs, objectives and limitations.** With a particular reference on planning personal goals and next steps, the personal action plan is an important tool that may help participants to meet their expectations and to manage on their own their business activity, helping them to think in terms of objectives, both from a personal and professional point of view. In this regard it emerges that, during the training activities considered in the empirical research, is not paid enough attention to provide strategies to balance work and personal sphere. In fact, it has been pointed the value on being aware on the impact that entrepreneur work may have in personal life and in time dedicated to family, in order to be able to find the best solutions for work-life conciliation after starting up their own business.
7. Considering the substantial impact on the psychological sphere that the management of one's own business may have, **it's important to raise awareness on participants on challenges they may face.** From the empirical research it emerges that this kind of challenges might be normal, but it's fundamental to know strategies and tips to managed them. Therefore, it's recommended to offer the opportunity to work on self-awareness and empowerment, with the possibility to go into specific issues if necessary.
8. **The training methods have to be aligned with education level and personal requirements of entrepreneurs, mixing different methodologies** (frontal, non-formal, e-learning, peer mentoring, just to mention some examples). Specifically, a study from Dotson et al. evaluated the effects of a well-established behavioural teaching procedure on the acquisition of skills related to self-employment (worker, supervisor, and clerical work) in young adults with developmental disabilities. This innovative study can provide inspiration and insight for further use, also with other target groups belonging to disadvantaged groups.
According to the feedback from professionals, **non-formal training methodologies generally are more engaging and motivating**, as arouse greater interest in an aspiring entrepreneur who can see live experiences and situations that recall his own project, rather than limiting himself to a theoretical study and further away from concrete cases. Some examples could be:
 - Learning by doing



- Meetings with successful entrepreneurs or experts
- Study visits
- Application of contents to the construction of their business model.

9. **In the evaluation of the incubation process a central part is referred to self-assessment:** entrepreneurs evaluated during the incubation process are able to observe personal growth in terms of professional skills and abilities (both formally through evaluations and informally through their perception). Many evaluation methods are used to monitor and evaluate users before, during and at the end of the course: personal interviews with mentors, pre- and post-assessment questionnaire, tests during seminars and courses, orientation interviews and Curriculum vitae analysis, coaching.

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