



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Enhancing Community Resilience: Social Businesses in Collaboration with Public Institutions

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### Abstract:

Community resilience is defined as a community's ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity, such as natural disasters, economic downturns, or social disruptions. Building resilience requires a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders, including public institutions, private sectors, and civil society. Social businesses-enterprises that prioritize social and environmental objectives alongside financial returns-play a crucial role in this ecosystem. Also, social businesses can work with public institutions to identify and address the needs of vulnerable communities, such as those affected by natural disasters or economic downturns. By collaborating with public institutions, social businesses can leverage resources, expertise, and networks to enhance community resilience effectively. Furthermore, collaboration between social enterprises and public institutions can help to build a more inclusive and participatory society. By involving social enterprises in the decision-making process and giving them a seat at the table, public institutions can ensure that their policies and programs are more responsive to the needs and aspirations of marginalized groups. This can help to empower local communities, enhance social cohesion, and promote greater equality and social justice. This article explores the synergies between social businesses and public institutions, highlighting a case study to illustrate this collaborative potential.

**Keywords:** *community resilience, social business, public institutions, collaboration, Romania*

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### **Introduction**

Social enterprises and public institutions share a common goal of creating positive social impact and addressing societal challenges. While they may operate in different spheres – with social enterprises representing the private sector and public institutions representing the government – there is a growing recognition of the potential benefits that can arise from collaboration between the two sectors.

One of the key reasons why social enterprises and public institutions should work together is their complementary strengths and resources. Social enterprises often have a deep understanding of local communities and a strong focus on innovative solutions to social problems. On the other hand, public institutions have the necessary infrastructure, resources, and authority to scale up these solutions and make a larger impact on society.

Collaboration between stakeholders, including social businesses and public institutions, holds immense potential for achieving community well-being (Sagala et al., 2015:123-144). By leveraging the expertise, resources, and networks of both sectors, social businesses can work hand-in-hand with public institutions to address societal challenges and create sustainable solutions (Thompson et al., 2002:264-273). This collaboration can lead to improved services, increased access to resources, and more effective implementation of policies and programs. Can also enhance the accountability and transparency of public institutions by promoting greater community participation and involvement in decision-making processes (Kekez et al., 2019:2-19). Also, by fostering partnerships between social businesses and public institutions, communities can benefit from a collective approach that combines the strengths of both sectors. Furthermore, social businesses provide a unique perspective and innovative approaches to problem-solving that can complement the efforts of public institutions (Lyon, 2012:140). Nevertheless, through collaborative efforts, social businesses and public institutions can effectively address complex public problems and promote the overall well-being of communities in ways that can promote greater community resiliency.

### **Understanding Community Resilience**

Community resilience is a community's ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from adversity while maintaining and potentially improving its basic functions, structures, and identity. This concept encompasses not only the physical and infrastructural aspects of a community but also its social, economic, and environmental dimensions (Ha-Mim et al., 2024; Pfefferbaum et al., 2013:250-258). By adopting comprehensive and proactive strategies, communities can better prepare for, respond to, and recover from a wide range of adversities. Also, community resilience is fostered through the cultivation of skills such as interpersonal communication, active listening, and the promotion of positive social attitudes and behaviors (Anghel & Dogaru, 2021:53) that are accepted and recognized within the community. Building resilience requires collaboration among residents, businesses, government agencies, and other stakeholders to create a sustainable and adaptive community capable of thriving in the face of challenges (Hepburn et al., 2024:1-27).

The key components of community resilience include (Daniel & Fernandes, 2024: 1-17; Sharifi, 2016: 629-647; Cutter, 2016:741-758; Saja et al., 2021): social, economic, environmental, infrastructural, institutional, and cultural resilience (Figure 1). Each component is interconnected and collectively contributes to the overall capacity of a community and plays a critical role in ensuring the overall resilience.

**1. Social Resilience:** the strength of social networks, community cohesion, and the capacity for collective action. It involves the ability of community members to support each other during crises, share resources, and maintain social norms and trust. *Key elements:* strong relationships and networks among community members enhance communication and support; active participation in community activities and decision-making fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility; systems of mutual aid and volunteerism provide immediate support during emergencies; access to healthcare, education, and other social services that support vulnerable populations.

**2. Economic Resilience:** the capacity of a community to maintain stable economic functions and livelihoods during and after disruptions. This includes the diversity of the local economy, employment opportunities, and access to financial resources. *Key elements:* diversified economy which reduces dependency on a single industry, spreading risk; opportunities of jobs that provide stable income and adaptability to changing conditions; access to financial resources like services, savings, credit, and insurance that can buffer economic shocks; support for local businesses that contribute to the community's economy and provide essential services.

**3. Environmental Resilience:** the ability to maintain and restore natural resources and ecosystems that support community life. This involves sustainable management of resources such as water, soil, and biodiversity, as well as mitigation of and adaptation to environmental changes (Olimid & Olimid, 2022: 114-121; Vadjunec et al., 2022). *Key elements:* management practices that ensure the sustainable use of natural resources such as water, soil, and forests; protection and restoration of ecosystems that provide essential services like clean air and water; measures to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change, such as flood defenses and drought-resistant agriculture; preservation of biodiversity to maintain ecosystem health and resilience.

**4. Infrastructure Resilience:** the robustness and flexibility of physical infrastructure systems, including transportation, utilities, housing, and healthcare facilities. These systems must withstand and quickly recover from disruptions to ensure the continued provision of essential services. *Key elements:* infrastructure designed to withstand extreme events like earthquakes, floods, and storms; redundancy, which involves having multiple pathways or systems in place to ensure uninterrupted service in case a single component fails; regular maintenance and timely upgrades to infrastructure to address vulnerabilities; the ability to quickly repair and restore infrastructure after disruptions.

**5. Institutional Resilience:** the effectiveness and adaptability of governance systems, policies, and institutions in managing risks and responding to emergencies. This includes the capacity for coordinated response, resource allocation, and decision-making under stress. *Key elements:* transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance structures that involve community members in decision-making; comprehensive emergency plans, clear communication channels, and coordinated response efforts; policies frameworks that support resilience-building, including land use planning, building codes, and environmental regulations; capacity building by training and resources for institutions and community leaders to enhance their ability to manage crises.

**6. Cultural Resilience:** the preservation and adaptation of cultural practices, values, and identities that provide a sense of belonging and purpose. Cultural resilience helps maintain community morale and social continuity. *Key elements:* maintaining and adapting cultural traditions, ceremonies, and practices; a strong sense of identity and

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pride that binds community members together; promoting education and awareness of cultural heritage and its role in resilience; adaptive capacity in order to integrate new practices and ideas while preserving core cultural values.

**Figure 1.** The key components of community resilience



Source: Author's own compilation

### **The Role of Social Business**

Social businesses are uniquely positioned to address community needs due to their inherent focus on social impact. Unlike traditional businesses, social enterprises prioritize goals such as reducing poverty, improving education, and promoting sustainability (Staiculescu, 2023:129-137). Their flexibility and innovation make them well-suited to develop solutions that address specific community challenges. Key roles of social businesses in fostering community resilience include:

- innovation and flexibility - social businesses often adopt innovative approaches to problem-solving that are tailored to local contexts. Their flexibility allows them to respond quickly to changing conditions and emerging needs;
- sustainable practices - these enterprises typically emphasize sustainability, ensuring that their interventions have long-term benefits for communities. Many social enterprises adopt eco-friendly practices and produce sustainable products or services. By reducing environmental degradation and promoting resource conservation, these businesses help mitigate the impact of climate change and other environmental threats on communities;
- local engagement - social businesses usually have deep ties to the communities they serve, fostering trust and collaboration at the grassroots level. By prioritizing the well-being of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and local residents, social enterprises foster a sense of belonging and cooperation. This social cohesion facilitates communities' ability to unite during times of crisis, providing mutual support and collaboratively devising solutions to challenges;
- resource mobilization - by attracting diverse funding sources, including impact investors and philanthropic capital, social businesses can mobilize significant resources to support community resilience initiatives.

Also, social businesses foster economic resilience by creating employment opportunities, particularly for marginalized groups and communities facing economic challenges. By providing stable jobs and income sources, social enterprises contribute to reducing poverty and inequality within communities. This economic empowerment strengthens the community's ability to withstand and recover from economic shocks and downturns (Stăiculescu, 2021: 145-152).

Nevertheless, the role of social business in achieving community resilience is multifaceted and indispensable. By addressing economic, environmental, and social challenges through innovative and sustainable business models, social enterprises play a vital role in building communities that are adaptive, inclusive, and capable of thriving in the face of adversity.

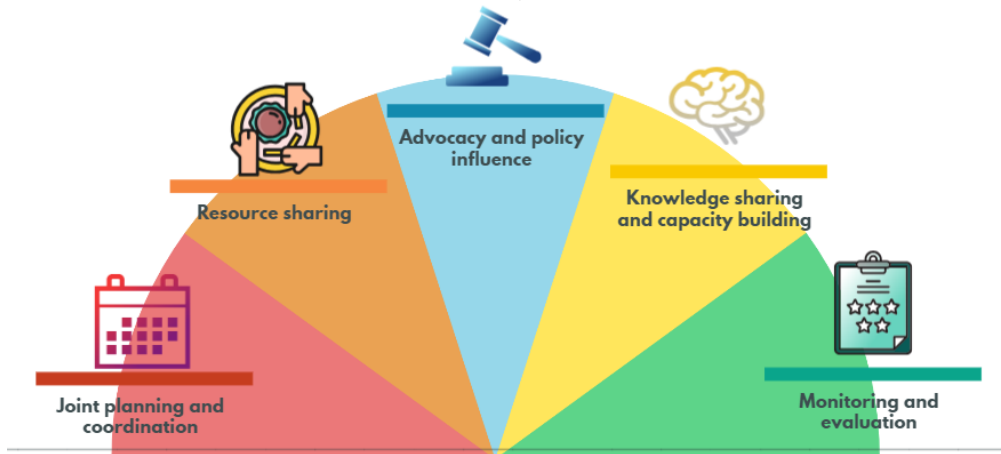
### **Collaboration with Public Institutions**

Public institutions, such as government agencies and local authorities, have the mandate and resources to support community resilience on a large scale. However, they often face challenges related to bureaucratic inertia, limited innovation, and resource constraints. Social businesses and public institutions can work together in order to achieve community resilience (Figure 2) through the following:

- joint planning and coordination. The integration of knowledge and resources from both social enterprises and public institutions enhances the development of comprehensive and sustainable plans tailored to meet the unique needs of the community;
- resource sharing to mobilize funding for resilience-building initiatives. By pooling resources, organizations can amplify the effectiveness of their actions and ensure that financial allocations are utilized strategically to bolster community resilience;
- knowledge sharing and capacity building. Social businesses can leverage their networks and expertise to provide training and capacity-building programs for community members, while public institutions can support these efforts through policy support and access to technical resources. This collaborative effort can empower communities to enhance their preparedness for and responsiveness to crises;
- advocacy and policy influence in order to support community resilience by leveraging their influence and networks, promoting a more inclusive and sustainable approach to development that prioritizes the needs of vulnerable communities;
- monitoring and evaluating the impact of resilience-building initiatives. By collecting data and feedback from the community, they can track progress, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that their efforts are effective in enhancing community resilience.

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**Figure 2.** Collaboration of Social Business and Public Institutions for Community Resilience



Source: Author's own compilation

### **Case Study: The Collaboration between the social enterprise "Atelierul de Pânză" and Public Institutions in Romania**

**Introduction.** Romania's journey towards community resilience involves tackling socio-economic disparities, environmental challenges, and social inequalities. Social businesses, with their dual focus on social impact and financial sustainability, have been instrumental in these efforts. This case study examines the collaboration between the social enterprise "Atelierul de Pânză" (The Canvas Workshop) and public institutions in Romania to enhance community resilience through sustainable practices, economic empowerment, and social inclusion.

**Background.** "Atelierul de Pânză" is a social enterprise established by the non-profit organization Viitor Plus. The enterprise produces eco-friendly textile products, such as reusable bags, from natural and recycled materials. Its mission extends beyond environmental sustainability, aiming to provide employment and social integration opportunities for marginalized groups, including people with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Key initiatives** include distributing eco-friendly canvas bags, organizing environmental awareness campaigns, and creating jobs for marginalized groups. This partnership supports local suppliers, encourages upcycling, and integrates educational programs to boost environmental literacy. Regular dialogue platforms, joint training sessions, and simplified administrative procedures enhance collaboration. The initiative not only fosters sustainable habits and community engagement but also influences policy development, contributing to stronger, more resilient communities. The most important key initiatives and collaboration for enhancing community resilience are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Key Initiatives and Collaboration for Enhancing Community Resilience

Key Initiatives and Collaboration:	Economic Empowerment and Job Creation	Environmental Sustainability	Social Inclusion and Community Engagement	Capacity Building and Education
<b>Project:</b>	Employment for Vulnerable Groups	Production of Eco-Friendly Products	Social Integration Programs	Training and Development Programs
<b>Objective:</b>	To create sustainable employment opportunities for individuals from marginalized communities.	To reduce environmental impact by producing and promoting reusable textile products as alternatives to single-use plastics.	To support the social integration of employees through educational and support programs.	To enhance the skills and capacities of employees, preparing them for long-term employment within and beyond the enterprise.
<b>Collaboration with Public Institutions:</b>	Atelierul de Pânză partners with local employment agencies and social services departments to identify and recruit individuals in need of job opportunities.	The enterprise collaborates with the Ministry of Environment and local municipalities to promote the use of eco-friendly products through public awareness campaigns and government procurement policies favoring sustainable products.	Atelierul de Pânză works with local social service agencies to provide ongoing support and resources, including counseling, educational workshops, and community-building activities.	The enterprise partners with vocational training centers and local educational institutions to offer comprehensive training programs in textile production, quality control, and business management.
<b>Impact:</b>	The initiative has provided stable employment and skills training for dozens of individuals, promoting economic independence and reducing social exclusion.	Increased public awareness and adoption of sustainable practices, reduction in plastic waste, and enhanced environmental health.	Improved social cohesion, enhanced quality of life for employees, and stronger community networks.	Increased employability and career advancement opportunities for participants, contributing to broader economic resilience.

*Source: Author's own compilation derived from gathered data (www.atelieruldepanza.ro)*

The collaboration between "Atelierul de Pânză" and the Romanian public institutions has faced several challenges and solutions about: bureaucracy, funding, communication, organizational cultures, measurement and frameworks (Table 2).

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**Table 2.** Challenges and Solutions for Enhancing Community Resilience

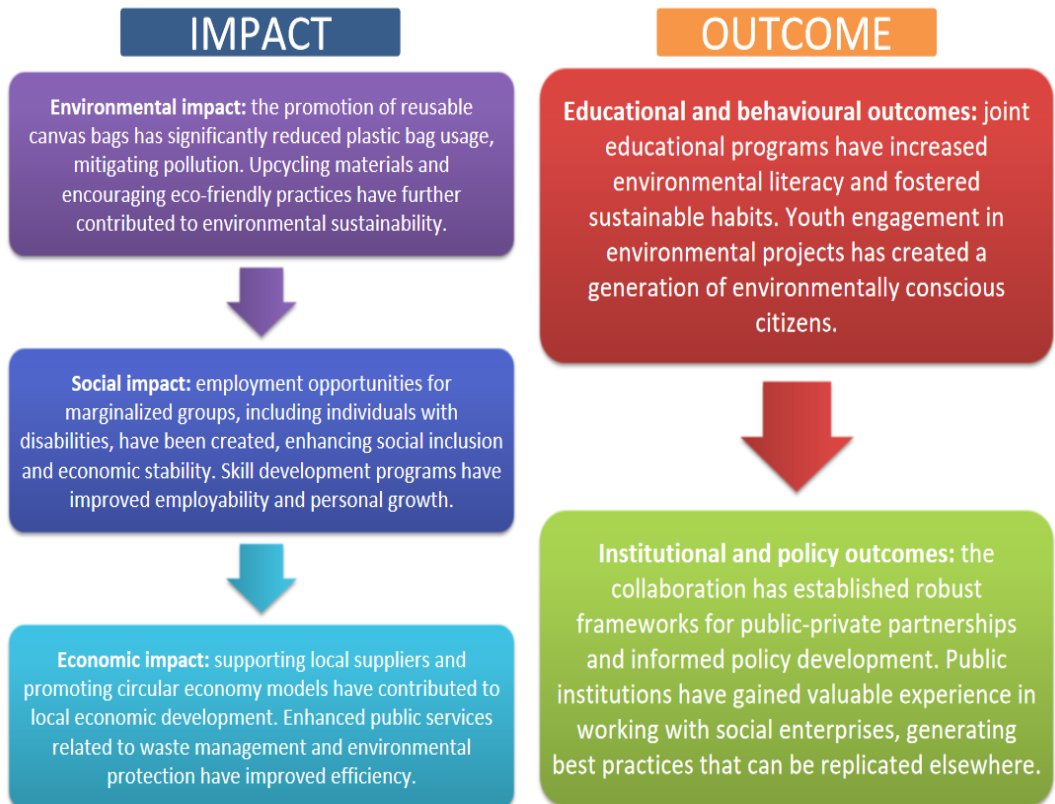
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Solutions</i>
Bureaucratic hurdles: complex administrative processes and regulatory compliance within public institutions can delay project implementation.	Streamlining processes: simplifying administrative procedures and establishing dedicated liaison offices can improve efficiency.
Funding constraints: limited budgets and changing funding priorities can jeopardize the financial stability of collaborative projects.	Funding diversification: exploring multiple funding sources, including EU grants and corporate sponsorships, can ensure sustainable financial support.
Communication barriers: differences in goals and expectations, coupled with inefficient communication channels, can hinder effective collaboration.	Enhanced communication: regular meetings and joint training programs can align goals and improve mutual understanding.
Cultural differences: the entrepreneurial culture of a social enterprise may clash with the hierarchical structure of public institutions, leading to resistance to innovative approaches.	Cultural integration: encouraging staff exchanges and implementing change management strategies can blend organizational cultures and foster collaboration.
Impact measurement: assessing and scaling the social and environmental impact of projects can be complex and resource-intensive.	Standardized measurement: developing standardized metrics for impact measurement and creating frameworks for scaling successful initiatives can streamline assessment and replication.

Source: Author's own compilation

This partnership has also achieved important environmental, social, and economic impact and involves educational and behavioral outcomes as well as institutional and policy outcomes (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Impact and Outcomes for Enhancing Community Resilience



Source: Author's own compilation

The partnership between "Atelierul de Pânză" and public institutions in Romania has successfully addressed environmental sustainability and social inclusion, making significant strides in community resilience. By overcoming challenges through strategic solutions and achieving multifaceted impacts, this collaboration serves as a model for effective cross-sector initiatives that drive positive change and build stronger, more resilient communities. Also, by addressing the identified challenges with strategic solutions, this partnership can create a robust framework for impactful and sustainable community development.

Therefore, the above partnership demonstrates the powerful role social businesses can play in enhancing community resilience. This case study underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, leveraging the strengths of both social enterprises and public institutions to address complex socio-economic and environmental challenges.

### Conclusions

The collaboration between social businesses and public institutions is a powerful strategy for building community resilience. Social businesses bring innovation, local engagement, and sustainability, while public institutions provide the necessary

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resources, infrastructure, and regulatory support. Together, they can address complex challenges and enhance the adaptive capacity of communities. The case of social enterprise "Atelierul de Pânză" (The Canvas Workshop) and public institutions in Romania demonstrates the tangible benefits of such collaborations, offering a replicable model for other regions.

In conclusion, social enterprises and public institutions have much to gain from working together. By leveraging their respective strengths and resources, they can develop more effective solutions to social challenges, drive systemic change, and build a more inclusive and participatory society. It is clear that collaboration between these two sectors is not only possible but essential for achieving sustainable and equitable development. As the world faces increasing uncertainties, fostering these partnerships will be crucial in creating resilient and sustainable communities.

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