

# INCORPORATING SOCIAL DESIGN FOR DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A CATALYST FOR SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study uses the potential of social design as a tool to promote social entrepreneurship involving people with disabilities. Social design, with its human-centered, empathic and collaborative approach, is being explored as a key strategy for creating business models that effectively meet the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities.

This article uses social design principles and explores how they can be incorporated into social entrepreneurship to promote disability inclusion, improve accessibility and generate socio-economic impact. This approach highlights the need to further explore the unique experiences and requirements of people with disabilities, thereby promoting the development of innovative, tailored solutions.

**Key words:** social design, social entrepreneurship, people with disabilities.

## INTRODUCTION

The intersection of social design and social entrepreneurship has been recognized as a powerful force for societal change, especially in the context of disability inclusion. Social interior design provides a unique opportunity to promote accessibility, dignity, and autonomy for individuals with disabilities. By combining the principles of inclusive design with entrepreneurial strategies, disability-inclusive social entrepreneurship can create innovative solutions that not only meet the needs of people with disabilities but also contribute to a more inclusive society.

Disability-inclusive interior design goes beyond creating accessible environments; it prioritizes collaboration with end-users people with disabilities themselves to develop spaces that improve functionality, autonomy, and aesthetic quality. This user-centered approach is crucial for changing societal attitudes toward disability, emphasizing the value of inclusivity and the contributions that individuals with disabilities can make to design processes.

This research aims to investigate how incorporating social interior design into disability-inclusive social entrepreneurship can act as a catalyst for societal transformation. Specifically, it examines the impact of co-design processes on empowerment, the development of sustainable, market-viable solutions, and the broader societal and policy implications of these efforts.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### SOCIAL DESIGN AND ITS ROLE IN EMPOWERMENT

Social design is an interdisciplinary approach that emphasizes democratic, inclusive, and community-rooted design processes. It incorporates theories of participatory design, co-creation, and design thinking, highlighting the importance of involving those who directly experience a

problem in finding solutions (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). In the context of disability, social design advocates for the active participation of people with disabilities in all stages of the design process, from generating ideas to implementing solutions. This approach challenges traditional power dynamics and gives a voice to marginalized communities, promoting empowerment and agency.

### **DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Social entrepreneurship (SE) differs from other forms of entrepreneurship because it prioritizes the achievement of social goals (Mair & Marty, 2006). An early definition of social entrepreneurship was developed by Boschee and McClurn (2003), who described it as not-for-profit initiatives that seek ways to finance. Others define it as commercial business with socially responsible practice. Yunus (2007) explains SE as a tool for solving social problems (Yunus, 2007).

Mair and Marty (2006) include the creation of social value as the primary goal of social enterprises. The idea of „more than profit” has also been proposed as an improved way of looking at social enterprises that need the support of society to be sustainable (Austin et al., 2006; Ridley-Duff, 2008).

Social entrepreneurship does this by creating value and using resources in an innovative way (Mair & Marti, 2006). In this sense, social entrepreneurship has a bottom-up approach where the social entrepreneur starts solving problems at the local level before scaling them up (Letaifa, 2016). The case of the Grameen Bank, founded by Professor Yunus in 1976 – to provide microcredit – is seen as a pioneering example of a profitable business that solves the challenges of social problems and facilitates access to finance for vulnerable population groups (Yunus, 2007).

One of the widely used definitions of social entrepreneurship was developed by Zahra (2009, p.9) who stated: „Social entrepreneurship encompasses the activities and processes undertaken to discover, define and exploit opportunities to increase social wealth by creating new businesses or managing existing organizations in an innovative way' The nonprofit sector relies primarily on grants and philanthropy. Social enterprises often operate in a similar way, but this is not as central as they avoid dependence in their operations on government funding or donations (Boschee & McClurg, 2003). Social enterprises in this way strive to become self-sufficient to avoid the risk of being dependent on others.

Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) argues that social innovation is strongly related to the social problems that stakeholders are trying to solve and therefore the solution is also related to the context in which the social problems arise. Thus, in social entrepreneurship, the disclosure and analysis of social problems is crucial (Letaifa, 2016; Mair & Marti, 2006).

From the perspective of institutional theory, social entrepreneurship can change norms and deliver higher social value, creating conflicts between social enterprises and their context (Mair & Marti, 2006).

The importance of social entrepreneurship has grown in recent decades (Dacin, Dacin, & Tracey, 2011) and currently it appears as a powerful tool for solving social problems and improving the lifestyle of the population.

Social entrepreneurship is a major driver of social innovation (Hall, Matos, Sheehan, & Silvestre, 2012). Social entrepreneurs use creative business models to solve social and

environmental challenges (Evans et al., 2017). In doing so, they develop much-needed innovations for modern societies that positively impact vulnerable social groups. The term vulnerable social groups refers to various groups of people who are at risk due to various factors. People with disabilities are a significant part of these social groups, and entrepreneurial solutions aimed at creating an accessible and comfortable environment for these people generate valuable social impact.

Social entrepreneurship has gained widespread attention as a mechanism for addressing social challenges due to its potential to create sustainable, innovative solutions to societal problems (Dees, 1998). Disability-inclusive social entrepreneurship specifically focuses on developing products, services, and business models that are designed to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Its goal is to create opportunities for economic participation, reduce social exclusion, and promote independence. When combined with social design, this approach not only addresses the practical challenges faced by people with disabilities but also recognizes their specifics as valuable contributors to the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

## EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

The methodology used in this study involves a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The process involved three key phases: surveys to gather quantitative data, interviews for qualitative insights, and field observations to witness the co-design process in action.

### *Survey Design:*

Surveys were distributed to a broad group of participants, including individuals with disabilities, interior designers, and professionals involved in disability-inclusive projects. The survey was designed to capture data across four primary areas:

- Empowerment: To what extent did individuals with disabilities feel empowered by participating in the design process?
- Satisfaction: How satisfied were users with the final interior design outcomes?
- Usability: Did the spaces meet the functional needs of users while maintaining aesthetic appeal?
- Market Viability: What were the commercial outcomes of the inclusive design solutions?

The survey utilized a Likert scale to quantify user experiences, ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). This approach allowed for standardized measurements of empowerment, satisfaction, and usability.

### *Interviews*

To further explore the challenges and benefits associated with social interior design in a disability-inclusive context, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities, designers, and professionals involved in the design and execution of inclusive projects. The interviews provided a deeper understanding of the impact of inclusive design on both personal empowerment and the viability of the solutions created.

Interviews focused on the following themes:

- The motivation behind adopting inclusive design practices.

- The perceived benefits for individuals with disabilities who participated in co-design processes.
- The commercial performance and public reception of the designs.

These interviews were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and common insights from the participants, providing a qualitative layer to the quantitative survey findings.

### *Field Observations*

Field monitoring was conducted at various inclusive design workshops and co-design sessions. These observations provided insights into how designers and individuals with disabilities collaborated to create practical, functional, and aesthetically appealing solutions. The observations also focused on how input from individuals with disabilities was integrated into the final design solutions and the dynamics of the design process.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The integration of social interior design into disability-inclusive social entrepreneurship yielded significant outcomes, especially in the areas of empowerment, market viability, and policy influence.

### *Empowerment through co-design*

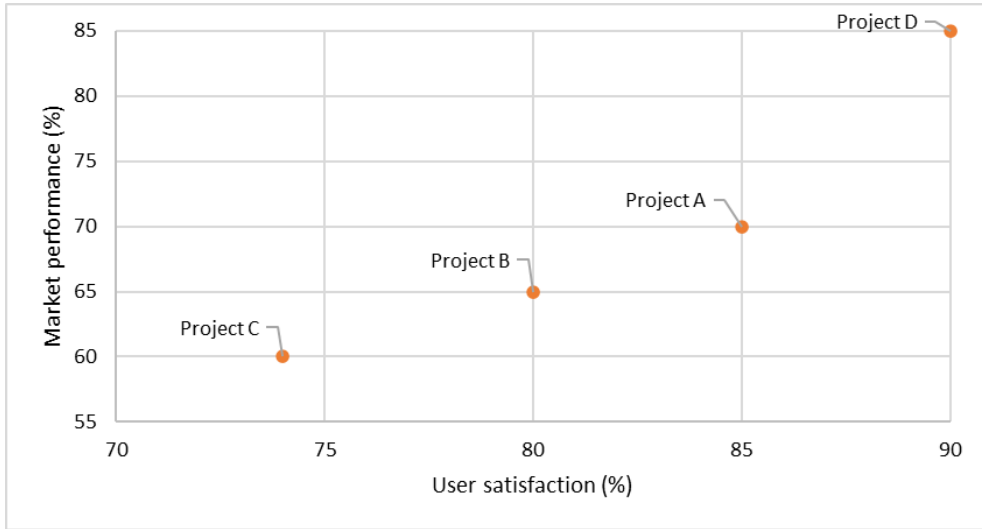
One of the most significant findings from the research was the level of empowerment experienced by individuals with disabilities who participated in the co-design process. As shown in Table 1, 85% of respondents agreed that their involvement in the design process enhanced their sense of agency and self-worth.

| <b>Empowerment indicators</b>    | <b>Percentage of respondents agreeing</b> |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Felt empowered by participation  | 85%                                       |
| Felt their input was valued      | 82%                                       |
| Developed new skills or insights | 78%                                       |

The participants consistently reported that being able to shape the environments they live in had a significant impact on their sense of autonomy and self-esteem. Involving individuals with disabilities in the design of their spaces not only led to functional improvements but also empowered them psychologically. The qualitative data from the interviews supported these findings, with many respondents expressing that co-design allowed them to control their environment in ways traditional design approaches did not. This feeling of ownership over the design process helped them become more independent and led to a higher quality of life.

### *Sustainable solution development and market viability*

The products and services developed through inclusive design processes were not only functional but also commercially viable. Figure 1 illustrates the positive correlation between user satisfaction and market performance, showing that the more satisfied users were with the final design outcomes, the better the products performed on the market.

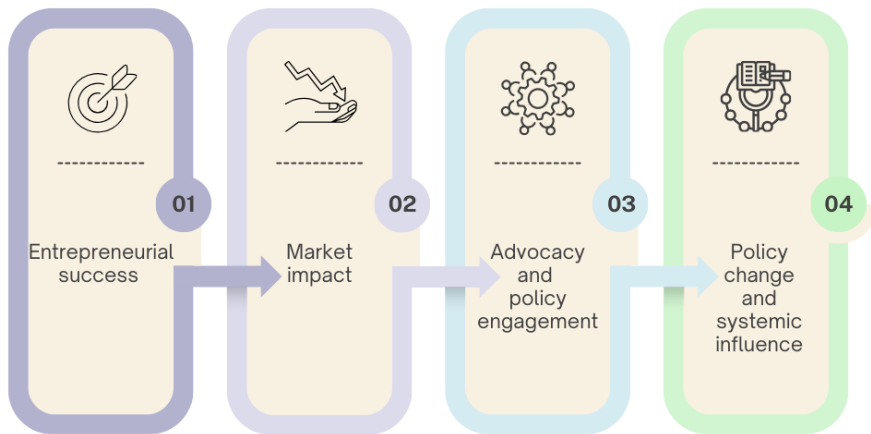


**Figure 1: Correlation between user satisfaction and market performance**

Market data demonstrated that solutions developed through co-design were better aligned with user needs, resulting in greater demand and improved market success. For instance, home adaptations designed to meet the specific needs of individuals with mobility impairments saw increased adoption rates due to their practical and ergonomic features. Products such as adaptive furniture and accessible renovations were particularly well-received by users and performed better in the market than those that were designed without user input.

***Policy and Societal Impact***

In addition to benefiting individuals and markets, incorporating social interior design in disability-inclusive contexts also has broader implications for societal attitudes and public policy. Co-design processes often highlight the needs and preferences of individuals with disabilities, contributing to changes in societal perceptions of disability and accessibility. Figure 2 illustrates the Policy Influence Pathway, showing how inclusive design solutions can lead to systemic change.

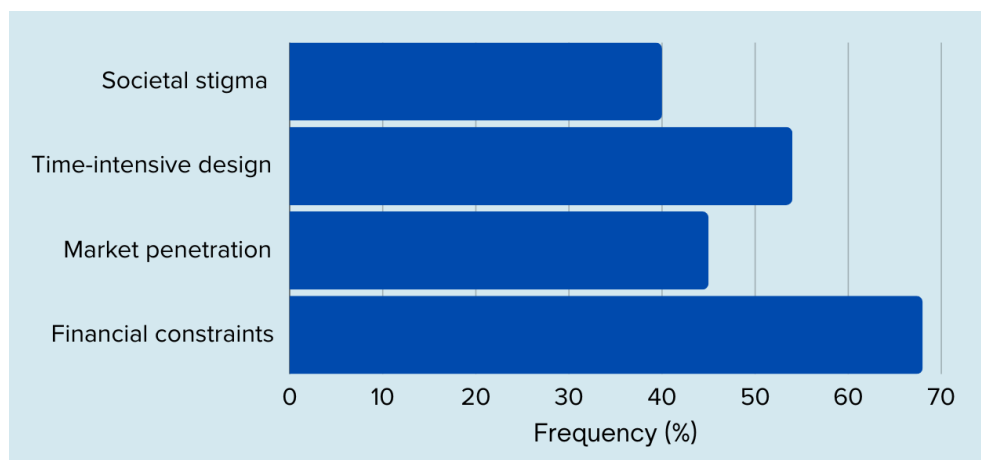


**Figure 2: Policy influence pathway**

Inclusive design practices have the potential to influence public policy by establishing new accessibility standards in both private and public spaces. For instance, projects involving the co-design of public seating and wayfinding systems led to advocacy efforts that influenced local and regional policies aimed at enhancing accessibility in urban planning. This shows that successful inclusive design projects can have a wider impact, contributing to broader societal change.

### ***Barriers and challenges***

Despite the positive outcomes of incorporating inclusive design into social entrepreneurship, several challenges remain unresolved. Figure 3 highlights the most common challenges encountered during the design and commercialization process.



**Figure 3: Challenges encountered in disability-inclusive social entrepreneurship**

As shown in Figure 3, the most significant barriers included:

- **Financial Constraints:** Many design projects faced difficulties securing sufficient funding to support the resource-intensive co-design process.
- **Market Penetration:** While inclusive products are highly valued by their target audience, they often struggle to gain traction in mainstream markets dominated by traditional, non-inclusive designs.
- **Design Time and Resources:** Co-design processes require significant time and effort, which can pose a burden for small design teams or social enterprises with limited resources. These challenges indicate that while the benefits of inclusive design are clear, additional support in the form of funding, government incentives, and broader market acceptance is needed to sustain these initiatives.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

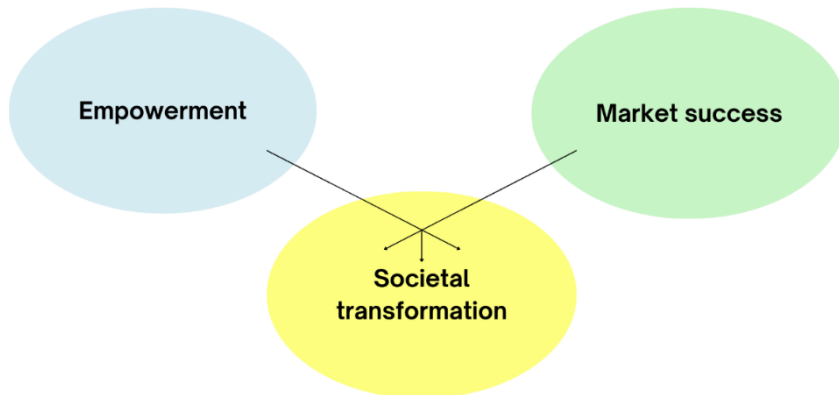
This study shows that incorporating social interior design into disability-inclusive social entrepreneurship can be a powerful force for creating positive societal change. The collaborative design process not only empowers individuals with disabilities by allowing them to shape their living spaces, but also leads to the development of marketable products and services that address real-world needs.

### 1. *Key Findings*

- **Empowerment:** Participating in collaborative design significantly enhances the sense of agency and control among individuals with disabilities, contributing to both psychological and functional empowerment.
- **Market Viability:** Products and services developed through inclusive design are more likely to succeed in the marketplace, as they better meet user needs and preferences.
- **Policy Impact:** Successful inclusive design initiatives have the potential to influence public policy, promoting greater accessibility and inclusivity in both private and public spaces.

### 2. *Future Research Directions*

Future research should investigate the long-term impacts of inclusive design on individuals with disabilities and society as a whole. This could include longitudinal studies that track changes in empowerment, market outcomes, and policy influence over time. Furthermore research is needed to identify strategies for overcoming the challenges of scaling inclusive design initiatives, particularly in terms of securing funding and gaining market penetration.



**Figure 4: Conceptual model of empowerment, market success and societal transformation**

#### Conceptual Model:

Figure 4 presents a conceptual model summarizing the findings of this research, highlighting the cyclical relationship between empowerment, market success, and societal transformation.

While this study provides a strong foundation for understanding the impact of social interior design on disability inclusion, there are several avenues for future research:

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Future studies should investigate the long-term impact of co-design processes on individuals with disabilities. Tracking changes in empowerment, independence, and quality of life over time will provide more comprehensive insights into the sustained benefits of inclusive design.
- **Technological Integration:** With the advent of smart home technologies and assistive devices, future research should explore how technological advancements can be integrated into social interior design to further enhance accessibility and autonomy for individuals with disabilities.

- Cross-Cultural Research: As this research was geographically limited, future studies should examine how social interior design initiatives are implemented in different cultural and socio-economic contexts.

This would provide valuable insights into the scalability of disability-inclusive social entrepreneurship across diverse regions.

## Conclusions

Given the positive outcomes associated with the integration of social interior design in disability-inclusive social entrepreneurship, the following recommendations are made:

- Expand Funding Opportunities: Governments, NGOs, and private organizations should establish dedicated funding streams to support disability-inclusive design initiatives. The co-design process is resource-intensive, requiring additional time, materials, and personnel. Adequate financial support will help alleviate these constraints and allow more organizations to engage in inclusive design.
- Encourage Policy Reforms: Policymakers should actively work toward updating building codes, urban planning regulations, and public procurement policies to mandate the use of inclusive design principles. This will ensure that public and private spaces are accessible to all individuals, regardless of ability.
- Enhance Cross-Sector Collaboration: Collaborations between social entrepreneurs, designers, disability advocates, and the private sector should be fostered. By pooling resources, expertise, and networks, these collaborations can drive greater innovation in disability-inclusive design and expand the reach of these solutions across multiple sectors.

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## CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| HOW TO FIND RESONANCE WOOD? .....  | 7   |
| Nikolay Bardarov, Nikolai Minkovski  |     |
| ANALYSIS OF DIAMETER TAPER IN FIR ( <i>ABIES ALBA</i> Mill.) AND SPRUCE<br>( <i>PICEA ABIES</i> L.) SAWLOGS FROM 1ST AND 2ND QUALITY CLASS .....                       | 13  |
| Ana Marija Stamenkoska   |     |
| OPTIMAL PRETREATMENT CONDITIONS OF INDUSTRIAL HEMP RESIDUES<br>TO GLUCOSE .....  | 20  |
| Vencislav Blyahovski, Stoyko Petrin, Ivo Valchev, Vesislava Toteva   |     |
| SATURATED WATER STEAM CONSUMPTION STANDARD FOR THE PROCESS<br>OF STEAMING BEECH WOOD WHILE ELIMINATING DIFFERENCES IN THE<br>COLOR OF SAPWOOD AND FALSE HEARTWOOD..... | 26  |
| Ladislav Dzurenda  |     |
| MACHINES FOR PRIMARY LOG CUTTING: PART II – COMPARATIVE<br>ASSESSMENTS AND ANALYSIS .....  | 36  |
| Valentin Atanasov  |     |
| WOOD-BASED BUILDING MATERIALS WITH A THERMAL ENERGY STORAGE<br>FUNCTION .....  | 44  |
| Meysam Nazari, Mohamed Jebrane, Nasko Terziev  |     |
| EFFECT OF STAINING ON THE ROUGHNESS OF BEECH FURNITURE SURFACES ..   | 53  |
| Krasimira Atanasova, Dimitar Angelski  |     |
| INCORPORATING SOCIAL DESIGN FOR DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE SOCIAL<br>ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A CATALYST FOR SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION .....  | 63  |
| Maria Kitchoukova, Emil Kitchoukov   |     |
| PRODUCTION AND TRADE OF WOODEN PRODUCTS IN BULGARIA FOR THE<br>PERIOD 2007–2021 – QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND FACTORS OF INFLUENCE ..                                    | 72  |
| Nikolay Neykov, Radostina Popova-Terziyska   |     |
| MODELING INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS THROUGH DESIGN THINKING .....   | 80  |
| Gergana Ivanova Koleva, Diana Ivanova Georgieva  |     |
| CHALLENGES IN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY OF BULGARIA .....   | 93  |
| Todor Stoyanov, Nikolay Neykov, Emil Kitchoukov93  |     |
| SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL „INNOVATIONS IN WOODWORKING INDUSTRY AND<br>ENGINEERING DESIGN“ .....   | 102 |