

# Networking in the Network Organization

Social Entrepreneurs' Use of the Social Impact Factory's Network



Thorben Kwakkenbos

Patrick van der Groen





**Utrecht University**

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Student	Patrick van der Groen
Student Number	4138600
E-mail	Patrickvandergroen@gmail.com

Student	Thorben Kwakkenbos
Student Number	4290798
E-mail	t.kwakkenbos@students.uu.nl

Supervisor	Ying Que
E-mail	w.i.que@uu.nl

Wordcount	21.475
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Date	27-6-2018
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## **Acknowledgements**

We believe that every research endeavor is a collaborative project. Therefore, we are grateful for those who have helped us along the way. This research has been shaped by all of them. Most importantly, this project would not have been viable without the staff and entrepreneurs of the Social Impact Factory. We are thankful for their time, hospitality, opinions and stories.

Our goal has been to portray their perspectives as accurately as possible. Although we will not name all of them, our gratitude goes out to all the informants mentioned in the thesis and those who have been critical in our analysis but not named in this story. We think that both will recognize their contributions. In particular, we owe Mees for giving us permission to conduct our research at the Social Impact Factory. His enthusiasm has inspired us and although he had left before we started, we are still thankful.

In addition, we would like to thank our supervisor, Ying Que, for guidance during all these months. Her criticisms of our work and methods have certainly challenged our thoughts. All these people have made our fieldwork between the 5<sup>th</sup> of February and 15<sup>th</sup> of April an instructive experience. This is the end product of this inspiring period as well as of our Bachelor Studies of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Utrecht.



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## Introduction

Ever since the bulk of Western economies took a neoliberal turn in the 1980s, governments in many European countries, such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, have started privatising their public sector role, with more and more tasks being assigned to civil society and/or the market (Monbiot 2016). Within this context, social security systems in the Netherlands have declined and the market has taken over healthcare systems, education, and job security. As a result of this trend, hybrid forms of action have stepped into the void that the retreat of the government has caused, leaving civilians to take care for their own. One of them is social entrepreneurship.

Social entrepreneurship is defined by the creation of social value, in contrast to commercial entrepreneurship which is focused on creating as many economic returns for shareholders as possible, in short called shareholder value (Austin et al. 2006, 2). Social entrepreneurs combine business with social impact. This combination, however, is at odds with “current cultural assumption and biases” (Dees 2007, 28) about entrepreneurship. Therefore, Dees (2007, 28-29) argues that governments should support social entrepreneurs to enlarge their social impact. In his view, the social entrepreneurs’ networks should be improved. The network of peer-entrepreneurs is part of the larger support system that is an important pillar of the ecosystem for social entrepreneurship (Stam 2015, 2-3). Theories about social capital and social networks have already emphasized the importance of being embedded in networks and leveraging social capital within these networks to attain resources such as information, capital, and labour (Casson & Giusta 2007, 224; Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 169). Moreover, these theories might be even more crucial for social entrepreneurs because these entrepreneurs do business in a fundamentally different way than conventional entrepreneurs (Austin et al. 2006, 2).

In the Netherlands, the social entrepreneurship sector has been flourishing since 2011 (Keizer et al. 2016, 5). The government has started to stimulate social entrepreneurship on a national and municipal level. One of the four focal points for many cities is the stimulation of an ecosystem in which social entrepreneurship can prosper (G32 2017a). Utrecht is one of the cities in the Netherlands that aims to create a collaborative community of social entrepreneurs and peripheral actors that can boost social innovation. In order to achieve this goal, the municipality has supported the establishment of the Social Impact Factory. The Social Impact Factory, in existence since 2017, is an organization that facilitates the work of social entrepreneurs, consisting of independent contractors, start-ups, scale-ups and small companies, to work in the city centre and meet other entrepreneurs. Their goal is to connect social entrepreneurs to each other and with other actors to let them collaborate towards social innovation.

As such, the Social Impact Factory represents one of these initiatives to support the social entrepreneurial ecosystem that multiple scholars have argued for. This is the field of our ethnographic

research in which we study how social entrepreneurs use the Social Impact Factory to enlarge their network and social capital and how the organization functions to create and strengthen an ecosystem for the social entrepreneurs. Despite the current interest in stimulating social entrepreneurship and building ecosystems, the networking aspect combined with social entrepreneurship is a new conceptual approach not highlighted enough in research yet. In our research we aim to contribute to these theories on social entrepreneurship, social capital, social network theory and ecosystems by answering our main research question:

*How do social entrepreneurs associated with the Social Impact Factory use social network organizations such as the Social Impact Factory in Utrecht to leverage social capital in their social networks?*

We employ a complementary research approach in which we study both the social entrepreneurs and the entity Social Impact Factory. Both actors are intertwined in building and utilizing social networks, hence the one should not be studied without the other. Therefore, the first sub-question is:

*How does the Social Impact Factory function to enlarge the social capital of social entrepreneurs associated with the Social Impact Factory?*

The research population to answer this question consists of the employees of the Social Impact Factory and the partners of the Social Impact Factory. These informants are important because they are responsible for connecting different actors, communicating their vision and building the ecosystem. We take the entrepreneurial perspective in our second sub-question:

*How do social entrepreneurs associated with the Social Impact Factory utilize social network organizations such as the Social Impact Factory in Utrecht to enlarge their networks and leverage social capital within their social networks?*

The social entrepreneurs are relevant because they are expected to use the Social Impact Factory to leverage social capital in their social networks. At the Social Impact Factory, the social entrepreneurs consist of independent contractors, start-ups, scale-ups and organizations with a few employees. We have focused on the social entrepreneurs who work in a space specifically targeted at sharing knowledge and collaboration, and that hosts around fifteen entrepreneurs a day. In short, we have interwoven the perspective of the collaborative community organization and the social entrepreneurs to fill gaps in the current literature.

## **Scientific Relevance**

Social entrepreneurship has been surfacing in the academic literature for a little over two decades. Despite its growing popularity, however, social studies have only slowly taken note (Short et al. 2009, 165). Several scholars, such as Short et al. (2009) and Dacin, Dacin and Tracey (2011) have conducted

exploratory research into social entrepreneurship and highlight the relationship between social networks and social entrepreneurs as uncharted territory. Social entrepreneurs do business in a fundamentally different way than commercial entrepreneurs because their goals are defined by social value instead of shareholder value. Establishing a wide social network to accommodate for their needs is thus even more crucial (Austin et al. 2006, 2). It is therefore interesting to apply the classic theories of social capital and social network theory to this new group of entrepreneurs.

There is also interesting ground to cover on a new theoretical topic. Toivonen (2013, 3) argues that it is remarkable that there has been almost no scholarly attention for what he calls collaborative spaces. These spaces, such as the worldwide Impact HUB franchise, where actors collaborate to make social change have been sprouting about all over the world (Toivonen 2013, 2). We will investigate how these spaces, established by organizations such as the Social Impact Factory, strengthen entrepreneurs' networks and how the social entrepreneurs utilize the organizations.

Finally, ethnography adds interesting perspectives into business and management research (Watson 2010, 215-216). Its holistic approach, long history in the analysis of power relations and ethnographic methods makes it suitable to play a larger role in these studies.

On a societal level, our research will gain insight into how these collaborative organizations contribute to the local ecosystem for social entrepreneurship. Local governments increasingly use these organizations to boost local social entrepreneurship in an era where the government itself is retreating as a social safety net. In addition, we will give new insights to the Social Impact Factory itself. Our empirical research will enable them to reflect on their performance and to make improvements to enlarge their own social impact.

To reach these goals, we have conducted fieldwork in the Social Impact Factory from the 5<sup>th</sup> of February until the 15<sup>th</sup> of April. We have used multiple research methods in these ten weeks. Hanging out, participant observation and conversations have been important in making initial contact with informants. In some cases, the relationships developed into rapport. In addition, observations are crucial to understand the context in a study of the everyday life in organizations and to get a deeper understanding because people tend to misreport their behaviours, such as their relations to and interactions with others (Barley & Kunda 2011, 84). The observations are systematically recorded in field notes and coded with NVivo to support the analysis of the data. The development of rapport was important to gather relevant and more reliable data in informal, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. We have recorded and transcribed these interviews to stick to the words of our informants. The busy schedules of our participants, unfortunately, did not allow the planning of focus groups but we have been able to talk with multiple informants at the same time in more informal settings. Finally, we have attended multiple events to experience them and study their importance for the entrepreneurs and organization.

We agree with DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 212) and Driessen (2014, 10) that the researcher is the primary research instrument in ethnographic fieldwork. This brings along ethical responsibilities and researcher influence on the data and analysis. Our personal characteristics have certainly influenced the selection of participants, although the informants' characteristics and interests have influenced this process as well. Observations are not objective either because a different observer might report different views on the same event (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 93-94). Our approach to deal with these biases has been to be aware of and reflect on them. Furthermore, we have compared our observations, from researchers with different characteristics and interests, to reflect on reasons for differences and similarities. During the research process we have continuously been looking for data that challenges our initial conclusions. We have reflected on our ideas and biases in order to tell the story of the informants as fair as possible.

On an ethical note, we have experienced that by participating in the lives of our subjects we have interfered in the situation in the field. It was, however, an important way to establish and maintain contact with our informants. They have enlisted us for our help with simple tasks and opinions on ideas. Secondly, our relationship with informants has led to gossip that has been beneficial to the research endeavour but in these settings our role as researchers is probably not always clear. In a similar fashion, we have overheard many conversations at moments the research subjects were probably not aware of our role. In writing down our data, the starting point is not to hurt our informants. Therefore, we have not used quotes that possibly will have a negative effect on informants and have fictionalized the informants' names. Still, we are aware that we cannot guarantee full anonymity because pseudonyms are not always effective in the local research context (Van der Geest 2003, 16).

In the next chapter, we will elaborate on the theoretical background of our research. The concepts of social capital, social network theory, social entrepreneurship and supporting structures within ecosystems are crucial to grasp the essence of our work. Naturally, this discussion will flow into the next chapter about the context of the research. Here we will delve into the topic of social entrepreneurship in the Netherlands. We focus on the municipality of Utrecht and the Social Impact Factory that is given an important role in stimulating social entrepreneurship in Utrecht. After we have laid the foundation, we present the empirical data. Firstly, we illustrate how the Social Impact Factory as an organization attempts to connect different actors, especially social entrepreneurs, to collectively tackle societal problems. Secondly, we turn to the entrepreneurial view and demonstrate how some social entrepreneurs make use of the Social Impact Factory to enlarge their network and social capital while others do not actively pursue this goal. In the accompanying discussion we will interweave both chapters and build further on the theoretical foundation. A recapitulation of the research process and an answer to the research question will follow in the conclusion before we close with

recommendations for the Social Impact Factory on the one hand and future anthropological research into social entrepreneurship on the other.



## **Theoretical Framework**

Social entrepreneurship has been quite a recent development and academically it has been rooted in management and entrepreneurship studies. However, there are cases where social scientists have studied conventional entrepreneurship and within these studies social capital and social network theories have been around for quite some time. The important theory on social capital together with the inherently connected social network theory gives us a strong insight into how (social) entrepreneurs function socially and use their sociability to get things done. Furthermore, the ecosystem theory allows us to illuminate the way a network functions as a social structure.

We will start with the term social capital, after which social network theory will naturally follow. We continue with the definitional struggle of entrepreneurship and the discovery of social entrepreneurship as an academically interesting field. We will close with the concept of the ecosystem as a network structure, bringing together the aforementioned topics and combining our knowledge to portray a picture of the theoretical environment in which a network organization for social entrepreneurs operates.

### **Social Capital**

*Patrick*

The term Social Capital, part of the neo-classical theories about capital, can be traced back to the classical approach of Karl Marx. Marx stressed the exploitative nature of the social relations between the classes where the dominant class that makes an investment with capital will be the one capturing the surplus value (Marx 1933).

The neo-classical theories about capital take the ideas of Marx and expand it to other realms of science. Examples here are Human Capital by Johnson (1960) and Cultural Capital by Bourdieu (1990). Social Capital has been defined from a sociological viewpoint by Lin (1999, 31), a psychological viewpoint by De Carolis and Saporito (2006, 41) and an organizational science viewpoint by Burt (2000, 347). All of these scholars agree that social capital is grounded in the assumption that certain people or certain groups who are somehow better connected than others will do better in the sense of receiving higher returns for their efforts. Burt highlights four characteristics as to why (2000, 347): for one, social capital facilitates the flow of information. In the usual imperfect market situation, social ties in strategic locations can provide an entrepreneur with valuable information regarding opportunities and risk within the sector. Second, these social ties can exert influence on the agents who play a critical role in decisions involving the actor. For example, by putting in a good word with a potential investor, someone who has valued resources and greater power, the decision-making process regarding the investment can be influenced (De Carolis & Saporito 2006, 43; Lin 1999, 31). Third, social ties and their acknowledged relations to the entrepreneur may be seen as social credentials, reflecting the entrepreneurs' accessibility to resources

embedded in social networks and relations and his/her capability of sustaining them. Finally, social relations reinforce identity and recognition, providing not only emotional support but also public acknowledgement of one's claim to certain resources (Burt 2000, 352; Lin 1999, 31). Through attainment of these four resources embedded in the networks accessed by entrepreneurs through their social capital, competitive advantage over others can be achieved.

However, social capital has not remained immune to criticism from the academic world since its emergence as a scientific means to study social relations. One of the biggest dilemmas is whether social capital refers to collective goods or individual goods. Since social capital is inherently connected with social networks, the assumption that social capital concerns individual goods is rooted in a context where social relations and one's social capital is isolated from social context and power structures (Lin 1999, 32). Furthermore, the individual goods approach can also refer to the bridging form of social capital in which the ego in the network has bridging capabilities to other networks regardless of social context and power structures (De Carolis & Saporito 2006, 43). The collective approach is also called the bonding approach to social capital, on which the established structure of trust and bonding with a network is the independent variable in shaping network relations instead of ego (De Carolis & Saporito 2006, 44). To see social capital however as a collective asset is neglecting the place of the individual in the network and the effort that an individual has put in to establish this network (Lin 1999, 32). We will elaborate more on bridging and bonding in our paragraph about social networks.

Moving forward, social capital can be more clearly defined as "resources embedded in a social structure which is accessed and or mobilized in purposive action" (Burt 2000, 347). This definition presupposes that social capital refers to the resources that can be accessed through personal interaction with other people in a network, the social structure. These resources are then mobilized with intention. For entrepreneurs, this means that the contacts that lead to successful outcomes are part of their social capital and as these contacts are embedded in entrepreneurial networks it is vital to understand these networks.

## **Social Networks**

*Patrick*

Within the field of entrepreneurship, research on networks has been an important new area of inquiry to illuminate how entrepreneurs acquire their resources. This field of research consists mostly of business and organizational science professors such as Hoang & Antoncic and Aldrich & Zimmer. They have argued that the entrepreneur is embedded in a social network that plays a critical role in the success of the entrepreneurial endeavour because of the resources embedded in that social network (Aldrich & Zimmer 1986, 14). These networks can be illustrated through three essential components: *content*, *governance*, and the *structure* of these relationships.



The content of the relationships within an entrepreneurial network is related to the variety of resources held by the entrepreneurs involved. Information and advice are one of the key benefits next to acquiring capital (Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 169). However, mobilizing resources is not strictly limited to the start-up phase of a venture. Entrepreneurs continue to rely on networks throughout the entrepreneurial process to solve problems and acquire information relevant to their business (Johannison et al. 1994 in Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 169).

Secondly, network governance influences and coordinates network exchange and has been extensively researched by academics. Network governance is hereby often defined as the reliance on “implicit and open-ended contracts” that are supported by social structures such as trust (Brass 1984 in Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 170). Trust affects the depth and richness of exchange relations and trust allows both parties to assume that each will take actions that are predictable and mutually acceptable (Burt 2000, 351; De Carolis & Saporito 2006, 44).

Lastly, the network structure is defined as the pattern of direct and indirect ties between actors. This definition assumes that who the entrepreneurs are is of less importance than their position within the network structure. To be able to uncover patterns in this kind of structure several measures have been utilized, the most logical one being size, the number of direct links between the ego and the other actors (Aldrich & Zimmer 1986, 16; Greve & Salaff 2003, 6). Another way of analysing network structure is centrality, being the same as size but also including the ability to access resources through indirect as well as direct links. While the network size and network centrality measure both the number of resources an entrepreneur can access, other patterns in the network structure can influence the diversity of resources. Granovetter (1973) was one of the pioneers in terms of uncovering these other patterns within a network structure. His notion is that weak ties yield more in terms of resources than strong ties because their bridging capabilities bring several network clusters that were unconnected before together. Granovetter, a sociologist himself, argued that the strength of ties, hereby he means the combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy and reciprocal services which characterize the tie, is not a determining factor in the number of resources the tie could possibly yield (Granovetter 1973, 1364). While strong ties are great for creating cohesion in a network and for including new people in a network, the strength of weak ties is the bridging capability, the ability to bring network clusters not yet connected and limited in the options to be connected, together (Granovetter 1973, 1365).

Granovetter's theory on strong and weak ties can be connected to De Carolis and Saporito's (2006, 43) debate on whether social capital is collective or individual goods. Strong ties can be seen as the key component of the bonding argument for social capital while weak ties are known for their bridging capabilities, the individual goods argument. As such, social capital and social networks are inherently linked concepts, the one not being able to exist without the other. Social capital consists of the actual

resources that can be extracted from social networks with social networks being the social structure that these resources are based in. The form of this social structure is based on the kind of weak or strong ties that shape the flow of these resources. Entrepreneurs are highly dependent on these resources for the success of their entrepreneurial endeavour. But what are entrepreneurs? And how are they defined?

## **Entrepreneurship**

*Thorben*

*“Entrepreneurs are agents of change and growth in a market economy”* (OECD 1998, 12)

with these words, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development stresses the importance of entrepreneurs to the society and economy. The definition of entrepreneurship is however still highly debated. Entrepreneurship scholars Westhead, Wright and McElwee (2011, 4) have tried to come up with the common denominator and proposed the following definition: “the creation of new business and the development of new and established firms”.

Within anthropology, there has not been a clear definition of entrepreneurship either. An important anthropologist in the study of entrepreneurship is Alex Stewart. To summarize the debates, he (Stewart 1991, 440) used the words of Keith Hart (1975, 6): “it is clear that the word [entrepreneurship] is normally used by analysts to mean whatever they like”. Naturally, this is unsatisfactory, but it does illustrate the over-use of ‘entrepreneurship’; a word used for all kinds of “opportunistic creativity” (Stewart 1991, 442). One of the most renowned anthropological studies about entrepreneurship is the work of Frederik Barth in Norway, 1963. In retrospect, he added two important insights to the knowledge of entrepreneurship. First, he argued that entrepreneurs are agents of change. This is reflected in the OECD definition above. Secondly, Barth (1967, 664) stressed the importance of shifting the focus of entrepreneurial studies from the individual to the level of the social system. His emphasis on the social organization has been adopted by other disciplines, such as economics and the field of entrepreneurial and management studies (Barth 2007, 9).

More than a decade later, the anthropologists Greenfield and Strickon (1981, 470) made a similar argument, arguing for a new paradigm in the study of entrepreneurship. For them as well, entrepreneurship should be embedded in the social context, in contrast to the dominant individual perspectives at that time. The personality/traits approach in which the entrepreneur is defined by certain personality characteristics is exemplary for the individual approach (Westhead et al. 2010, 59). Welter (2011, 165-66) proposes to study the general context of entrepreneurship because the context sets the opportunities and boundaries for entrepreneurs. One of the dimensions of the context is the social context. Here again, the importance of the social network and its characteristics becomes apparent. Networks provide resources but determine the level of encouragement and support an entrepreneur receives as well. This support depends on the social values towards entrepreneurship in

society. Thus, how positively or negatively entrepreneurship is perceived by the entrepreneur's surroundings. This illustrates the importance of the social context (Welter 2011, 168-69). Up to today, the individual perspectives are still important. However, the (social) contextual perspectives cannot be neglected anymore. It is the social contextual approach that we will explore further.

## **Social Entrepreneurship**

*Thorben*

The emphasis on the social context of entrepreneurship should not be confused with social entrepreneurship. As we will see, social entrepreneurship is strongly embedded in the social context, but it is not the same as the social context perspective. There are several ways to think about social enterprises, for example enterprises that limit the distribution of their surplus; are not privately held; or have a social purpose and want to create social value (Westhead et al. 2011, 165). In agreement with Austin, Stevenson and Wei-Skillern (2006, 2), we define social entrepreneurship in line with the third characteristic as the creation of social value rather than personal or shareholder value.

From this viewpoint, social entrepreneurship is juxtaposed with commercial entrepreneurship. The latter is more often seen as creating individual or shareholder value. However, even though there is a sharp, conceptual, line between the types of value these different kinds of entrepreneurs create, the difference between the entrepreneurs is not always clear-cut. For example, both social and commercial enterprises make use of the same legal business entities because there is no separate legal entity for social enterprises. The European Commission (Social Business Initiative 2011) has tried to prevent some vagueness by defining the social enterprise as follows:

“The term ‘social enterprise’ covers the following types of business:

1. Those for who the social or societal objective of the common good is the reason for the commercial activity, often in the form of a high level of social motivation.
2. Those where profits are mainly reinvested with a view to achieving this social objective.
3. Those where the method of organization or ownership system reflects the enterprise's mission, using democratic or participatory principles or focusing on social justice.”

In Europe, social enterprises and charity foundations are separated based on their main source of income. Charities are solely focused on impact and are financed by subsidies and donations. On the other hand, social enterprises predominantly generate their revenue through commercial activities. For example, in the Netherlands the Scientific Council for Government Policy stated that at least seventy-five per cent of the income should be generated through trading activities (G32 2017b).

To make the distinction between social and commercial entrepreneurs clearer, Austin et al. (2006, 2-3) identified four differences between social entrepreneurs when compared to commercial entrepreneurs. First, social entrepreneurs see opportunities in the problems of commercial entrepreneurs. Second, social entrepreneurs have a social purpose, not a purely commercial one. Third, social entrepreneurs

are more embedded in the social context and their network is important to mobilize the resources. Fourth, performance is not only indicated by profits but also in non-quantifiable social impact.

In the next paragraph, we will focus on the third difference: the embeddedness in the social context and the importance of the entrepreneur's network (Westhead et al. 2011, 167). We will delve into ecosystems and the approaches of governments and network organizations to enlarge the entrepreneur's network and to connect it with other networks.

### **The Ecosystem: Support Systems**

*Thorben & Patrick*

Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) emphasized the importance for the entrepreneur to be embedded in networks; receiving information being one of the reasons (Casson & Giusta 2007, 224; Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 169). Without information, the entrepreneur will not identify an opportunity. For the network to be beneficial to the entrepreneur, trust in the other actor involved is essential to ensure that the other party will deliver on the agreement (Burt 2000, 351; Casson & Giusta 2007, 229; De Carolis & Saporito 2006, 44; Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 170). The concept of an ecosystem as a network structure has sparked scholarly interest because it provides the analytical means to highlight the flows of information and resources present in these networks.

The current infrastructure to support and encourage commercial entrepreneurs has inspired several authors to argue that we should do the same for social entrepreneurs. One of these authors is the pioneer of social entrepreneurship studies (Anderson 2014) Greg Dees, who sees social entrepreneurship as a strategy to tackle social problems that should receive more support (2007, 24). The problem, however, is that social entrepreneurs are "swimming against the current of cultural assumptions and biases" (Dees 2007, 28). The combination of tackling social problems and making a profit is criticized for being a form of window-dressing or marketing and an abuse of government funds to make a profit. These social entrepreneurs, however, are very important to combat social problems. Therefore, Dees argues that social entrepreneurs should receive more elaborate support, just as commercial business entrepreneurs did in the last centuries.

In recent years, national and local governments across Europe started to promote the creation of an ecosystem for social entrepreneurship. The ecosystem as a concept in economics asserts that "entrepreneurship takes place in a community of interdependent actors" (Stam 2015, 2). It is the (social) context that allows or restricts the activities of the entrepreneur. Stam (2015) indicates several pillars of the ecosystem, for example support systems, government & regulatory framework, education and cultural support. The support systems consist of mentors, professional services, incubators and accelerators and the network of peer-entrepreneurs (Stam 2015, 2-3). These systems create a flow of information and connect entrepreneurs which lead to the identification of new opportunities and the establishment of joint projects (Casson & Giusta 2007, 224). Organizations that help create support

systems by bringing social entrepreneurs together in one physical place pop up around the world. The focus of our research is on these organizations because Witkamp, Royackers and Raven (2010, 304) have shown that social entrepreneurs lack means to learn from their peers. This means that there are no institutions that regulate the diffusion of experience and knowledge to new entrepreneurs. The above-mentioned buildings where entrepreneurs are able to collaborate allow for this diffusion of experience and knowledge.

Multiple names are used for these organizations, such as Hubs, Networks, Communities of Practice and Clubs, but Toivonen (2013, 1) argues that these places are social innovation communities that “should be viewed as collaborative communities that have the potential to rewire wider social innovation circuits in a given area”. He argues that social entrepreneurs in a social innovation community collaborate with each other and seek to connect with multiple other networks in a city or within the wider region. The goal is to create more societal impact by bringing multiple actors together. This means that there are not just social entrepreneurs but also supportive professionals, civil servants and investors in these communities (Toivonen 2013, 4).

Toivonen (2013, 5) has conducted participant observation in multiple social innovation communities, where the activities consist of co-working, mentoring, workshops, meet-ups and competitions. In addition, ‘prospective collaborators’ are introduced to the community by the members. He notes that Impact HUBs have developed a hosting system to systemize this process (Toivonen 2013, 6). In her observational study of the Helsinki Hub, part of the international network of Impact Hubs, Houtbeckers (2013, 143-144) found that the hosts are very important to introduce newcomers to the existing community and to create a good atmosphere.

Toivonen (2013, 6) sums up a short list of benefits of co-working: “affordable workspace, psychological support from meeting like-minded peers, frequent feedback, access to new networks and knowledge and even to financial resources”. The difference, however, is that the community is more focused on specific needs of the members and is a ‘subcultural space’ that supports social entrepreneurs. A subculture describes a “set of beliefs, behaviors, and practices that are at odds with (but not wholly isolated from) the surrounding, dominant culture” (Toivonen 2013, 6). Within this subculture, there can be social entrepreneurial values that are not common in the conventional, profit-focused economic perspectives of the outside world. He argues that within the subcultural space the new social entrepreneurs that are swimming against the stream can receive the support, recognition, and trust they lack in wider society (Toivonen 2013, 6).

However, there is more to organizing and managing a network structure within an ecosystem than hosting or co-working. Mandell (2001, 280) and Agranoff & McGuire (1999, 19) highlight the need for a manager who understands how to manage and stimulate collaboration.

To be able to manage a network structure, three key components can be named according to Mandell (2001, 280):

1. Members need to be influenced to participate.
2. Members need to stay committed to the network structure.
3. A healthy environment needs to be created for productive social interaction, leading to a sense of community.

Within the network, two behaviours can be influenced to enhance participation. First, the goal is to secure the support of members that sustain the network. Two kinds of people here are crucial: the ones that put in the work to keep the network alive, and the ones who have the ability to legitimize the network to the outside world through persuasion and influence (Mandell 2001, 283).

Furthermore, the second behaviour can be described as creating a set of shared values and norms, a shared purpose (Agranoff & McGuire 1999, 32). Developing a clear vision for potential network participants is crucial to be able to communicate the network clearly to the world. Through this, a sense of community among the members of the network structure is built.

The second component, motivating members of the network to stay committed, refers to getting participants to take collaborative action (Agranoff & McGuire 1999, 28). It involves developing cooperative endeavours among the network participants. This can be done in a myriad of ways, mobilizing members for a specific goal, organizing events and setting up congresses. By activating people within the network, the sense of being part of a greater whole is strengthened, increasing social cohesion within the network.

The third component of managing a network structure is creating a favourable environment for productive interaction (Mandell 2001, 283). This means to lower the threshold of participation as much as possible, so gaining access to the social capital embedded within the network is as easy as possible. It is vital here to build areas of trust or if they already exist, identify these, as to take full advantage of the network structure and make communication within the network as easy and clear as possible (Agranoff & McGuire 1999, 30; Mandell 1999, 283). This allows participants to contribute for their own reasons and align their goals with the networks'.

All of these three components of managing a network structure should be managed with the right kind of rigour according to the commitment that the network structure asks from their participants. The one component cannot exist without the other if the ecosystem is to succeed.

### **Conclusive remarks**

Network organizations, or social innovation communities according to Toivonen (2013), have emerged all around the world. The goal of these network organizations is to improve the ecosystem for social entrepreneurship in the way that has been done for conventional entrepreneurs. These conventional entrepreneurs engage in interactions and networking to achieve competitive advantage (Lin 1999, 31). To be able to gain this advantage, entrepreneurs need to have sufficient social capital, the “ability to leverage resources embedded in a social structure”. There are several forms of resources found in these networks that facilitate the achievement of this advantage: information, capital, and labour but also recognition and power are embedded here. This role of social capital might even be of more vital importance to social entrepreneurs than conventional entrepreneurs. As argued by Dees (2007, 28), social entrepreneurs are received with suspicion which implies that the context is often more adverse for them than for conventional entrepreneurs. This makes a wide social network to accommodate for the social entrepreneurs’ needs even more crucial (Austin et al. 2006, 9). Scholars like Dees (2007) have argued that the government should play a pivotal role in the establishment of these networks through for example network organizations. However, networking is more than just the establishment of a network organization. Networks are a complex social structure, consisting of a network structure, network content and network governance, all aspects that need to be taken care of. This whole process of the influence of the network organization on the actual networking environment and the influence it has on the social capital of the social entrepreneur has not been thoroughly researched yet and it is to this field that we will contribute. Since the emergence of social entrepreneurship in the Netherlands, a young field, several of these network organizations have been founded in different cities and we will shift our attention to these organizations hereafter.





## Context

Neoliberal thinking has introduced the term of *participatiesamenlevng* into domestic policies in the Netherlands. This term *participatiesamenleving* is based on the assumption that people operating in society must take responsibility for their own lives instead of relying on the welfare state. The goal here is to get rid of the bureaucratic nightmare that is the welfare state and liberalize the economy (Tonkens 2014, 85). In this shift a lot of societal challenges have come up, with the private sector or civil society purposed to take the governments' place (Movisie 2017). It is here, in this void that neoliberalism has left, that social entrepreneurship has come to the fore.

### Social Entrepreneurship in the Netherlands

Thorben

Civil society has quickly taken up activities in areas where the government has retreated, and social entrepreneurship is one of the ways civil society has reacted. Although social entrepreneurship has become prominent, there are no clear figures on the number of social enterprises in the Netherlands (Witkamp et al. 2011, 288). First of all, the diverse definitions are partly responsible for this. Witkamp et al. (2011, 292) estimated there would be around thousand social enterprises in 2011. This number is based on the two hundred members of the Dutch Society for Social Entrepreneurship (SSO) multiplied by five to account for the non-members as well (Witkamp et al. 2011, 292). In contrast, McKinsey&Company (Verloop et al. 2011, 5), using a wider definition, estimates the number of social enterprises to be around four to five thousand in 2011. McKinsey&Company is a global consulting firm directing resources such as consulting knowledge and research experience towards the social enterprise sector around the world. Five years later, McKinsey&Company adopted the definition of social entrepreneurship as issued by the European Commission in their new Dutch research. This definition, which we supported in the theoretical outline, states that social enterprises have a societal objective, mainly reinvest their profits to achieve this objective, and have a method of organization reflecting the mission (Social Business Initiative 2011). Using this definition, McKinsey&Company found an increase of 2.000-2.5000 to 5.000-6.000 social enterprises between 2011 and 2016 (Keizer et al. 2016, 5).

In short, social enterprises with the goal to tackle societal problems have been quickly rising. These facts have not gone unnoticed and the *Sociaal-Economische Raad (SER)* conducted a study into social entrepreneurship in 2015. This research body advised the Dutch government to support the social enterprise sector because of the social entrepreneurs' potential to deliver innovative solutions for social problems, such as improving the access of disabled people to the labour market (SER 2015, 13-14). The Dutch government Rutte III did include the support of the sector in their 2017 coalition agreement.

Similar developments have been taking place at the local level, with many municipalities adopting social entrepreneurship in their policies. The G32, a network of thirty-two average and large cities in the Netherlands, stresses the allurements for municipalities to facilitate and stimulate social entrepreneurs. By working together, municipalities can tackle societal problems through these entrepreneurs (G32 2017b). The G32 identifies four opportunities for municipalities to stimulate social entrepreneurship, including organizing or stimulating an ecosystem in which social entrepreneurship can flourish (G32 2017b). In the next paragraph, we will focus on this ecosystem and entrepreneurs' networks.

### **Social Entrepreneurs' Networks and the Ecosystem in the Netherlands**

*Thorben*

The need for more attention to the social entrepreneurial ecosystem was delineated by Witkamp, Royakkers and Raven (2010, 304). In 2010, these scholars identified three problems with the supporting structures for social entrepreneurship in the Netherlands: 1) the government is not/barely involved; 2) there are not enough investors involved; and 3) social entrepreneurs do not reach clients and partners. Additionally, there was a lack of institutions with the purpose to diffuse social entrepreneurs' knowledge and expertise to their peers. The improvement of this ecosystem is one of the G32's current targets to stimulate social entrepreneurship.

To improve the ecosystem of social entrepreneurship, scholars like Dees (2007) and Stam (2015) argued for the improvement of entrepreneurs' networks. In our view, and in line with Granovetter's (1973) argument, the actors in the support systems are part of the entrepreneurs' networks and differ in the strength of the ties. We have already mentioned several of these actors in the ecosystem, but what does the 'typical' network of an entrepreneur look like? Witkamp et al. (2011, 295) conducted a survey to analyse the social entrepreneurs' networks. Among the six most mentioned partners were SSO and The Hub. SSO tried to build a network among social entrepreneurs and to improve the ecosystem in general. Nowadays, Social Enterprise NL tries to achieve these goals. The Hub facilitates co-working spaces for social entrepreneurs. These organizations facilitate contact between entrepreneurs, thus widening their networks and adding to the social entrepreneurial ecosystem. Furthermore, these organizations link entrepreneurs to investors and experts. In the depth of the networks, which refers to how powerful the actors are, especially high-ranked people in society or certain organizations are important (Witkamp et al. 2011, 296).

However, the width of the networks is important as well. The width is comparable to the concept of centrality (Aldrich & Zimmer 1986, 16; Greve & Salaff 2003, 6) and defines the "type and number of actors" in the network (Witkamp et al. 2011, 296). In 2016 the report *Scaling the impact of the social enterprise sector* by McKinsey&Company indicated opportunities for the sector, among them are the need for more information, training, and networks. As we have argued before, networks are crucial to distribute information. Thus, wider networks are necessary for the sector to move forward.

Organizations like Social Enterprise NL and The Hub are likely to be players in facilitating this process, but we will focus on the Social Impact Factory in Utrecht.

The municipality of Utrecht states that they “challenge, support and connect (social) entrepreneurs to create innovative solutions and more impact for societal issues” (Gemeente Utrecht 2016, 1). In order to build a “solid network” Utrecht is a partner of the Social Impact Factory. The three pillars are social purchasing, organizing challenges for societal issues, and creating change by setting the agenda, organizing events and enabling connections. These goals are pursued in collaboration with the Social Impact Factory, either the foundation for the Buy Social program and challenges or the physical location as the physical hub to connect actors. In addition, there is financial support, under certain conditions, for a number of social entrepreneurs (G32 2017a, 26; Gemeente Utrecht 2016; Gemeente Utrecht 2018). We will now focus on the physical location where we conducted our research into how entrepreneurs utilize these networks to improve their business.

### **Social Impact Factory**

*Patrick*

The Social Impact Factory (SIF) is a company focused on social entrepreneurs located at Vredenburg 40. It was founded by four entities: Kirkman Company, Seats2Meet, the Foundation Social Impact Factory and Bruggink & Van der Velden Advocaten Belastingadviseurs. The goal of Social Impact Factory B.V. and of the Foundation Social Impact Factory, after this called the Foundation, is to normalize social entrepreneurship by creating a self-sustaining networking ecosystem in which all people can connect, collaborate and share their knowledge, creating new opportunities in the meantime.

SIF is a social enterprise, called into life after one of the Social Enterprise Days where different parties realized that a physical location where social impact is the core would be of value to the city of Utrecht. Several parties came together to discuss the possibilities for this, among which the board members of SIF nowadays and the municipality Utrecht. They discussed the location and grants to support this effort. Eventually, the municipality Utrecht and the Board came to an agreement of which the rental of the building, located on Vredenburg 40, was a part of. This building had been vacant for a while and consists of four floors, totalling roughly 2000 square meters.

After acquiring the building with help from the municipality, the partners of SIF had to decide how to renovate the building according to their needs. They settled quickly on a catering service downstairs and invited several parties that had their expertise in the catering industry to determine what kind of formula would be exploited on the ground floor. This formula became “Stadsbrasserie de Utrechter”, a separate corporate entity in close cooperation with the Social Impact Factory. Furthermore, the partners decided that the lay-out of the building and full interior design should have sustainability in

mind, giving room to several interior designers and initiatives to come up with sustainable solutions for working spaces and meeting spaces.

The Social Impact Factory opened her doors to the public at the beginning of 2017. SIF utilizes fifteen meeting spaces available for every organization to rent. This is where their main revenue comes from. Furthermore, there are workspaces, spaces where entrepreneurs can work for a fee, taking advantage of the synergy in the building without having to rent a whole meeting space. Finally, there are the co-working spaces, spaces that are provided out of abundance and that can be used for free by entrepreneurs under the condition that they share their social capital. This is the Social Capital Room.

The concept of serendipity is the underlying rationale for these spaces. This concept originates from Seats2Meet and is based on the assumption that 'random' encounters between entrepreneurs will have a positive networking effect. According to Van de Vrande (2016), these random encounters with like-minded people create a feeling of community, strengthening the belief and trust that is associated with these encounters, leading to a community feeling and collaborative innovation.

To conclude, the Social Impact Factory has taken a proven concept, the Serendipity idea by Seats2Meet, and applied it to the new demographic: social entrepreneurs. The ambition to foster a community feeling and stimulate collaborative innovation among social entrepreneurs is a worthwhile one, but how do these ambitious ideas work out in the real world?





## **The Social Impact Factory**

*Patrick*

The Social Impact Factory, located in the heart of the city centre of Utrecht, has been fully in operation for a year now and functions as a network organization for social entrepreneurs. It consists of four floors. On the ground floor, Stadsbrasserie de Utrechter has taken seat with the back of the café being used by Social Impact Factory as Social Capital Room. The first floor is the main floor, with a large amount of meeting spaces carrying the names of several major cities around the world such as Barcelona and Shanghai. When you arrive on the first floor, you will ordinarily be greeted by the host and asked to log into the Serendipity Machine. Afterwards, you take place in your designated place, be it a working space, meeting space or co-working space. It was here on the first floor that we spent most of our time during the conduction of our research. On the second floor, several other meeting spaces exist, complemented by fixed working spaces rented by enterprises such as Kromkommer and the Foundation Social Impact Factory. On the third floor, there is a large vacant space used by more enterprises such as Webmapper and some additional meeting spaces. In our first appendix a lay-out of the building can be found.

Throughout this chapter, we will outline the organizational structure within the Social Impact Factory and the way it operates on a daily basis. Firstly, the way as to how the Social Impact Factory has come into existence and its vision will be outlined. After this we will introduce our key informants and look at the practical execution of this vision. Thirdly, a light will be shed on the Serendipity Machine and the role it plays in facilitating the network ecosystem the Social Impact factory envisions, and we will close with the repercussions of the Serendipity Machine on the cooperation with the Foundation Social Impact Factory.

### **The Vision: Society 3.0 and Seats2Meet**

The Social Impact Factory was born as an initiative by several partners, among them the Foundation Social Impact Factory and Seats2Meet<sup>1</sup>. While all these partners deliver two members to the board, Seats2Meet's involvement with the Social Impact Factory quickly appeared to have a further reach than just the board. As Anne, our gatekeeper, stressed in our first interview "The Social Impact Factory is a product of the Society 3.0 idea courtesy of Ronald, the CEO of Seats2Meet." Central to this concept are two ideas: "offering free co-working when abundance is present and supporting value creation by creating a networking ecosystem in which people can connect, collaborate and grow". Both Toivonen (2013, 6) and Houtbeckers (2013, 143-144) have highlighted the importance of co-working for the creation of a networking ecosystem. However, even though the intentions are good, and the concept of co-working has proven itself already at several Seats2Meet locations, the execution of this vision has gotten complicated for the Social Impact Factory. To get to the bottom of this, we first need to shed a light on the Society 3.0 idea that is the fundamental principle to SIF's existence.

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<sup>1</sup> The full list of partners can be found in the context chapter of this thesis.

Ronald van den Hoff, the founder and CEO of Seats2Meet, wrote a book called *Society 3.0* in which he outlines his vision for the world. This vision has been used by Seats2Meet for almost ten years now (Van den Hoff 2013, 6). The book envisions the network as the solution to the accessibility of resources and Ronald states that the future of democracy lies in these networks. He highlights co-working as the key to accessibility of these networks, a space wherein people operate and cooperate and create added value to society, as opposed to a class distinction in which the capabilities to create added value are with the “happy few” (Van den Hoff 2013, 27). He claims that the necessity of this radical change in organization and means of production is caused by an existential crisis in the West, in which a “Whole generation has lost its way and with it, its corporate and governmental institutions” (Van den Hoff 2013, 22). Within the book he highlights his vision for society as a whole, touching upon topics such as education, health systems, and macroeconomics, all of which would be a subject of a research project on its own. However, his most important point is that while networks are the key to creating collective abundance instead of the economic scarcity that is present now, the new means of organization within society should be within open and non-hierarchical network organizations in which people can co-work, co-create and organize. He sees Seats2Meet as the embodiment of this organizational form that represents this new shift (Van den Hoff 2013, 28).

This idea of a non-hierarchical organization is rooted in the notion “that people are able to self-organize and self-manage and consequently, can stimulate each other to perform value-driven work” (Van den Hoff 2013, 229). We have seen this idea of leadership and management coming back with our informant Céline, from Seats2Meet, who has described the work mentality of Seats2Meet as “based on self-reliance and more entrepreneurial than you would normally expect from an employee”. According to her, this creates a dynamic workspace but requires a highly pro-active attitude towards working.

We can also see this work attitude based on self-reliance and self-organization in the way the Social Impact Factory manages the network based in the building, with both Anne and Iris, the marketing manager, saying that the “Social Impact Factory leaves room for initiatives, facilitates them when able to out of abundance, but does not organize events themselves”, thus relying on the self-organizing and self-managing of the network, only supplying hosts and the Serendipity Machine. This is fully in contradiction with our theoretical findings where Mandell (2001, 281) has stressed in her various articles that there is more to organizing and managing a network within an ecosystem than just hosting or co-working. We will delve deeper into this contradiction and the Serendipity Machine later in this chapter.

### **‘Fanchise’**

Céline and Mariëlle, the second in charge after Ronald, have both explained to me that Seats2Meet operates as a so-called ‘fanchise’, not a franchise. This ‘fanchise’ idea means that everybody can take



the concept of Seats2Meet, including the Serendipity Machine, be it against compensation, and implement it in their geographical locality. While this makes the concept highly flexible and able to be implemented in a wide range of social contexts, it also means that while the idea is spreading, Seats2Meet does not take a lot of liability for any failures with the implementation, only taking credits for the successes.

However, the Social Impact Factory is not a ‘fanchise’, according to Ronald, Mariëlle and Anne. It is owned by Seats2Meet, among others, and decision making goes straight through these owning partners instead of the free reign that Seats2Meet employs with her ‘franchised’ locations. However, while these partners should have an equal say in the decision-making processes, the reality is that Seats2Meet has a larger impact on the daily operations of the Social Impact Factory than the other partners and it is to this topic that we will turn now.

## **The Execution**

“It is our first meeting with Anne. She is the floor manager of the Social Impact Factory and the gatekeeper to our research site. We are curious since Anne is the replacement of Mees, the floor manager that originally granted us permission to do our research at this site located on Vredenburg 40. At two o’clock we sit down with her in ‘the box’ on the first floor, an isolated workspace made completely of cardboard, lit by a single light bulb, giving us some form of privacy in an otherwise open space.

Anne is a middle-aged woman formerly employed in the political landscape. She dresses in a business casual way and her voice is raspy from a smokers’ history. We quickly come to realize her quick wit and talkative nature and because of this, we decide to get straight to the point. Throughout our first day we noticed an atmosphere of passivity throughout the building, with little to no networking being done. When we bring this up in our first conversation Anne confirms this as a problem. After asking her some questions about the organization of SIF she mentions the Serendipity Machine for the first time. She explains that The Serendipity Machine is a booking app on the iPad present at the entrance and while it functions as an ordinary booking app for the meeting spaces and workspaces, it also demands of its users to identify themselves with so-called knowledge tags. These knowledge tags, such as ‘Cultural Anthropology’, ‘Social Entrepreneur’, ‘Social Buying’ etcetera, represent the knowledge present in the building and through this system a bulk of collective intelligence is created, from which members of this community can “connect, collaborate and grow”, according to her.

Throughout our conversation she stresses that the Social Impact Factory is a social enterprise. Money is earned by renting out the meeting spaces and the workspaces, while the vacant

meeting spaces and workspaces are shared out of abundance and used as Social Capital Workspaces. These workspaces are free, but when people use these workspaces they are expected to share their social capital, by networking, helping other entrepreneurs out or helping the Social Impact Factory out.”

Anne is the floor manager and the replacement of Mees. Together with the marketing manager, Iris, she is the only fulltime employee working at the Social Impact Factory. Iris, a small brunette just graduated from her bachelor studies, manages the content of the website, the magazine and social media. Being an open and adventurous personality, we quickly bonded because of our shared passion for travelling.

After a while, Iris introduced me to the main host in the mornings, Berna. Berna, a temperamental woman of Turkish descent, functions mostly as host on the first floor, receiving guests and taking care of daily operational tasks. Berna has told me that she just does physical hosting activities, not taking charge of the mailbox and not handling bookings because she isn't confident enough with her Dutch. Because of her children, she only works half days, hosting duties being taken over by Sanne or Alfonso in the afternoon. Sanne and Alfonso are usually the ones taking care of the bookings during their shifts. Sanne owns a clothing and blogging company and Alfonso owns a food truck, among others. Sanne, highly fashionable but a tad bit shy, started her work at Social Impact Factory the same week we started our research, limiting her knowledge about the company. Mutually we decided that she would keep me in the loop about her introduction time at Social Impact Factory, confirming several findings highlighted by other informants.

Alfonso, a native from Spain having lived in The Netherlands and Mexico among others, is a highly creative person and very driven to start new enterprises. Being the only guy on the team, he was very happy with our presence and we quickly hit it off. Throughout our research, Alfonso was writing his own thesis and through exchanging feedback and brainstorming he was the first one that I befriended and that I could call key informant. He highlighted the change in management as a severe complication for the daily functioning capabilities of the company. Because of this change in management, there has been a shift in focus after Mees has stepped down as floor manager, something he describes as “Mees being more of a risk-taker, stimulating the community was his priority whereas Anne has a more business mind, prioritizing profit a little bit more over making impact”. Because of the change in management, he noticed a more chaotic atmosphere on the floor and he started feeling left out, relegated to hosting responsibilities instead of organizing meet-ups because there was a lack of personnel. This severely demotivated him.

This sentiment was echoed by Iris. The moment I had my first interview with her I had built up some rapport with her, being able to talk more freely about Anne and Mees and the change that has taken place within SIF. Because she is the only one, together with Anne, that works full time she noticed

that her work shifted from marketing to more operational hosting responsibilities, managing bookings and preparing the meeting spaces for guests. Trying to combine these two took its toll on her well-being and made her role within the organization blurred and uncertain.

These two data sets confirmed my observations on the floor. I first noticed a shortage in personnel and the chaos it caused when Berna had to transfer her hosting shifts to Sanne or Alfonso, the only two part-timers that were available in the afternoon and Berna being the only one available to work in the mornings. For a long time throughout our research, Thorben and I were the ones that were present for more hours on the floor than anyone except for Iris. Anne was most of the time not to be seen and she rarely took on hosting duties. After a while we saw this lack of personnel taking its toll, but there was a deeper underlying reason the team didn't function optimally.

### **Social Impact Factory and Seats2Meet**

After a while, I came to learn that four out of six people of the team have a history at Seats2Meet. Anne and Mees both know Ronald and have been with Seats2Meet for several years before their involvement in the Social Impact Factory. Iris did her internship at the Hoog Catharijne location of Seats2Meet where she came to know Mees who hired her for the Social Impact Factory and Berna has been with Seats2Meet for several years as well, functioning in the same capacity as host and as cook. Noticeably, Naomi, an employee hired in the last three weeks of our fieldwork, has joined the team from Seats2Meet as well, making Alfonso and Sanne the only paid employees who do not have a history at Seats2Meet

We have seen the Seats2Meet work ethic coming back in the annoyances of the team of the Social Impact Factory. This work ethic is based on Ronald van den Hoff's book *Society 3.0*, the vision of the CEO of Seats2Meet for the world on several topics. Ronald highlights in his book the need for good leadership when employees operate more independently, even supplying a leadership model he calls the "Transforium" (Van den Hoff 2013, 230), in which the manager's most important task is keeping an eye on the personal development of the employees and creating a working environment based on a "culture of trust, taking responsibility and learning" (Van den Hoff 2013, 236).

However, within the Social Impact Factory, this "culture of trust, taking responsibility and learning" is barely present. The team has on multiple occasions voiced their concerns in confidential interviews about a lack of team meetings, leading to communicative struggles and annoyances that have negative implications for the cohesion within the team. Following this lack of cohesion within the team, the employees were prone to annoyances and didn't take responsibility. At one point during our fieldwork, an argument between Berna and an operative from the Stadsbrasserie escalated in front of everyone on the first floor, certainly not being in line with a culture of 'trust' among employees. Furthermore, Iris her tasks became convoluted with managing bookings and Alfonso's task of managing LABS, a co-working initiative, was convoluted in the same way with bookings because of a shortage of personnel.

This has led to both being forced to give up the original task they were hired for, leading to demotivation and even burn-out symptoms. Lastly, the personnel were poorly briefed. Nobody took responsibility to spread important information to all of the members of the team, leading to misinformation being spread to entrepreneurs or lack of knowledge on basic things such as the definition of social entrepreneurship.

All in all, these are all examples of things that went wrong within the team. While the structural lack of personnel is one of the causes of these problems, it is the reliance on Ronald van den Hoff's idea of depending on the self-organizing capacity of these employees that have made this problem significantly harder to fix. Anne, the floor manager, was rarely around to actually keep an eye out and the schedule was made by Berna while the bookings were managed by first Iris and afterwards Sanne. While these activities can be done in a fairly independent manner, communication between all of the employees is important when it comes to hosting properly, knowing what work needs to be done and avoiding simple mistakes and annoyances. Since this communication part did not come naturally for the employees and the tendency to work independently has made problems worse, the absence of a manager with a keen eye for teamwork has led to the ineffective work situation at the Social Impact Factory. This whole situation is in contradiction with what Van den Hoff preaches in his book *Society 3.0* and the vision that Seats2Meet has for teamwork. A "culture of trust, taking responsibility and learning" is not yet established for the employees and this has had a negative effect on the atmosphere that the entrepreneurs have to deal with in the Social Impact Factory. This is most visible in the way co-working is managed and treated by the employees.

### **Co-working**

Since the opening of the Social Capital Room on the ground floor the designation has been unclear because at first the lunchroom was the only Social Capital workspace. Entrepreneurs and people working in the Social Capital Room naturally preferred the lunch room as co-working space rather than the co-working lounge in the back of 'Stadsbrasserie de Utrechter'. This was mainly because the lunch room had less noise and better connectivity to the electricity grid. However, it is unclear whether people are allowed to work in the lunch room and whether the choice to work either in the lunch room or in the co-working space downstairs is a choice that is up to the entrepreneurs. Instructions regarding this division have been inconsistent, Anne giving various instructions while Berna or Iris give instructions to guests that indicate the contrary. The confusion that these unclear instructions have created was exemplified at one point when Thorben and I were working on our field notes. A younger guy came in looking for his friends. When he found them, he put his hands in his hair as if to communicate non verbally his confusion and voiced his opinion: "The most confusing building in the whole world.", explaining to his friends how he tried to get in at the side entrance of SIF since there is a plaque over there, after which he was sent upstairs by personnel of the Stadsbrasserie de Utrechter because he asked for the Social Impact Factory and then being sent downstairs again by Berna because

the meeting was not paid for. This event is a perfect example of the confusion that is caused by the lay-out of the building, the unclear instructions given by the team and the miscommunication between the Utrechter and the Social Impact Factory. However, free co-working is not the only way of the Social Impact Factory to establish an ecosystem and have social entrepreneurs “connect, collaborate and grow”. There is one big other tool: The Serendipity Machine.

### **The Serendipity Machine**

As already mentioned, the Serendipity Machine is the primary booking system of the Social Impact Factory. The core to the system is to make serendipitous meetings with people in the building possible thanks to the bulk of collective intelligence it offers through the use of knowledge tags (Van den Hoff 2013, 291). This collective intelligence can be seen as the content of the networks that the ecosystem provides. However, as Hoang and Antoncic (2003, 169) argue networks exist of more than just the content of the networks. Network governance, the way the people within the network move socially and establish connections, and the network structure, the way the actors within the network are connected, are the other two components of a network that are not being addressed by the Serendipity Machine.

In practice, within the Social Impact Factory, the Serendipity Machine is the main tool for providing the ecosystem since the team is busy running the company, managing bookings and setting up of the meeting spaces. This is in contradiction to what Mandell (2001, 281) has stressed in her various articles, highlighting the importance of organizing and managing a network. This could be done either by a manager or the community itself, although she argues for a manager who understands how to manage and stimulate collaboration because a self-organizing community is hard to achieve. Mandell stresses the importance of the three key components that need managing, 1) participation, 2) commitment and 3) creation of a healthy environment. However, within the Social Impact Factory, there is no such person. The Serendipity Machine has taken over the ‘connecting’ part of the hosting responsibilities, but as Houtbeckers (2013, 144) suggests, there is more to hosting than connecting. A good atmosphere should be created, and newcomers should be introduced to other people present in an active manner. While this atmosphere is present in other Seats2Meet locations and “many people at Seats2Meet actively engage in interaction with other coworkers”, according to van de Vrande (2016), this is barely visible in the Social Impact Factory.

As can be read in the next chapter, entrepreneurs rarely feel this need to take initiative to organize events and welcome newcomers for various reasons. Even more remarkable, I decided to organize a design thinking meet up for free at the Social Impact Factory together with Lucas. From the moment we first pitched the idea to the operational team of the Social Impact Factory to the moment we finally got the place booked it took the team five weeks to come to a decision for the rental of a room without

any amenities. I concluded from this that even the minimal effort that the Social Impact Factory said to put into organizing and facilitating networking events is not lived up to in reality.

In conclusion, the goal of the Serendipity Machine is to show the knowledge present in the building and stimulate serendipitous meetings. While the Serendipity Machine is not sufficient to establish a networking ecosystem, we do not doubt that it can be functional when implemented correctly. However, there is more to establishing an ecosystem than just a screen with knowledge tags. An ecosystem needs to be managed, employees need to take initiative and connect people and, in that way, create an open networking atmosphere. Furthermore, an important thing needed for the Serendipity Machine to function properly is that everybody who enters the building checks in according to the procedure. However, when this procedure is not followed, the goal to create a thriving networking ecosystem for social entrepreneurs becomes harder. With this in mind, the Social Impact Factory has unfortunately not succeeded in creating and establishing a thriving networking ecosystem, instead having limited networking capabilities when the Serendipity Machine is not used. Lastly, the Social Impact Factory does not take advantage of this other great linkage that they have apart from Seats2Meet: The Foundation.

### **The Social Impact Factory and the Foundation Social Impact Factory**

The Foundation Social Impact Factory has existed for longer than the company has and while our research is mainly about the company Social Impact Factory, the Foundation cannot be left out since they share the goal of normalizing social entrepreneurship.

The Foundation, although known to us, had been quite distant throughout our research. We noticed there wasn't a lot of communication with the team of the Social Impact Factory, or at least not as much as you would expect from a company and a foundation bearing the identical name and the same goals. At one point I scheduled an interview with Lisa, a former consultant at Kirkman Company and nowadays a connector at the Foundation. In our interview in Stadsbrasserie de Utrecht, I had my first contact with the Foundation.

The Foundation was founded as a foundation, in contradiction to the Social Impact Factory which is an enterprise. This reflects the fact that there is no legal entity for a social enterprise in the Netherlands. As a foundation there are several financial and governance possibilities that do not exist for a profit-making legal entity, which is why the legal entity of a foundation was chosen. The main difference between the Social Impact Factory and the Foundation is the locality: The Foundation cooperates closely with several Impact Hubs and initiatives across the country while the Social Impact Factory is very much located in the physical space on Vredenburg 40. Lisa has explained to me that the goal is to complement each other, with the Social Impact Factory focusing on being a physical hub and the Foundation using their contacts outside of Utrecht.

In theory, the Foundation has perfect bridging capabilities for both the employees of the Social Impact Factory as well as the entrepreneurs there. The Foundation has access to a large number of weak ties throughout the whole of the Netherlands and a lot of people hired that know about the landscape in which social entrepreneurs within the Netherlands have to operate. Combined with the shared goal of the Foundation to create an ecosystem for social entrepreneurs, it should only follow naturally that the Foundation and the Social Impact Factory operate side-by-side, strengthening each other.

Unfortunately, this rarely happens. The employees of the foundation rarely check in to the Serendipity Machine, hindering networking within the building, and also operate on a different floor than most of the social entrepreneurs present. Lisa has acknowledged this fact, saying “I have grown more active, checking in (the Serendipity Machine, ed.) every day [...] but I do acknowledge that I have not been active enough and that it is a part of my own responsibility and that I should improve this.” She highlights furthermore that “if all of us would have a bit more discipline with this (the Serendipity Machine ed.), we would reach our goals more quickly”.

However, not checking into the Serendipity Machine is not the only thing that hinders cooperation between the Foundation and the Social Impact Factory. The team of the Social Impact Factory rarely has an idea about the work that the Foundation does on a daily basis and vice versa. This is particularly evident in a conversation where I asked Alfonso if he had any connections with the foundation, to which he responded: “Not at all. I do not even know all of their names and if we had any conversations they were very brief. They work on a different floor and while we have this shared idea of an ecosystem where everybody exchanges knowledge and socializes, they mostly keep to themselves”. Berna echoes this sentiment, saying: “Before, the Foundation was located on the same floor as us, the first floor. Back then we were way more up to date about each other’s work, but nowadays they are on another floor and I only incidentally converse with them”.

This disconnection between the two organizations is remarkable and in contradiction with the literature that we have found. The Foundation possesses a wealth of networking capabilities and social capital and it is interesting to see that this is not widely known to the team and the entrepreneurs of the Social Impact Factory. We have already established that network governance influences and coordinates network exchange (Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 170). The lack of network exchange between the Foundation and the Social Impact Factory is also an indicator of the network governance aspect within the building at Vredenburg 40. Several other scholars besides Hoang and Antoncic (2003) such as Burt (2000, 351) and De Carolis & Saporito (2006, 44) have argued that for the social structure trust is the most important factor when facilitating network exchange and it is very possible that the lack of network exchange can be caused by a lack of mutual trust. This causal relation is however beyond the scope of our research, but we can highlight the irony of two entities both focused on networking not being able to network.

## **The Social Impact Factory and Her Goals**

Through all of these criticisms, it is important to note that the Social Impact Factory has only existed for a year now and has had to cope with several changes in management. This is however not sufficient enough a reason for the shortcomings that we have seen throughout the ten weeks that we conducted research there. Co-working within the building does not foster collaboration in itself and the communication within the team leaves to be desired, sometimes causing more confusion than it solves. One of the reasons for this is the involvement of Seats2Meet and the Social Impact Factory would gain if they would create a more separate identity from Seats2Meet than they have right now. To summarize in Anne's words, but with our own interpretation of the data behind us, the goals of SIF are: "offering free co-working when abundance is present and supporting value creation by creating a networking ecosystem in which people can connect, collaborate and grow". These goals are currently not in reach and for the most part because of the fact that "The Social Impact Factory is a product of the Society 3.0 idea courtesy of Ronald, the CEO of Seats2Meet", to also use the words of Anne.

The Social Impact Factory and Seats2Meet have voiced their long-term goals to us at one point. When their goals of normalizing social entrepreneurship and creating a thriving networking ecosystem are reached, it is their wish to also exploit the formula of the Social Impact Factory as a 'fanchise' and have it spread to all of the cities that the meeting spaces are named after. However, for now, this goal is not within reach, and the names of the cities remain just writings on the wall.







## **Collaboration among Social Entrepreneurs**

Thorben

In this chapter, we move from the organizational to the entrepreneurial perspective. We first point out that social entrepreneurs as well as supportive professionals use the Social Impact Factory. The boundaries between these groups, on various levels, are not always clear and we will elaborate on these levels. We continue to explain that in a social innovation community these different actors could strengthen each other to create social value. However, the Social Impact Factory is often used for other reasons, such as a free place to work away from home, which raises more questions about the fact whether the Social Capital Room is more than a regular co-working space. We will use the term subcultural space to analyze co-working within the Social Impact Factory. Thereby, we will delve into the Serendipity Machine and the social barriers present at the Social Impact Factory to understand to which extent the entrepreneurs come into contact with each other and to compare their intentions with actual behavior. After we have paid attention to the subcultural space, we move on to argue that the lack of interaction between entrepreneurs hinders the usage of social capital and the process of collaborative innovation towards social value creation.

### **Social Entrepreneurs and Social Value**

“It is almost one o’clock when Jochem approaches me: “I need someone to help me with the lunch”. I immediately put my laptop away and walk with Jochem, dressed in a black shirt and trousers, downstairs to the restaurant. We take the food and walk back to the Social Capital Room while we exchange a few words about today’s workload. Then we put the two salads and the bread, cheese, and ham on the high table where Jochem had already put the plates and cutlery. In the meantime, the first entrepreneurs walk from the long, grey lunch table to the high table to get their lunch.

There are not many entrepreneurs working at the Social Impact Factory today, which is common for a Friday. Therefore, I take my lunch and sit down with just three others: Lucas, Sanne, and Mark. Lucas is an entrepreneur who works here almost every day. He wears a white shirt with a blue pull-over and talks with me in Dutch although he lived in Germany until six months ago. Meanwhile, three other entrepreneurs are having lunch at the other end of the table. These entrepreneurs have been around since this week and often sit together. Between us is yet another group of three women who work for the foundation and have their lunch collectively.

Lucas tells me about a possible client in Germany and after our short conversation there is a silence that is broken when Lucas asks the newcomer, Mark, his name and occupation. Mark explains that he works for an insurance company. On Fridays, he is allowed to work at home, but he prefers a younger and more inspiring setting. The conversations flow naturally to more

general topics and we end up talking about certain neighborhoods in Utrecht and our plans for the weekend.

When it is a quarter to two, Mark rises and moves the black chair backwards. He makes sure his white shirt is still tucked into his jeans and takes his plate to put it in the dishwasher. Lucas decides to get back to work as well and greets us before he walks towards the white table to grab his MacBook. For another fifteen minutes, I talk with Sanne, an employee with long blond hair who wears a blue dress, about her work before we decide to continue with our activities as well.”

The Social Impact Factory was founded to support social entrepreneurship, but at this lunch there was not a single social entrepreneur present. Although this might sound peculiar, it does not contradict Toivonen’s (2013, 4) definition of a social innovation community where different actors, such as social entrepreneurs, supportive professionals, and investors, come together to rewire their networks and collaborate. Lucas, for example, is a designer who loves to support social entrepreneurs. One of the social entrepreneurs he regularly talks to is Elise. When I ask her why she started her initiatives, she explains that “you are confronted with something you think is unfair, unjust or something that doesn’t work”. In her view, this can happen wherever you are, and you get the urge to solve it. Although she normally laughs a lot, she becomes more serious if she talks about societal issues and unfairness. She started her first initiative when she was still a law student. Driven to buy only sustainable products she experienced that it was very hard to find the right places, so she has developed an app that shows stores with sustainable products in your area. A few years later, in her late twenties, Elise worked in Kampala, Uganda, and stumbled upon another problem: air pollution. From this point on, she has been trying to improve the health of motor taxi drivers through the distribution of air pollution masks and the provision of information.

For Elise and many other social entrepreneurs, creating social value, often called social impact, is the most important reason to start their enterprise. There are, however, other motivations as well. While talking about the start up of his food company, Daan tells me: “I have always wanted to work for myself. I noticed that this gives me the most energy, even though I have always worked for nice companies”. Daan is well-dressed and radiates confidence. He mostly wears a pullover and decent shoes, and his hair and stubble are properly groomed. As a former business student, he likes to set out strategies to expand his business. The freedom to make his own decisions, instead of obeying a boss, is the catalyst for his entrepreneurial activities. At the same time, entrepreneurship brings along a lot of stress, especially about making enough money. When I got to know Lucas better, he started to tell me more about his hardships with money, but he still insists that the freedom to make your own decisions outweighs the stress and uncertainties of securing an income.

### **Profit versus Impact**

Daan is ambitious and more like a conventional entrepreneur in his focus on expansion and financial growth. At the same time, he knows that a business should take societal responsibility and that customers want to hear about the company's story. His case differs from that of a number of other social entrepreneurs, who are satisfied as long as they can make a living and focus purely on the social impact. This observation mirrors what we have found in the literature. For example, Westhead et al. (2011, 165) argue that social enterprises limit the distribution of their surplus and the European Commission (Social Business Initiative 2011) states that profits are "mainly reinvested". It is, however, ambiguous what 'limit' and 'mainly' in practice mean. The social entrepreneurs at the Social Impact Factory have their individual views on the balance between profit and impact and act accordingly.

In contrast to other corporate entities, foundations do not have shareholders and are not allowed to distribute profits to their owners by law (Wetrecht 2018). This could imply a sole focus on stakeholder/social value, which is an important characteristic of social enterprises according to Westhead et al. (2011, 165). On the other hand, these social entrepreneurs have the view that they are not really an enterprise. I ask Fleur whether she would define her foundation as a social enterprise or not, she replies: "A kind of... I don't know whether we are really an enterprise, we are not really a company, but yeah ... a foundation". Bram, who works for another foundation, hesitated but then replied in a similar fashion "our goal is not to make a profit". Thus, Bram and Fleur both envision social enterprises as businesses that combine social and shareholder value and not just social value. This contradicts the general practice in the Netherlands where thirty-four percent of the social enterprises is a foundation or a combination of a foundation and another corporate entity (Social Enterprise NL 2016, 9). It illustrates that most of the social entrepreneurs at the Social Impact Factory do not really know how a social enterprise is defined according to scientific literature or government policies. Moreover, the entrepreneurs are not familiar with topics such as "the method of organization or ownership system should reflect the enterprise's mission" (Social Business Initiative 2011) that are part of the conceptual, scientific and political debates.

The common denominator between the social entrepreneurs remains the creation of social value and this is in line with the definition of Austin et al. (2006, 2). But what this social value actually entails is unclear in the field and leads to confusion. I have encountered Nina, a woman with brown, curly hair, in the paid working spaces where we talked about her work. As a consultant on environmental topics, she does not regard herself as a social entrepreneur. She argues that social entrepreneurs mostly create jobs for certain groups of people and she does not do that. Nina clearly defines social value quite narrowly, while others would define it more in line with the definition that impact is the contribution that a company makes to a solution for a societal issue. There is then a positive effect on humans, the environment or the society (Social Enterprise NL 2018). With this in mind, even though Nina does not

think of herself as a social entrepreneur, she would be one according to the abovementioned definition because her efforts to reduce the negative effects of waste on the environment are included within the definition of impact by Social Enterprise NL.

In short, the users of the Social Impact Factory consist of social entrepreneurs, commercial entrepreneurs, supporters and employees of different kinds of organizations. Even though the boundaries between these groups are unclear and they are not always fully up to date about the scientific inquiries in their field, they are potentially part of a social innovation community where they collectively work towards social value. The question, however, is whether the Social Impact Factory is indeed such a community or more like a regular co-working space.

### **The Office Experience**

In the theoretical outline, we have listed the benefits of regular co-working spaces: affordable workspace, support and feedback from peers, and access to networks, knowledge and financial resources (Toivonen 2013, 6). What is important for the users of the Social Impact Factory? The Social Impact Factory enables social entrepreneurs to work on the basis of social capital. This means that no monetary exchange takes place, but the users are expected to exchange their knowledge, skills, and network. In an interview with Elise, conducted in one of the meeting spaces on a Friday afternoon, she told me why she started to use the Social Impact Factory as the place to work: “To be honest, the first incentive was actually that it is free”. In most cases, however, this view is expressed in less literal terms. I often listened to how entrepreneurs explained the concept of the Social Capital Room to others, such as their clients. A marketing professional told his client that there is no monetary requirement and although “you have to pay with social capital”, he continued by stating that “in fact, you do not really have to do anything”. It is this quote that reflects the attitude of many of the entrepreneurs that make use of the ‘free’ space on the basis of social capital.

The main reason to use the Social Impact Factory, however, is that the entrepreneurs do not like to work at home. Toivonen (2013, 6) did not mention this benefit, but the users of the Social Impact Factory give several reasons for this, such as that working at home is lonely, it makes the division between work and private life ambiguous or there is no suitable workspace at home. The entrepreneurs explain that the Social Impact Factory offers a nice atmosphere where you can have an office experience. The story of Sebastiaan, a South American man who works for an international company, exemplifies this argument. I have met him at the lunch a few times and one time we continued our conversation in the ‘box’. This is the small, two to four-person workspace from cardboard and wood, which is often used for meetings because it gives some privacy in the otherwise open area. Here he tells me: “What I look for whenever I come to this office spaces is two things. One: to get out of my house, not to work from home, because it is, for me particularly, more efficient. And second, to connect with people that are also working in whatever field, in order to have a little bit more of a

colleague kind of life”. However, most of the entrepreneurs do not often greet each other and I have not observed many conversations between entrepreneurs that did not know each other. In contradiction to what he told me, Sebastiaan is one of them. There is clearly a distinction between how entrepreneurs intent to behave and their actual behavior.

### **More Than an Office?**

The Social Impact Factory strives to connect social entrepreneurs. Even though this is, apparently, not the main reason why entrepreneurs go to work at the Social Impact Factory, it is still one of the reasons. The access to knowledge and networks is especially interesting for social entrepreneurs who just started. While we are working next to each other at the lunch table, I ask Sylvia why she has chosen this place to work. She tells me: “We are still a start-up so I thought it would be nice to meet other people as well”. The young woman, who tends to work with her earphones in, is originally from Germany and recently graduated. This means that her network is still small, and she hopes to meet others at places like the Social Impact Factory.

In short, even though the entrepreneurs present at the Social Impact Factory voice an alternative workspace away from home as the main reason they are there, they do see the networking benefits that the Social Impact Factory offers. What makes a collaborative community different from a co-working space, according to Toivonen (2013, 6), is that it is focused on specific needs of the members and becomes a subcultural space. This means that the ties formed between entrepreneurs and the norms and practices within the Social Impact Factory are crucial to study to understand how social entrepreneurs use and benefit from the organization.

### **Community and Networking**

“It is almost ten o’clock on a cold Tuesday morning when Lucas walks up the stairs towards the first floor. In his German accent, he says “*goedemorgen*” to the hostess, the Turkish lady Berna, who wears a black and white dress. He ignores the iPad with the Serendipity Machine app that stands on a pillar at the entrance and walks into the Social Capital Room. He greets Elise and me before he walks towards Daan. The two men catch up because they haven’t seen each other for some time. Both of them say that they are busy, a remark that is made in most of the small talk at the Social Impact Factory. After a short conversation, Lucas turns to Gijs to greet him and then walks to us.

Elise, Lucas and I sit at the lunch table in the Social Capital Room. On the other side of the room are Daan, sitting on the armchair, and his brother Gijs, who works for him, at the table in the center. Both of them wear a shirt and pullover and are working with their earphones in. In front of Gijs sits Sebastiaan who wears his earphones as well. There are no others in the room which makes our voices the only sounds that fill the room. Lucas and Elise discuss with subdued voice their newest idea: a magazine about social entrepreneurship. We discuss the goal and content but after some time the discussion moves to a conversation about the arrogance of successful entrepreneurs. The morning is almost over

when Lucas and Elise agree that it is time for them to work on some emails before the lunch, so we keep quiet for some time. “

In the previous chapter, we have encountered the Serendipity Machine that matches entrepreneurs with similar interests and puts their photo on the screen at the entrance. I have observed that many entrepreneurs, like Lucas, walk straight past the pillar with the app at the entrance of the building. On my first day, however, I met Martijn who introduced me to the concept. He is an entrepreneur who has been around since the beginning because he likes the concept of the Social Impact Factory. The app is a useful device if you spend some time to understand it, Martijn explains, and he continues by stating: “You will discover a lot of people who can do something for you”. In hindsight, he has been one of the only entrepreneurs with a positive feeling towards the app. It seems that only the employees and founding partners, who do not use the app themselves, agree with him.

Most entrepreneurs express that they ‘experience very little of it’ and sometimes do not even know what the Serendipity Machine is. “Only you have approached me to ask me something”, laughed Daan when I asked him whether others have approached him through the app. Because of the limited utility to the entrepreneurs, an increasing number of entrepreneurs have decided not to sign in anymore. Lucas, who has his own user experience company, is one of them and is clearly not a supporter of the app: “it is not user-friendly at all and it does not really establish contact between people” was his comment when I asked him why he never signs in. I have come to know Lucas as a social and talkative guy who is not afraid to voice his opinion. But in his criticism of the app, he is not alone. Bram laughed when I asked him about the app and said it is a “*bloed ding*”, a forceful Dutch term to state the app is worthless. The Serendipity Machine app clearly does not function as it is intended and does not establish the desired networking ecosystem. Moreover, it is not a suitable substitution for a host, which creates a problem because a host is important to introduce newcomers to the community and to create a good atmosphere (Houtbeckers 2013, 143-144). What happens in this void that the lack of a host creates?

### **The Community as Host**

An official host might not be necessary to create a collaborative environment if the entrepreneurs themselves would fulfil this role by introducing newcomers to the community. In general, however, a newcomer is not approached by one of the regular visitors. A newcomer is often recognizable because he or she is looking around for the Wi-Fi password or struggling with the coffee machine. In most occasions, they walk to the host of the meeting spaces to get some help or information.

The fact that most newcomers do not ask questions to their peer entrepreneurs is partly due to the atmosphere in the Social Capital Room. A look into the room shows multiple entrepreneurs with chairs between them, focused on their laptops and wearing earphones. This situation gives me, and the entrepreneurs I have talked to, the feeling that the people are not approachable. At the same time, the



users of the Social Impact Factory argue that the use of headphones is necessary for them to focus or to do their job. In a conversation between a frequent user of S2M locations and his guest in the Social Capital Room, the feeling that people are not approachable was greatly exemplified by a comment of the guest. When the man explains the concept of the Social Capital Room with the words “people here are open to others to talk” she immediately laughingly replies: “They don’t seem so”. Indeed, I have observed only limited interactions between the entrepreneurs.

As a result, the users of the Social Impact Factory are not inclined to receive newcomers and do not want to put a lot of effort into improving the ambiance as well. Sebastiaan and Fleur, for example, stated that there should be more activities, such as having casual drinks or networking events, to connect with others. They argue, however, that the Social Impact Factory should organize it because the entrepreneurs do not have enough time. This contradicts the vision of the Social Impact Factory. They are willing to facilitate such events but argue that the entrepreneurs themselves should take the initiative. Moreover, when I asked Sebastiaan whether he attended the activities at other Seats2Meet locations when he worked there, he had to admit that he did not. For the hosting as well as the organizing of other events to stimulate interactions between entrepreneurs, both parties put the responsibility in each other’s shoes. This creates an environment in which newcomers are not adopted into the community and no interaction between users becomes the norm. We will delve into the consequences of this after we have dealt with another barrier to interaction.

### **A Subcultural Space**

As we have argued in the previous chapter, the lay-out of the building limits the interactions between entrepreneurs. Hans is one of the entrepreneurs with an office on the third floor. He is a bit older than most of the others, probably in his forties. I approached the man with short, black hair during the lunch because he is one of the only entrepreneurs from upstairs who regularly attends the lunch. He told me: “We are on the third floor, so it is not easy to make a connection with people downstairs”, but he shows up at the lunch to meet some of the entrepreneurs and to see what is going on. I have noticed that he does speak to some of the entrepreneurs, but most of the time his team has lunch together without having conversations with others. The barrier increased when the new Social Capital Room opened on the ground floor. On one of the first days, Sam approached me and voiced his opinion on this new room. “I suspect that you will talk less with each other now”, says Sam while he points to the small tables that give the room a different lay-out than the big lunch table upstairs. Sam always wears a shirt and his hair and beard are a bit sloppy. In his work, he tries to connect people with each other. Therefore, he likes to talk about these subjects and expresses his feeling that the room on the ground floor will further diminish the interactions with the entrepreneurs on other floors.

The Social Impact Factory would be able to distinguish itself from regular co-working spaces if it would create a subcultural space where social entrepreneurs support each other. The lack of

interaction, however, raises questions about the capacity of the Social Impact Factory to do so. Without regular interactions between the users, collaboration and support are not likely. I have often discussed this topic with Lucas. He is well-known among the other entrepreneurs because he often approaches others to have a chat. However, he notes that over the past months there are fewer possibilities to connect and the users of the Social Impact Factory are less open to interactions. In the words of Sam, the “social lubricant” is missing. This ‘lubricant’ could be fulfilled by the hosts or active community members (Houtbeckers 2013, 143-144; Toivonen 2013, 6). We have seen, however, that this does not happen. It even seems that instead of a supportive subcultural space there exists a culture where interaction between entrepreneurs is not common. The question is to which extent social entrepreneurs collaborate in a, what is supposed to be, collaborative community where newcomers are not received and the interactions between actors are limited.

### **“The Only Thing I Knew Was That I Knew Nothing”**

The social context influences entrepreneurial activities (Welter 2011, 168-69) and support systems are important to create an enabling context (Stam 2015, 2). Furthermore, social capital is grounded in the context of the entrepreneur as well and is important to receive information, influence others, attain social credentials and receive emotional support and public acknowledgement (Burt 2000, 347; De Carolis & Saporito 2006, 43; Lin 1999, 31). The problem for young entrepreneurs, however, is that their social capital is small, and their network is often narrow and based on a single resource, mostly friends with the same educational background. Elise, who started her first initiative while she was still in university, describes her lack of both knowledge and network contacts: “The only thing I knew was that I knew nothing. So, I had to go out to learn things. For me, the only way was to meet others. For example, I had one friend who is a graphic designer. He was one of the only people I knew in that field, so I could brainstorm one time with him but otherwise, I had to go to events”. Elise has attended numerous events organized by various organizations to enlarge her knowledge and network. This is clearly a form of purposive action that is necessary to access and mobilize the resources embedded in a social structure (Burt 2000, 347). Now, the Social Impact Factory offers her another venue to look for more knowledge and resources.

Elise works on an app that shows the users all shops with sustainable products in the area. For the optimization of her app, she has spoken with Hans who has experience in this knowledge area. He would be able to help her, but Elise did not have the funds to hire him. The management of the Social Impact Factory, however, uses this example to illustrate that entrepreneurs not only collaborate but even grow as a result of the encounters with other entrepreneurs at the Social Impact Factory. There seems to be the assumption that this one-time conversation has led to collaboration between both parties, which is not the case according to Elise, who was surprised when I mentioned the story.

## **Social Capital in Practice**

The above is an example of management using a non-existing story to illustrate their vision of creating collaboration among social entrepreneurs. Moreover, I have not come across other cases of cooperation. In order to stimulate knowledge sharing and, in the end, collaboration, the Social Capital Room is a space where entrepreneurs are allowed to work in exchange for sharing knowledge. This underlying rationale, however, does not prevent that the lack of collaboration is exemplified here as well. As we have seen earlier, some entrepreneurs just use it as a free place to work. Others, however, assume that the social capital principle means that other users of the Social Impact Factory will help them without requiring any monetary payment.

It was a quiet Wednesday morning when Lucas approached me to blow off some steam about a conversation he had just finished with another entrepreneur. Still angry, talking in an irritated voice and making wild hand gestures, he told me: “You are not going to ask for free food in a restaurant, are you? I would be ashamed!” It was the second time that day that he had an appointment with an entrepreneur who uses a workspace at the Social Impact Factory. Again, he was offered just a few hundred euros for projects that normally cost thousands of euros. Lucas is one of the entrepreneurs that support the social capital idea, but he clearly gets irritated by entrepreneurs he did not even talk to before, who expect his services for free just because he uses the Social Capital Room. For Lucas and the other entrepreneurs that try to share knowledge, the social capital principle is more about helping each other with tasks that maximally take a few hours, like fixing a problem with a website or Photoshop, giving feedback on a concept and making connections, such as arranging a meeting for someone with a potential client. Lucas, for example, helps the Social Impact Factory with developing a plan to improve the user experience of the website.

These events in the field clearly contradict Van de Vrande’s (2016) quantitative findings that state that ‘random’ encounters at co-working spaces create a feeling of community that strengthens collaborative innovation. According to her research, the relationship between actors is strengthened by organized activities such as the lunch. However, she does not mention the importance of trust, a factor that governs relationships. Trust affects the depth and richness, and thus the outcomes, of a relationship (Burt 2000, 351; De Carolis & Saporito 2006, 44). This is reflected in the occasions where information and advice, the content of the relationship (Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 169), are exchanged between the social entrepreneurs at the Social Impact Factory.

It is namely when entrepreneurs get to know each other better that they sit next to each other and engage during their work. I have experienced that after some time I often worked along with Gijs, Lucas, and Elise at the large lunch table in the Social Capital Room. We were focused on our own work but often helped each other out when there were issues. Elise, for example, has asked Lucas multiple times to help her out with her website and Lucas asked me for some advice or help with

translations, as he is still in the process of learning Dutch. After a while, when we developed the habit to make jokes and have small talk during work, Lucas proclaimed: “It really starts to feel like an office with you guys”. It is when these relationships are established that advice and information start to flow.

### **The Flows of Advice and Information**

Advice on new ideas is important to improve products and services. Sam tells me that Lucas has been helpful in sharing his thoughts on a platform Sam is developing. This exchange of knowledge is a benefit of the network, but these interactions are often limited because most entrepreneurs are in the same business stage. In the words of Daan: “The question is whether it is possible to grow or enlarge your impact or whatever by speaking to entrepreneurs similar to you.” He indicates that it would be more useful if there were some more mature companies to give advice on issues they have already dealt with. In fact, in the SIF building there are more mature companies, but these are on other floors and the interconnection between the floors is low. The advice that is currently given takes the form of feedback on ideas, emotional support or encouragement to go on with certain activities. This creates the enabling social context that motivates the entrepreneurs to keep going (Burt 2000, 352; Lin 1999, 31; Greenfield and Strickon 1981, 470; Welter 2011, 165-166).

Besides advice, information is important as well. It is shared by connected entrepreneurs about, for example, events, meet-ups and interesting people to approach. While Lucas, Elise and I were working in the Social Capital Room, Isabella entered the room. Elise and Isabella already know each other better so Elise knew that Isabella does the same work as Lucas. Therefore, she introduced them to each other and later Isabella invited Lucas to a meet-up event for designers that she organizes. Here, trust creates the confidence that the other party is indeed worth your effort and will deliver on the promises.

### **The Exception rather than the Rule**

In conclusion, the Social Impact Factory aims to facilitate social entrepreneurs, supporters, commercial entrepreneurs and employees of other organization to connect their networks and to collaborate towards social impact. Yet, the lack of interaction creates only a number of weak ties between the actors. Information and advice, however, seem to flow especially among the few entrepreneurs that did get to know each other better. This contradicts Granovetter’s (1973) theory that weak ties are sufficient to exchange resources. It is in the relationships that are characterized by cohesion and trust that entrepreneurs start to benefit from their peers. Moreover, it is a necessary condition for collaboration to take place. The fact that Elise and Lucas, two users that have created a strong tie, are the ones who recently started to work on a joint project is thus no coincidence. However, the lack of a host and the dysfunctional Serendipity Machine in combination with the limited interactions make Elise and Lucas the exception rather than the rule. The Social Impact Factory is only for a small group of entrepreneurs a space that fulfils the need for training, information, networks, and peer-learning that was stressed in the research of Witkamp et al. (2010,

304) and McKinsey&Company (2016). Although Dees (2007, 28-29) and Stam (2015) argued for more support systems, the Social Impact Factory will not lead to more social impact if there are no new efforts to create a collaborative community in which collaboration, trust, support and a feeling of community are at the core of the subcultural space.



## Discussion

*Patrick & Thorben*

In this research we have conducted an ethnographic inquiry to seek the genuine experiences within the Social Impact Factory. Our goal has been to bring the theoretical debate forward and to give new insights to the Social Impact Factory itself. In order to reach this goal, we have been guided by the research question: *How do social entrepreneurs associated with the Social Impact Factory use social network organizations such as the Social Impact Factory in Utrecht to leverage social capital in their social networks?* We have concluded that the social entrepreneurs present throughout our ten weeks of qualitative research did not use the Social Impact Factory mainly to leverage social capital in their social networks. Sometimes they did, but these events were incidental. This was in contradiction to what we expected of actors within a network organization. However, we have taken the current scientific knowledge as a point of departure to research the rationale behind this finding. In doing so, we have encountered several limitations within the current theoretical debates. First, the conceptual debate regarding social entrepreneurship often lacks the perspective of the social entrepreneurs themselves. In addition, we have been able to pinpoint where the Social Impact Factory falls short in terms of creating a networking ecosystem thanks to the theories put forward by Hoang and Antoncic (2003) and we have confirmed that Granovetter's (1973) theory on weak ties has aged and needs replacement within social network theory. We will elaborate on all these topics in this order, after which we will close with some recommendations towards the Social Impact Factory, Seats2Meet and the academic world.

### **The Definition of Social Entrepreneurship**

In the theoretical outline, we have pointed out that there is no common definition of social entrepreneurship. In line with Austin et al. (2006, 2) and the European Commission (Social Business Initiative 2011) we agree that the creation of social value should be at the core of the definition. In the field, however, it is even more ambiguous what or who a social entrepreneur is. It is hard to exactly define social value, let alone to draw a strict line. Furthermore, there is no agreement on the social domains in which social entrepreneurs operate and whether social value creation is the only defining characteristic. This makes it unclear at which demography an ecosystem for social entrepreneurship is targeted. Without a clear definition all kinds of 'social' entrepreneurs are able to use the facilities. At the Social Impact Factory, this means that employees of large commercial organizations and commercial entrepreneurs use the Social Capital Room in the same way as the entrepreneurs that are more focused on social value. Moreover, there is often no sharing of knowledge between these actors. A peer-network of social entrepreneurs that is willing to help each other towards more social value is not established in this way. As one of the pillars of the City of Utrecht's social entrepreneurship program, the Social Impact Factory receives large sums of public money. At this moment these grants support commercial parties as well. When we take the whole ecosystem into perspective this point

illustrates the bigger problem. Without a clear vision on social entrepreneurship, it will be hard to define which entrepreneurs are allowed to be part of the ecosystem, for example to participate in incubator and accelerator programs that are important components of an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Stam 2015, 2-3).

On the other hand, a network organization could also focus on creating a network of different actors, such as social entrepreneurs, supportive professionals, and commercial entrepreneurs. Here, the focus is not on social entrepreneurship but on creating a social innovation community (Toivonen 2013, 4) that is focused on collaborating towards social value. However, to become a subcultural space in which actors support each other, a shared vision on social entrepreneurship or social value is necessary to create a common denominator between the different actors. This shared vision contradicts the economic values in wider society, but within the community it unites the actors to collectively focus on reaching their goals. At the Social Impact Factory, however, the goal to make social entrepreneurship the new norm is too vague to be a collective target. In addition, the marketing is focused on social entrepreneurship and not on a network of supportive professionals. More effort will be necessary to manage the network to create the collaboration among actors that characterizes a social innovation community.

### **The Network at the Social Impact Factory**

We have shown in our theoretical outline that networks can be illustrated through three essential components: the content, the governance and the structure of the relationships within the network (Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 169). Through this model, we can accurately portray the network that the Social Impact Factory establishes, and it gives us a clearer view on where the shortcomings within the network come from. Network content means the resources embedded within the network, such as information and advice (Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 169). Within the Social Impact Factory, these resources are called 'collective intelligence'. Users of the Social Impact Factory indicate their knowledge in the Serendipity Machine and the app makes it visible with knowledge tags. However, since the usage of the Serendipity Machine is inconsistent and thus not representative of the actual knowledge that is present in the building, the Serendipity Machine does not accurately portray the content of the network. Since the employees are not fully informed on the people in the building, they cannot complement the Serendipity Machine in making this content visible. Furthermore, Hoang and Antoncic (2003) have described capital as a resource that is also part of the content of the network. However, in our experience, the amount of capital present and ready for exchange is very limited, demonstrated by the high number of people relying on the Social Capital principle within the Social Impact Factory and the absence of investors.

Furthermore, we have highlighted trust as a crucial factor for knowledge exchange to take place, exemplified by several cases in previous chapters in which people first had to get acquainted before



they would exchange resources. This is what Hoang and Antoncic (2003) describe as the reliance on “implicit and open-ended contracts based on trust”, the definition of network governance. Within the Social Impact Factory, trust is not naturally fostered because most actors do not really get to know each other. Furthermore, the Social Impact Factory has not matched the expectations they have raised among their users. This creates disappointment and weakens the trust in the Social Impact Factory itself and in the possibilities to connect with others as well.

Lastly, the network structure is the pattern of ties between the people involved, assuming that who the people are as a person does not matter as much as their position within the network. The building plays a very spatial role in structuring the network within the Social Impact Factory. The four floors, as described multiple times in the previous chapters, make interaction across floors hard and while it hinders the cooperation between the Social Impact Factory, the Foundation, and the Utrechter, it also hinders social interaction between entrepreneurs, thus limiting network exchange. Furthermore, the Social Impact Factory has not taken enough steps to counter this problem through signage, hosting or remodeling.

As we have shown, there is an ambiance in which social interaction is not the norm at the Social Impact Factory. This hinders the formation of weak and strong ties. These ties are important because social capital is based on the assumption that better-connected entrepreneurs will receive higher returns for their efforts (Lin 1999, 21; De Carolis & Saporito 2006, 41; Burt 2000, 347). It requires purposive action to build a network and to use it. In building a network the creation of ties is central. At the Social Impact Factory, the Serendipity Machine should make this process easier, but it is not regarded as a useful mechanism and therefore not used to establish weak ties. These weak ties are characterized by a low intensity, intimacy, reciprocal service and the amount of time invested (Granovetter 1973, 1364). Yet, they have the ability to bridge separate networks. These networks at the Social Impact Factory, however, remain disconnected partly because of the ineffectiveness of the Serendipity Machine and the lack of interaction between entrepreneurs. The resources in these networks remain unattainable in this way as well. Moreover, our empirical data has shown that even if weak ties are established it often does not lead to the exchange of resources. We have found that the strong ties, that according to Granovetter have a bonding capability, are more important. In these ties trust is present. Trust is an essential component in a relationship because it ensures that the other party is worth the effort (Burt 2000, 351; Casson & Giusta 2007, 229; De Carolis & Saporito 2006, 44; Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 170). Thus, whether it is information, emotional support or another resource, it is when there is a stronger relationship that these resources start to flow in both directions. This does not mean that entrepreneurs must be friends, but it shows that just having seen someone around at the Social Impact Factory or on the Serendipity Machine is not enough to create a beneficial relationship. Let alone that it leads to a relationship in which entrepreneurs start to collaborate.

Knowing this, it is even more important to shape the network in a way that all components, including trust, are able to flourish. Mandell (2001, 280) claims that the managing of a network is fundamental to stimulate collaboration and she outlines her recommendations very clearly. First, get as many people in and have them stay active. The Serendipity Machine has the potential to make accessibility of the network content way higher, which would improve participation, but it has to be used by more actors to do so. The second component is stimulating collaboration. Throughout our experience, the Social Impact Factory has said on multiple occasions that they facilitate collaboration. However, facilitation and stimulation are not the same thing. The entrepreneurs have indicated that more events organized by the Social Impact Factory would spark social interaction and foster collaboration as well. The last aspect of managing a network comes down to creating an atmosphere of trust, a subcultural space in which like-minded people are able to rely on each other. While this is the hardest of the three and mostly determined by the network itself, it is important that the staff tries to bring people together and contributes to an open, inviting environment. This means that the employees take the important role of hosts (Houtbeckers 2013, 143-144; Toivonen 2013, 6). In addition, it is important that the entrepreneurs' expectations about the benefits of the Social Impact Factory are managed in the right way because disappointment leads to a lack of trust and involvement.

### **The Value of the Ecosystem**

The findings stated above raise the question what the value of such a networking organization is within the social entrepreneurial ecosystem. Clearly, hanging around other entrepreneurs does not magically lead to collectively generating new business opportunities and executing them with 'unknown' people. Moreover, being around other entrepreneurs does not even lead to many interactions between the entrepreneurs or to the exchange of resources. Elise has explained that you have to ask yourself what kind of support you seek in such a place. In her view, it is often a form of monetary support that is unfortunately not feasible in most cases. In addition, for many entrepreneurs their motivation to use the Social Impact Factory is not collaboration but a space to work away from home. This has not created a subcultural space where social entrepreneurs receive the support they lack in wider society and where they can collaborate with their peers.

When the social entrepreneurs do not collaborate, we are wary of the practice of clustering these entrepreneurs in one place such as the Social Impact Factory. According to the theories outlined in our framework, Social capital is based in social networks and to bridge the gaps between various networks it is important to meet actors outside your own network. This goal might be better achieved in regular co-working spaces, especially because the 'world of social entrepreneurship' in the Netherlands is, although growing, quite small.

On a final theoretical note, the Social Impact Factory has the goal to make social entrepreneurship the norm in wider society. We have stumbled upon several problems that limit their capability to do so,

but we think it is still interesting to question what the Social Impact Factory adds to the social entrepreneurial ecosystem after they have reached this initial goal. As argued by Toivonen (2013), a social innovation community is important as a subcultural space. Yet, when social entrepreneurship becomes an established field, there is nothing subcultural about the Social Impact Factory anymore because social entrepreneurship has become accepted or even the norm itself. We would argue that with the growing attention and recognition for social entrepreneurship, illustrated for example by the report of the *Sociaal-Economische Raad* and the coalition agreement, that in a number of years the norms in society will not be that much opposed to social entrepreneurship anymore. This means that as long as the Social Impact Factory enables collaboration towards social value it is distinctive from a regular co-working space. However, if this does not happen, there is no clear reason for entrepreneurs to use the Social Impact Factory, other than that it has a nice atmosphere or is located close to their home. These two reasons illuminate the fact that the Social Impact Factory needs to continuously work on a collaborative environment towards social value. This environment would mean a real, long-term contribution to the social entrepreneurial ecosystem.

## **Recommendations**

After addressing a number of problems we stumbled upon during our fieldwork at the Social Impact Factory, we would like to end with a couple of recommendations. First of all, it is important to rethink the relationship between Seats2Meet and the Social Impact Factory. We think that the problems with the workload, the cohesion within the team, and the use of the Serendipity Machine illustrate that it is not possible to copy one organization's practices and implement them in a new context. We have concluded several times that the Social Impact Factory does not fulfil their potential networking capabilities. However, we do think that there is room for improvement when they create their own 'DNA' instead of imitating Seats2Meet. The work ethic of Seats2Meet does not fit this start-up that has to deal with many actors and a building with a difficult physical lay-out. Therefore, it is time to move on and to create an own identity, work ethic and atmosphere.

The risk of the current affiliation with Seats2Meet and the 'fanchise' concept is that the stakeholders of the original concept claim the successes but do not take responsibility for failures. This tendency is apparent when Seats2Meet representatives and the other partners introduce the concept to their guests and visitors. They raise high expectations about the level of interaction that do not match reality. Furthermore, the Serendipity Machine is often praised because it matches users to interesting others, but it seems that only those actors who do not use it themselves are still positive about the app. In short, a success story is told that seems to be based on Seats2Meet instead of what happens at the Social Impact Factory. The problems on the ground are not addressed which means that they will not be tackled either. Therefore, it is important that the Social Impact Factory creates its own story. The

actual benefits that it brings to entrepreneurs should be included, but the current problems as well. Only by naming these issues, the first steps to improvement are taken.

Furthermore, we recommend that the Social Impact Factory, as a social enterprise, tries to practice what they preach as much as possible. We point hereby to doing business in a more social way. For example, during lunch the topic of sustainable purchasing was often brought up regarding the use of plastic cups or tea from a non-social enterprise. Users feel that there is still ground to cover on these topics. In addition, we have found that the personnel are not always kept in the loop regarding decisions and not taken seriously by the management team in their efforts to improve the situation on the work floor. Key here is creating that “culture of trust, taking responsibility and learning” where all employees are respected and enabled to develop themselves.

Finally, it would be of value to align more with the foundation. Both entities seem to operate separately and only have limited knowledge of what the other is exactly working on. The entrepreneurs that use the Social Impact Factory are barely involved in the practices of the foundation and when visitors ask questions regarding the foundation the hosts are often not fully up-to-date about the projects. According to us, shifting attention and involvement to the Foundation instead of Seats2Meet would yield a lot, both in operations and team dynamics as well as in the networking aspect.

After all, we hope that our research contributes to the scientific field that we operate in. Both Short et al. (2009) and Dacin, Dacin, and Tracy (2011) argued for more qualitative research into the relationship between social networks and social entrepreneurs. In our case study, we have used these qualitative methods and theoretical foundations as the point of departure. Watson (2010, 215-216) has argued that ethnographic methods have proven to be able to add interesting perspectives to management studies and we hope that the reader has the feeling that we have been able to do the same. Van de Vrande (2016) indicated, based on quantitative research, that random encounters at Seats2Meet lead to a community feeling and collaborative innovation. In our approach, we have looked beyond standardized question formats to find the story behind the figures. These stories illustrate another picture and make contradictions between what people say and actually do visible. As a result, the benefits of the serendipitous encounters seem lower than earlier found by Van de Vrande. Furthermore, our participants encouraged our research because there is happening a lot in the field of social entrepreneurship, but it often lacks the scientific argumentation and social entrepreneurial perspective. Therefore, we believe that further qualitative research into how social entrepreneurs make use of different pillars of the ecosystem, and ethnographic research in the business realm in general, is highly important.

In conclusion, the goals of the Social Impact Factory are not yet reached. Our ethnographic data has illustrated several problems that limit the networking capabilities of the Social Impact Factory. We

have shown that the employees have not enough time to function as hosts for the entrepreneurs. With the Serendipity Machine not functioning as a sufficient substitute, this leads to an environment in which social interaction is not the norm. In addition, the network lacks in all three components: content, structure, and governance. We have given several recommendations to improve the current situation, among which the organizing of networking events to stimulate the formation of ties between social entrepreneurs. This forms the basis on which trust can be built. Trust, as we have argued, is the lubricant that makes resources flow between two parties and is a necessary condition to start collaborating. Thus, if the Social Impact Factory wants to add more to the social entrepreneurial ecosystem it is important to improve their practices. We hope our thorough research will be able to support this process because we do believe that creating a sustainable networking ecosystem for social entrepreneurs has tremendous value in a world where neoliberalism has left a huge void and caused tremendous uncertainty. Unfortunately, for now, the Social Impact Factory is a place with missed opportunities where too many social entrepreneurs work to be away from home and not to find peer-entrepreneurs to collaborate.



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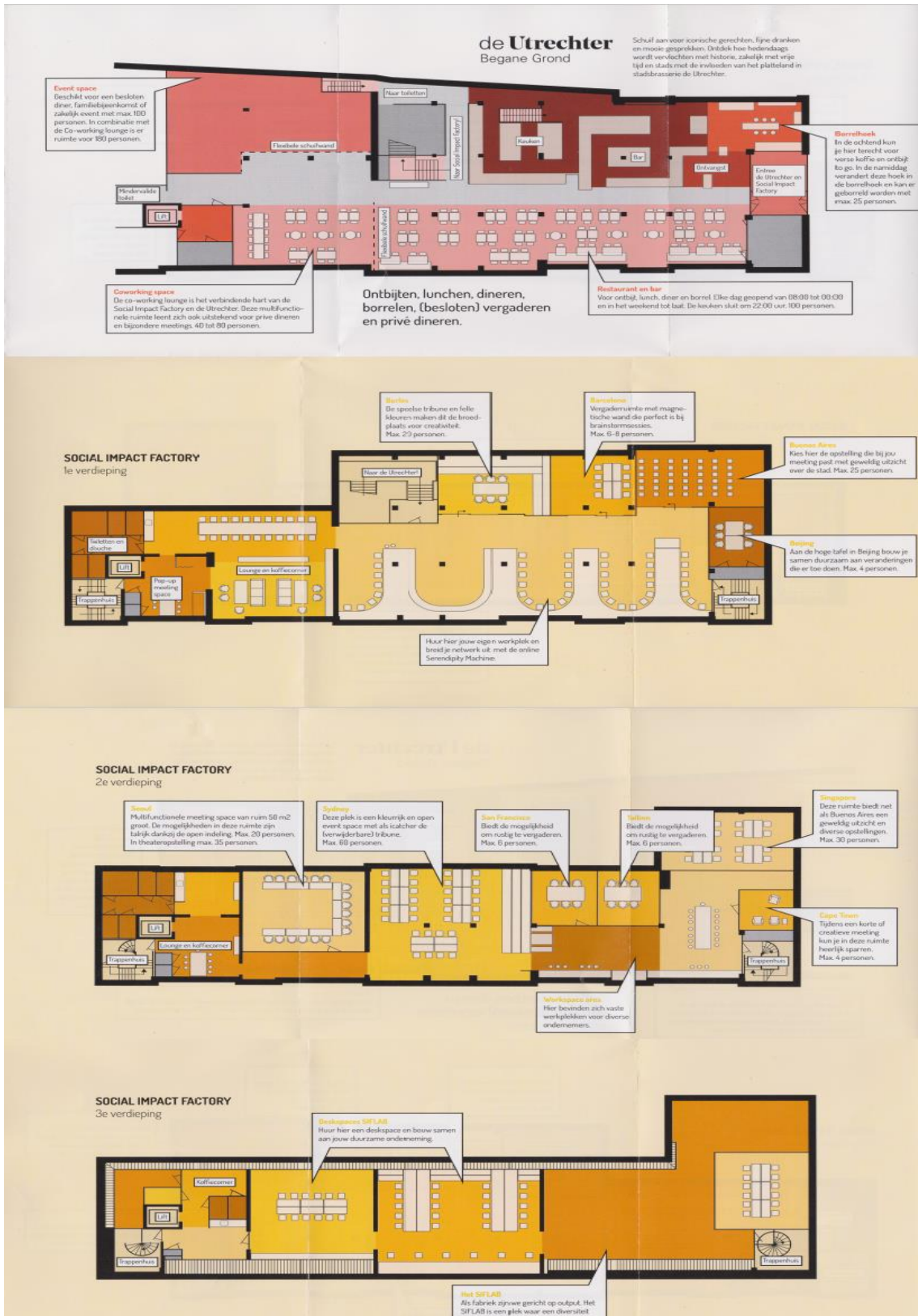
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# Appendices

## Appendix I. Map



Source: Social Impact Factory brochure, 2018

## Appendix II. Summary/Samenvatting

Sinds de neo-liberalisering van verschillende Europese economieën in de jaren '80 zijn er in deze landen steeds meer burgerinitiatieven opgekomen die taken van de overheid overnemen. Eén van de vormen is sociaal ondernemerschap. Wij hebben onderzoek gedaan naar sociaal ondernemerschap vanuit een netwerkperspectief, een onderwerp dat in de wetenschappelijke literatuur nog onderbelicht is. Dit hebben we onderzocht binnen de *Social Impact Factory* te Utrecht. De vraag die hierbij centraal stond was 'Hoe gebruiken sociaal ondernemers netwerkorganisaties zoals de Social Impact Factory om het sociaal kapitaal in hun netwerk te vergroten?'. Het onderzoek is opgebouwd uit een literatuurstudie en daaropvolgend drie maanden kwalitatief onderzoek, voornamelijk bestaande uit participerende observatie en interviews. Dit is een samenvatting van onze bevindingen en is dus een sterk verkorte versie van de daadwerkelijke resultaten. Wij verwijzen terug naar de volledige scriptie voor een uitgebreide uitleg van alle begrippen en uitkomsten.

De Social Impact Factory in Utrecht is een netwerkorganisatie voor sociaal ondernemers die sinds 2017 op Vredenburg 40 gevestigd is. Het bedrijf, dat zich profileert als een sociale onderneming, is opgericht door vier verschillende partners die ook allen een zetel hebben in het bestuur. Deze partners zijn: Seats2Meet, de Stichting Social Impact Factory, Kirkman Company en Bruggink & Van der Velden Advocaten Belastingadviseurs. Het uitgangspunt, naar het 'Society 3.0' idee van Ronald van den Hoff, is dat iedere partner evenveel invloed heeft op de besluitvorming binnen de Social Impact Factory, al blijkt dit in de praktijk anders te zijn. Wel hebben de partners een gezamenlijk doel, namelijk van sociaal ondernemen 'het nieuwe normaal' maken. Hiertoe biedt de Social Impact Factory werkplekken aan voor sociaal ondernemers onder het motto 'connect, collaborate, grow'.

Gregory Dees (2007, 28-29) beargumenteerde dat sociaal ondernemers meer steun zouden moeten krijgen om hun impact te kunnen vergroten. Hiervoor is het belangrijk om het ecosysteem voor sociaal ondernemerschap te verbeteren. Een ecosysteem wordt door Stam (2015, 2) gedefinieerd als de (sociale) context die de activiteiten van ondernemers stimuleert of beperkt. Volgens Dees is een belangrijk aspect hiervan het creëren van mogelijkheden voor sociaal ondernemers om hun netwerk te vergroten, dit is ook waar de Social Impact Factory zich op richt. Theorieën over sociaal kapitaal en sociale netwerken hebben eerder al het belang getoond van het onderdeel uitmaken van netwerken en het gebruik maken van het aanwezige sociaal kapitaal, zoals informatie, financieel kapitaal en arbeid (Casson & Giusta 2007, 224; Hoang & Antoncic 2003, 169). De eerste dagen in de Social Impact Factory viel ons echter op dat er weinig contact was tussen de ondernemers, het personeel en andere aanwezigen. Bovendien werd duidelijk dat er, behalve de lunch, geen activiteiten worden georganiseerd om contact tussen de aanwezigen te bevorderen. De sociaal ondernemers gaven zelf ook aan dat er weinig nieuwe contacten worden gelegd bij de Social Impact Factory en dat de opbrengst van het werken in de Social Impact Factory in dit opzicht dan ook beperkt is. De motivaties om hier te

werken waren dan ook niet het netwerk aspect, maar vooral de gunstige locatie en de mogelijkheid om ergens anders dan thuis te werken.

Dit onderzoek richt zich enerzijds op de gebruikers, de ondernemers, van de Social Impact Factory maar ook op hoe het personeel de doelen tracht te bereiken. Aan de hand van observaties en interviews werd duidelijk dat het team onderbezet was en de onderlinge communicatie beter kon. Bovendien werd er gewerkt zonder dat een leidinggevende een duidelijk overzicht had van alle werkzaamheden. Door problemen bij het uitvoeren van deze werkzaamheden, zoals het beheren van de boekingen, had het team geen tijd om de ondernemers en andere aanwezigen met elkaar te verbinden. Het team organiseerde bijvoorbeeld geen events, maar zou die alleen faciliteren als een ondernemer zelf met een idee zou komen.

Voornamelijk dit gebrek aan een *host* of verbinder wordt door de ondernemers van de Social Impact Factory gemerkt. Zij voelen de noodzaak dat er vanuit het personeel meer activiteiten worden ondernomen om mensen met elkaar te verbinden, aangezien ondernemers dit initiatief zelf vaak niet nemen door gebrek aan tijd. Het belang van de host werd eerder al aangetoond door Toivonen (2013, 6) en Houtbeckers (2013, 143-144) die stellen dat hosts erg belangrijk zijn om nieuwkomers te introduceren binnen de community en een goede sfeer te verzorgen. Binnen de Social Impact Factory valt op dat veel aanwezigen werken met oortjes of koptelefoons, elkaar vaak niet begroeten en niet bij elkaar gaan zitten. Hierdoor is er geen sprake van wat door Toivonen (2013, 1) een sociale innovatie community genoemd wordt waar verschillende actoren hun netwerken bij elkaar brengen om tot sociale innovaties te komen. Hiervoor is het van belang dat er een *subcultural space* ontstaat, een sfeer binnen het gebouw waarin ondernemers elkaar de steun geven die zij in de samenleving niet krijgen.

Kortom, door het personeel en de ondernemers wordt een gebrek aan onderling contact ervaren. Tijdens het onderzoek kwam een dieperliggend onderzoek naar voren: de grote invloed van Seats2Meet binnen de Social Impact Factory. Op papier zou Seats2Meet net zoveel invloed moeten hebben op de besluitvorming binnen de Social Impact Factory als de andere partners, maar in de praktijk blijkt dat ze meer in de melk te brokkelen heeft. Vier van de zes werknemers komen bij Seats2Meet vandaan en zijn zodoende gewend aan de onafhankelijke en ondernemende werkhethiek binnen Seats2Meet. Binnen de Social Impact Factory blijkt dit echter niet goed te werken en zorgt de combinatie van wegvallende personeelsleden en een gebrek aan kennis op bepaalde onderwerpen ervoor dat er een vicieuze cirkel ontstaat waarin taken blijven liggen of niet volledig worden uitgevoerd. Hierdoor ontstaat er geen ecosysteem waarin het verbinden van netwerken centraal staat, waardoor er extra werk nodig is om dit te bereiken. Vervolgens blijven hierdoor weer (andere) taken liggen. Het gebrek aan samenwerking, mede veroorzaakt door het grote aantal parttimers dat elkaar niet ziet, versterkt dit effect.

Echter, er moet verder gekeken worden dan alleen Seats2Meet en het team. De problemen in de samenwerking met Stadsbrasserie de Utrechter, gevestigd op de begane grond, en de onhandige indeling van het gebouw maken dat de hosting verantwoordelijkheden van het team voor de verhuurde ruimtes onevenredig veel tijd in beslag nemen. De Social Impact Factory blijkt een bijzonder moeilijke locatie om te vinden door het gebrek aan aanwijzingen, zowel visueel als verbaal door het personeel van de Stadsbrasserie, en binnen het pand worden bezoekers vaak heen en weer gestuurd tussen de verschillende ruimtes. Dit zorgt ervoor dat ondernemers regelmatig hun frustratie uiten over de gebrekkige communicatie en onduidelijkheid.

Veel van deze ondernemers maken gebruik van de sociaal kapitaal ruimte. Hier zijn werkplekken voor ondernemers die geen financiële bijdrage hiervoor hoeven te leveren, maar waarvan verwacht wordt dat ze hun kennis delen. Om aan te geven welke kennis er aanwezig is, moeten zij inloggen bij de Serendipity Machine. Het gebrek aan een host die zich richt op ondernemers zou dus moeten worden opgevangen door deze applicatie die het contact tussen aanwezigen moet faciliteren. Echter, veel ondernemers geven aan dat het systeem niet werkt en ze maken er dan ook geen gebruik van. Dit betekent dat de toegang tot de inhoud, zoals de aanwezige kennis, van het netwerk en het betrekken van de actoren beter kan. Het is, net zoals het stimuleren van samenwerking en het zorgen van een sfeer van vertrouwen, een van de drie punten die juist door Mandell (2011, 280) als essentieel wordt beschreven. Het niet gebruiken van de Serendipity Machine en het gebrek aan sociale interactie zorgt er dus voor dat er weinig kennisdeling is. De slogan ‘connect, collaborate, grow’ vertaalt zich hierdoor niet naar de praktijk. Door het gebrek aan connecties ontstaat er geen vertrouwen tussen de verschillende ondernemers. Dit vertrouwen zien wij als noodzakelijk om tot de uitwisseling van kennis en uiteindelijk samenwerking en groei te komen. Het is bij de ondernemers die wél regelmatig met elkaar in gesprek gaan en hierdoor elkaar leren kennen en vertrouwen, dat informatie en advies worden uitgewisseld. Van samenwerking is echter geen sprake.

Tot slot, het is belangrijk in het achterhoofd te houden dat de Social Impact Factory nog maar een jaar bestaat. De bovengenoemde problemen en het gebrek aan een duidelijke visie op wat sociale ondernemers zijn zorgen ervoor dat er voorlopig geen impact, zoals het laten ontstaan van samenwerkingen, wordt gemaakt. Dit in tegenstelling tot de claims die ze zelf wel maakt. Wil de Social Impact Factory daadwerkelijk bijdragen aan het ecosysteem van sociaal ondernemerschap dan moet er gewerkt worden aan verbeteringen. Het boekingssysteem zal moeten worden verbeterd zodat het team tijd heeft zich te richten op waar het daadwerkelijk om gaat: het creëren van een atmosfeer waarin ondernemers en andere partijen met elkaar in contact komen, samenwerken en groeien. Op dat moment kan er daadwerkelijk een *collaborative community* ontstaan waar sociaal ondernemers van profiteren. Zolang dit niet gebeurt is de Social Impact Factory vooral een plek met gemiste kansen en ondernemers die er voornamelijk zijn zodat ze niet de hele dag thuis hoeven te zitten.





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