D.5.3 SE LIVING LABS REFLECTION
HANDBOOK

UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

PROJECT

Name	SE4Ces
Coordinator	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
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DELIVERABLE

Number	5.3
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Summary

1.   Introduction

1.1 The project

SE4Ces, a Knowledge Alliances project funded by the Erasmus+ programme, is a collaborative effort involving 9 European partners. These include 4 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), 3 Social Economy (SE) organizations, and 2 Research and Training Institutes. Rooted in four fundamental SE principles—Connected Societies, Community Development, Collaborative Educational Practices, and Co-creation of Knowledge—the project aims to create an enabling environment within the SE educational landscape.

The project's main objectives are as follows:

1. **Facilitating an innovative approach through Living Labs**, serving as a cornerstone for SE4Ces activities. This approach encourages both academic and non-academic SE stakeholders to engage in the co-creation of new ideas, co-teaching, and joint reflection on critical SE issues.

2. **Establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships** to understand the needs of SE education and current curricula, identify challenges, and motivate stakeholders (students, professors, and SE entrepreneurs) to exchange knowledge and contribute to new educational experiences and networking opportunities.

3. **Co-creation of Knowledge and Educational Materials** In these workshops, participants work together to develop learning materials that integrate the real needs of communities with academic learning. This process is guided by the Living Labs approach and involved the three main target groups of SE4Ces (educators, students and SE organisations) in a co-creation mode.

4. **Co-teaching and Socially Guided Approaches** Co-teaching between academics and practitioners allow for a fusion of theory and practice, enriching students' educational experience and providing them with ready-to-use skills.

5. **Application of Service Learning in SE Curricula** Service Learning is used as the main methodology to integrate academic learning with civic and professional engagement, emphasising the importance of practical application of theory.

What is the innovation of SE4Ces project?

SE4Ces project leverages the concept of Living Lab (LL), as a means to strengthen an active and collaborative environment among multiple SE actors towards co-creating and testing a set of

educational material focused on current educational needs and societal challenges in SE area. SE4Ces promotes the high-impact and significance of experiential methods, by motivating stakeholders from the academic community as well as SE actors to interact with each other at local level. This process helps them to upgrade SE knowledge, skills and current educational methods in the sphere of SE, having as a final aspiration the co-development of a master's programme on 'Social Economy and Community Development', consisting of different modules on the basis of co-created material designed by the project consortium under a joint vision.

The design of this multi-disciplinary, challenge/goal-driven programme is based on a co-creative methodology that the partners have commonly developed, with the aim of getting away from fragmented modular approaches. During this challenging but intriguing educational journey, the project includes also a 'Wiki platform' that will offer a creative and collaborative digital space for HEIs, SE organisations, and students for the collection of useful material and the coordination for the development of educational material.

Finally, SE4Ces project has created and envisions to sustain, and expand the first European Community of Practice in SE area. This Community fosters growing, promising and sustainable collaborations among HEIs, SE actors and community from a wide range of disciplines across Europe.

Overall, the project aspires to

1) bridge the gap between supply and demand of SE education and skills, by co-developing an international master's programme on 'Social Economy and Community Development Strategies';

2) implement the SE Living Labs (LLs) at local level in four EU countries (UK, Spain, Greece, Italy) as innovative spaces for interaction, collaboration and knowledge co-creation that go beyond the traditional adopted teaching approaches; and

3) unite the power of HEIs, students, SE organisations and local communities to thrive together towards the co-design and pilot testing of new educational material (AUTH, 2021).

1.2 Objectives of Deliverable 5.3

This deliverable was developed in the context of task 5.3 under WP5 and focuses on the reflection sessions after the implementation of SE Living Labs and of the piloting of the project's educational package in four universities during 2023. The overarching objective of this task is to be a practical and useful tool for all educators and teaching staff in the field of SE that are interested in applying SE Living Labs in their educational settings.

Three point of view are taken into account:

1. Students' self-reflection: reflecting students' learning impact through an interactive learning process where they will be asked to think critically about their service-learning experience and relate it to their theoretical background gained in class as well as their wider community.

2. Teacher self-reflection: teachers will also be provided with tools to measure their own Continuous Professional Development in Service Learning methodologies and innovative teaching collaborative practices.

3. SE organisations self-reflection: offering tools on measuring their level of participation in the learning process, their members' Professional Development and the added value gained from the innovative approaches and the implementation of service learning in their settings.

Teachers, students, SE organisation representatives and other participants were encouraged to participate in group sessions where the opinions, feelings and thoughts about the educational experience could be shared.

1.3 Methodological approach of D5.3

The current report draws on quantitative and qualitative data that were collected through all the duration of the project (2020-2023) and for each pilot activity training event and SL activities. The data collection plan and instruments were developed according to the principles and procedures established under the **D7.2 Evaluation of pilot case results**, which presents key findings from the evaluation activities during the piloting phase, assessing the effectiveness of the SE4Ces educational package against predefined targets.; **D.4.1 Social Economy Living Labs framework**, one of the project major outcomes. It shows how stakeholders involved in SE Living Labs, including higher education institutions and social economy organizations can work together and it explains what skills they need to implement the teaching approaches. Last but not least **D.5.2 SE Living Labs Piloting Reporting Plan,** which summarizes the culmination of rigorous research and collaborative efforts undertaken in four distinct pilot countries as part of the Social Economy Living Labs (SE Living Labs) and the Service-Learning activities.

The following section outlines the evaluation methodology that was used for assessing the project.

The report focuses on three interconnected subsections including (i) strengths and weaknesses in the project partner countries, (ii) strengths and weaknesses in the living labs methodology, and (iii) the methodology implemented in the SE4CES project and the strengths and weaknesses observed.

The second part of the paper explains the results obtained from the reflection sessions conducted with the project's three target groups (teachers, students and social economy organizations).

2. Living Labs

2.1 Definition and Characteristics of Living Labs

The Living Lab concept emerges as an open innovation environment, which focuses on the user as a co-creator of solutions and knowledge in the real context of his/her everyday environment. These labs are dynamic platforms where experimentation and collaboration between different actors (universities, companies, public bodies, citizens) take place in real time. The distinctive feature of Living Labs is their ability to integrate research and innovation processes in real-life situations, thus facilitating an iterative process of developing, testing and improving ideas and products.

Living Labs are not just physical spaces, but rather innovation ecosystems operating in a specific social context. These labs allow communities to experiment with new technologies, services or business models in a controlled but highly interactive and realistic environment. End users, who are at the centre of this process, actively participate in the development and experimentation, offering valuable feedback that guides innovation in a more oriented and sustainable way.

The main advantage of a Living Lab is its ability to generate innovations that are both sustainable and socially acceptable. This is possible because the innovation process is rooted in the everyday reality of the users, ensuring that the solutions developed are not only technically sound but also desirable and functional for the community. Moreover, Living Labs facilitate cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration, promoting a holistic and integrated approach to innovation.

Despite their many benefits, Living Labs also present significant challenges. Managing the complexity and diversity of stakeholders involved can be difficult, requiring advanced skills in project management and communication. Furthermore, maintaining the balance between scientific and commercial objectives and community needs requires continuous adaptation and negotiation.

2.2 Use of Living Labs in SE4Ces

The SE4Ces project implemented Living Labs as an integral part of its framework to promote the social economy (SE). The objective was to create new educational and vocational opportunities through a sustainable partnership between various social economy stakeholders, such as higher education institutions, SE companies, students and local societies. Living Labs made it possible to:

1. Co-creating knowledge and teaching materials.
2. Apply co-teaching approaches.
3. Integrate Service Learning into higher education curricula.
4. Developing transversal skills by enhancing employability.

These workshops functioned as platforms for social experiments and innovations, integrating research and practical application in a continuous cycle of learning and adaptation.

The SE4Ces project took an innovative approach by exploiting Living Labs to:

i) Map and analyse training and skills needed in SE organisations.
ii) Develop an international Master's programme in 'Social Economy Strategies and Community Development', seeking to bridge the gap between supply and demand for SE education and skills.

Strengths and Weaknesses in the Project Partner Countries

SE 4Ces suggests the establishment of Social Economy Living Labs (SE Living Labs), a space boosting co-creation and collaboration that will enable HEIs in the field of SE to integrate real life societal issues into curricula by interacting closely with SE organisations and local communities in order to create inclusive and sustainable solutions to pressing social issues.

Through the showcasing of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach we aim to demonstrate its usefulness and guide decisions of future interested stakeholders to apply this approach.

Applying the SE LL approach in Greece (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) – AUTH

Strengths:

- Strong links with the academic community and local authorities.
- Consolidated experience in managing European projects.

Weaknesses:

- Limited ability to reach and involve small social economy organisations .

Applying the SE LL approach in Italy (University of Bologna) - UNIBO

Strengths:

- Excellence in the field of social economy research.
- Extensive networks and collaborations with SE organisations at national and European level.

Weaknesses:

- Difficulties in translating research into practical applications at local level.

Applying the SE LL approach in United Kingdom (University of Essex)

Strengths:

- Innovative approach in education, with a strong emphasis on experiential learning.
- Good ability to engage international students and diverse communities.

Weaknesses:

- Brexit could have negative impacts on funding and international collaboration

Applying the SE LL approach in Spain (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) - UAB

Strengths:

- Strong links with local and regional governments, facilitating the implementation of policies based on Living Labs results.
- Innovation in community involvement and participatory methodologies.

Weaknesses:

- The need for more financial support to sustain large-scale implementation of pilot projects.

AUTH, UAB and UoEssex have been developing studies in the field of SE as a special strand under a wide range of courses and disciplines and have been long aiming to offer a post graduate program dedicated on SE. In addition, UNIBO have established the Campus of SE respectively, that aim to develop a multidisciplinary ecosystem for the co-creation of sustainable solutions concerning their wider region. Thus, UNIBO was significantly interested in participating in the SE Living Labs as a way to provide upskilling pathways to academics and researchers on how to develop sustainable collaboration schemes with SE enterprises and their community.

In conclusion, the Living Labs in the SE4Ces project offered a valuable model for promoting social innovation and collaborative learning. However, the variation in strengths and weaknesses across partner countries highlights the importance of customized strategies that consider local specificities and available resources.

Living Labs in the SE4Ces Project: Analysis of Effectiveness and Areas for Improvement

The SE4Ces project implemented Living Labs as nerve centers for innovation and learning in the social economy. These labs provided a dynamic environment in which students, academics, social economy practitioners and community members collaborated to develop innovative solutions that

address the real needs of the sector. Below, successful aspects of this methodology and areas in need of further improvement are analyzed.

Strengths

- **Multidisciplinary Collaboration:** Living Labs promoted a collaborative approach that brought together diverse expertise and perspectives. This enriched the learning process and contributed to the creation of more complex and well-rounded solutions.

- **Experience-Based Learning:** The hands-on approach adopted by the Living Labs enabled participants to learn through direct action, a much more impactful method than traditional educational approaches. Students and professionals were able to directly experience the challenges and opportunities of the social economy.

Strengths:

- Multidisciplinary Collaboration
- Experience-Based Learning
- Local Impact and Community Involvement
- Real Skills Development

- **Local Impact and Community Involvement**: Projects developed in Living Labs were often directly applicable to local communities, ensuring that the benefits of the innovation were tangible and immediate. This also increased local community engagement and awareness of the potential of the social economy.

- **Real Skills Development:** Living Labs participants acquired crucial practical skills, such as problem solving, project management, and cross-cultural and interdisciplinary communication, which are essential in the modern job market.

Improvements

- **Sustainability and Long-Term Funding**: One of the main obstacles to the sustained effectiveness of Living Labs is their dependence on external funding, which is often projected over short-term funding cycles. A more robust strategy is needed to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of these labs.

- **Measuring Impact:** Although Living Labs have demonstrated significant successes, quantitative and qualitative measurement of their impact remains a challenge. It is critical to develop more precise methodologies to assess the effectiveness of initiatives and justify further investment.

Improvements:

- Sustainability and Long-Term Funding
- Measuring Impact
- Scalability of Solutions
- Greater SE business Sector Involvement
- Diversity and Inclusion

- **Scalability of Solutions:** While pilot projects in Living Labs have been successful at the local level, there is often difficulty in scaling

these solutions to broader levels. There is a need to work on the adaptability and replicability of projects to maximize their impact.

- **Greater Private Sector Involvement:** Although the main contributors to Living Labs have been universities and nonprofit organizations, the inclusion of SE business partners could further enrich innovation and open new avenues for practical application of research.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Finally, while Living Labs are open to participants from diverse disciplines, they could do more to ensure the representation of underrepresented groups and to promote greater social inclusion.

In conclusion, while **Living Labs in the SE4Ces project have proven to be powerful incubators for social and economic innovation,** there are several areas where they can be improved and expanded. By addressing these challenges, the project can not only improve its current effectiveness but also ensure greater sustainability and impact for the future. Implementing these changes will require coordinated efforts among all project partners and open dialogue with all stakeholders involved.

3.   Learning Mobility

Learning Mobility (LM) is a key concept in international educational programs that allows students, teachers and professionals to participate in learning experiences in a context different from their usual environment. This type of mobility is particularly emphasized in Erasmus+ projects, such as SE4Ces, where learning mobility is used to promote cultural, academic and professional exchanges between participating countries.

In the context of the SE4Ces project, Learning Mobility focuses on activities that integrate formal education with practical, real-world experiences, often through collaborations with external organizations, including those in the social economy (SE) sector. These activities may include workshops, seminars, fieldwork projects, and other forms of experiential learning that allow participants to immerse themselves directly in the professional and cultural contexts of the social economy.

LM activities are designed to enrich the traditional curriculum by providing students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, develop soft skills such as cross-cultural communication, leadership, and project management, and increase their awareness and understanding of the different facets of the social economy.

3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of Learning Mobility

Strengths:

- **Interactivity and Engagement**: LM activities promoted high interaction among participants, fostering collaborative and immersive learning.
- **Instructional Innovation:** The adoption of innovative methodologies, such as Living Labs and service-learning, allowed for hands-on testing of learning material, making learning more applied and contextualized.
- **Development of Transversal Skills:** Students were able to develop crucial skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and the ability to work in international and multidisciplinary contexts.

Weaknesses:

- **Language and Cultural Barriers:** Despite efforts, language and cultural differences were a challenge for some participants, affecting their ability to interact fully and effectively.
- **Coordination and Logistics:** Some feedback indicated that logistical management and coordination between different institutions could be improved to ensure a smoother and more integrated experience.

- **Balance between Theory and Practice:** Despite the emphasis on practical methodologies, some participants noted the need for more balance between theoretical content and practical activities to ensure a deeper understanding of social economy concepts.

4.   Evaluation   Methodology: The Empowerment Evaluation Approach

Empowerment evaluation is a paradigm that focuses on empowering participants to improve the programs of which they are part through participatory processes. This approach is based on principles of self-determination and active involvement, with the goal of transforming evaluation into a tool for empowerment rather than just judgment. In the context of the SE4Ces project, which aims to integrate social economy practices through university education, empowerment evaluation takes on particular relevance as a means of actively engaging students, faculty and third-sector actors in the continuous improvement of educational initiatives.

4.1 Theoretical Foundations of the Empowerment Evaluation Approach.

The empowerment assessment approach traces its theoretical roots to community psychology and empowerment theory, which see the ability of individuals to influence decisions that affect them as central to their psychological and social well-being. Central to this approach are the concepts of democratic participation, social justice, and the ability of individuals and communities to govern themselves. Empowerment evaluation is a methodology that focuses on the autonomy and enhancement of participants. For the purpose of SE4Ces evaluation activities this approach is tailored for collective learning endeavours by encouraging stakeholders' active involvement with and the democratization of evaluation processes, in line with the project's co-creative and reflective philosophy.

Details of the Evaluation Methodology:

1. **Critical Friend:** The evaluator operates as a 'critical friend', acting as a facilitator and guide through the stages of evaluation, providing feedback and ensuring the organisation of the process.
2. **Culture of Evidence:** The use of evaluation evidence is emphasised as a key tool, requiring community members and programme participants to provide documentation and evidence to support their opinions at each stage of the evaluation.
3. **Reflection and Action Cycles:** The process includes recurring feedback loops, with continuous phases of analysis, decision-making and implementation based on evaluation results.
4. **Community of Learners:** Stakeholders involved learn from each other in a group process, acting as a peer review group or critical friends.
5. **Reflective Practitioners:** Individuals develop and improve their capacity, improve the quality of group exchange, deliberation and action plans.

4.2 Implementation of the Approach in SE4Ces Project

The empowerment evaluation approach was implemented during the pilot and service learning activities of the SE4Ces project. The dynamic evaluation plan involved all stakeholders at every stage of the process, with the aim of enabling the partners to evaluate the implementation of the learning material in different cycles. This methodology made it possible to gradually refine the learning material, take corrective actions and test its effects while the programme was still in progress.

Specific steps followed in the evaluation strategy included:

- **Frequent evaluation activities:** These allowed continuous collection of feedback and data.
- **Regular reporting:** Monthly reports, developed by Stimmuli as the evaluation's lead partner, summarised the results and conclusions of all evaluation activities contacted at the end of each month, allowing the four pilot universities (AUTH, UNIBO, UoEssex & UAB) to provide feedback, discuss and reflect on any necessary adjustments.
- **Reflection and action on the evaluation results**: This provided multiple opportunities to reflect and implement improvements based on the collected feedback.

4.2.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Empowerment Evaluation Approach in the SE4Ces Project

The empowerment evaluation approach adopted in SE4Ces project showed several **strengths** that contributed significantly to the success of the project. These included:

- **Inclusion and Participation:** This approach promoted active participation of all stakeholders, allowing them to play an active role in the evaluation and decision-making process. This not only increased engagement, but also ensured that different perspectives were taken into account.

Strengths:
- Inclusion and Participation
- Continuous Learning
- Adaptability and Flexibility
- Co-creation and Collaboration

- **Continuous Learning:** The approach fostered a continuous cycle of learning, reflection and action, which helped participants to continuously improve their practices and approaches based on data and evidence.

- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** The approach allowed for real-time adjustments of teaching materials and methodologies, relying on continuous feedback, a key aspect in a dynamic and evolving educational context.

- **Co-creation and Collaboration:** Reflecting the co-creative philosophy of the project, this approach encouraged strong collaboration between the different stakeholders, who worked together to build and improve the programmes.

Despite its many advantages, the empowerment evaluation approach also had some **weaknesses** that, if not recognised and addressed early on, could affect its effectiveness. These limitations include:

1. **Demand on Time and Resources:** The approach requires a significant investment of time and resources to facilitate regular meetings, analysis and feedback loops. This can be a limitation, especially in contexts with limited resources.

2. **Dependence on Stakeholder Competence:** The quality of the process and results may vary considerably depending on the level of competence and commitment of the stakeholders involved. If stakeholders are not adequately trained or motivated, the process may not work as intended.

Weaknesses:
- Demand on Time and Resources
- Dependence on Stakeholder Competence
- Management Complexity
- Measuring Long-Term Impact

3. **Management Complexity:** Managing such a collaborative and iterative process can become complex, especially when it involves multiple stakeholders with different expectations and levels of experience.

4. **Measuring Long-Term Impact:** While the approach is effective in producing short-term, incremental improvements, it may be more difficult to measure long-term impact and systemic transformation, which are crucial for comprehensive evaluations of the effectiveness of large-scale educational programmes.

5. Reflection sessions: Application in SE4Ces project and results obtained

This chapter was created with the aim of supporting all educators and teaching staff in the field of Social Economy interested in implementing reflection sessions after the implementation of SE Living Labs in their educational contexts.

The main goal of all reflection sessions was to evaluate the following:

- How much students, educators and SE organisations have benefited from the programme based on their overall experience;
- To examine in-depth whether their participation in the SE4Ces piloting and service learning (SL) activities brought about changes in the promotion of innovative educational practices;
- To assess what worked well and what did not during the pilot activities, what improvements need to be made to raise the efficacy of the SE4Ces educational package, how the innovative teaching methodologies differentiate the teaching experience, how they contribute to strengthening the SE community (including SE actors, students and academics) and whether the SE4Ces activities and deployed methods positively impacted on their professional development.

Participants in the interviews were SE educators from all countries and a couple of SE actors from Italy while the focus group included mainly educators and students. The reflection activities offered the opportunity for collecting the views and overall experience of different groups and contributing through the several phases of SE Living Labs (co-creation, application of co-teaching methodologies, pilot testing of material and SL projects).

For the purpose of the reflection session, Stimmuli developed a detailed guide for conducting the semi-structured interviews, including the goals, steps to be followed, tips to establish a good communication with the interviewees and indicative questions tailored to the three target groups (students, SE educators, SE actors). Moreover, an additional guide was developed by Stimmuli for the focus group including the main objectives and steps to effectively capture the shared ideas and exchange experiences among participants. The following sub-chapters will focus on the presentation and analysis of the collected evaluation findings from the reflection session for the three target groups of the project.

More information on the guidelines and methodologies used to conduct the reflection sessions can be obtained by consulting deliverable 7.2 'Evaluation of pilot case results'.

5.1 Students' self-reflection

In the context of the SE4Ces project, the methodology adopted for the students' self-reflection was based on an interactive learning process. During this process, the students were invited to critically reflect on their experience of participating in the pilot and service-learning activities.

Through the reflection session, it was possible to investigate not only the skills acquired by the students, but also to link the practical experiences with the theoretical background acquired in the classroom, also stimulating a deeper understanding of their role within the wider community.

To facilitate this type of reflection, a questionnaire with open and closed questions was designed to guide the students through their reflective journey.

The closed questions made it possible to collect specific and quantifiable responses, useful for aggregate evaluations and longitudinal comparisons. Open-ended questions, on the other hand, offered students the opportunity to express more complex and detailed thoughts, facilitating deeper and more personal reflection.

This section emphasises the impact and contribution of the tested material to the improvement of students' understanding of the fundamental principles of SE, the acquisition of skills for the development of the SE sector and the impact of these on the wider community.

Soft skills acquired by the students:

Public speaking: Students reported that they improved their public speaking skills, gaining confidence and the ability to communicate their ideas and business proposals effectively.

Networking: The students reported that the SE4Ces project enabled them to expand their network of professional contacts in the social economy sector, creating opportunities for collaboration and future connections with professionals and organisations involved.

Team building: The students involved learnt the skills needed to form and manage an effective working team, including the distribution of responsibilities, communication and conflict management.

Soft Skills:

- Public speaking
- Networking
- Team building
- Development of a sense of civic responsibility
- Problem-solving
- Critical thinking
- Time management
- Adaptability
- Strategic thinking
- Creativity and innovation
- Emotional resilience

Development of a sense of civic responsibility: The students developed a greater awareness of social issues and community needs, acquiring a sense of civic responsibility and a commitment to addressing these challenges through the social economy.

Problem-solving: The activities implemented within the project provided tools and approaches to address and solve problems creatively and efficiently, developing the ability to analyse complex situations, identify solutions and make informed decisions.

Critical thinking: Individuals learnt to critically analyse information, evaluate data sources and develop an evidence-based approach to problem-solving and decision-making.

Time management: Project activities provided tools and strategies to efficiently manage time and deadlines, improving productivity and task management.

Adaptability: Students developed the ability to adapt to changes, challenges and new situations, demonstrating flexibility and resilience in the context of the changing social economy.

Strategic thinking: The activities implemented within the project provided a strategic perspective for the planning and execution of activities in the social economy sector, developing the ability to define clear objectives, identify necessary resources and assess opportunities and threats.

Creativity and innovation: Students reported that the project activities enhanced their ability to think creatively, generate innovative ideas and find original solutions to challenges in the social economy context.

Emotional resilience: The SE4Ces project helped students to develop emotional resilience and the ability to handle stress, pressures and difficulties that may arise in the context of the social economy.

Hard skills acquired by students:

Enrichment of academic knowledge with practical experience: Students had the opportunity to apply the academic knowledge acquired during the course to real situations in the context of the social economy, gaining a deeper understanding of theoretical concepts through practical experience.

Financial analysis: The course provided students with a solid understanding of the financial skills required to evaluate the economics of a social economy enterprise, including the analysis of financial statements and the assessment of financial risks.

Reporting: Students developed skills in creating accurate and meaningful reports on the development and performance of social economy enterprises in order to effectively communicate their results.

Business plan pitch: Students acquired specific skills in presenting and pitching a business plan for a social economy enterprise, including persuasion skills and the effective communication of project goals and benefits.

Hard Skills:

- Enrichment of academic knowledge with practical experience
- Financial analysis
- Reporting
- Business plan pitch
- Impact creation

Impact creation: The course encouraged people to actively engage in the social economy, stimulating them to create a positive impact in society through their actions and decisions.

Community impact:

Through this parameter, it is investigated and interpreted the students' opinion on how the SE4Ces education programme and its interdisciplinary and participative methods have contributed to the strengthening and development of the SE community. From the interviews conducted with the students, it emerges how the SE4Ces programme activities have had a positive impact on the community and students' participation in it. Some of the key points noted are listed below:

- **The promotion of effective collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and social economy organisations:** Students felt that a programme such as SE4Ces fostered collaboration between HEIs and social economy organisations. This collaboration enabled students to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the social economy sector and to work together to address them.

- **Fostering collaboration and improving communication and knowledge exchange between Higher Education Institutions and social economy actors:** The students believe that a project such as SE4Ces contributed to improving communication, collaboration and knowledge exchange between Higher Education Institutions and social economy actors. This collaboration has fostered a more effective sharing of expertise and resources and a better mutual understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the social economy and working together to address them.

- **Strengthening the social economy community:** The students believe that a project such as SE4Ces has contributed to strengthening the social economy community. This was envisaged through the implementation of inter- and transdisciplinary teaching methods, practical exercises and increased involvement of universities and social economy organisations.

Community Impact:

- The promotion of effective collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and social economy organisations
- Fostering collaboration and improving communication and knowledge exchange between Higher Education Institutions and social economy actors
- Strengthening the social economy community

Overall, the SE4Ces project activities provided students with the opportunities and tools to actively contribute to their community through the promotion of collaboration, communication and knowledge exchange between academia, social economy organisations and the community itself.

5.2 Teacher self-reflection

This section examines the experiences of the teachers involved in the SE4Ces project. Through interviews, the teachers were asked to:

- Assess how the project has influenced their professional development
- The effectiveness of innovative teaching methodologies and how these have influenced the teachers' approach to teaching and their interaction with students in higher education.

The results of interviews conducted with four teachers actively involved in the SE4Ces project pilot activities are reported below.

5.2.1 First Interview

Professor "A" is a Greek professor who participated in the SE4Ces project pilot activities carried out and is a member of the Scientific Advisory Council (SAC). During the interview, the professor highlighted a significant professional development pathway, which well embodies the challenges and opportunities faced by educators in the modern context of higher education. This path is distinguished by the adoption of an international and multidisciplinary perspective, which is crucial in the era of educational globalisation.

Professional Development of Teachers in the Context of the SE4ces Project

Professor "A" described how the SE4Ces project offered "new methods and new tools" for approaching educational processes. This implied an evolution from traditional face-to-face teaching towards more interactive and participative methodologies, which are crucial for engaging students in a more meaningful way. The integration of such methodologies into its teaching repertoire has not only enriched the students' learning experience, but has also stimulated ongoing critical reflection on the effectiveness of the teaching techniques used.

The opportunity for exchange and discussion with colleagues and practitioners from other countries, which allowed the professor to compare herself with realities where social economy is more advanced, such as in Italy, is emphasised as particularly relevant. These exchanges have been essential for the acquisition of a broader and more complex view of social economy, which she believes has greatly enriched her professional and pedagogical profile.

Collaborative and Innovative Teaching Practices: The Case of the "UPSTREAM" Game

With regard to the "UPSTREAM" game implemented during the SE4Ces Project, Professor "A" emphasised that this was a concrete example of how innovative methodologies can transform education. This board game introduced a playful and interactive dimension to learning, which proved particularly effective.

Through the game, students took on the role of various social actors, thus facilitating learning based on the simulation of real scenarios. This methodology made it possible to explore complex social and economic dynamics in a controlled environment, where students could experience the consequences of their decisions in real time. Active participation in the game promoted not only understanding of the content, but also the development of soft skills such as critical thinking, negotiation and conflict resolution.

The students' positive response to the game demonstrated the value of such innovative approaches in education. Students appreciated the novelty and interactivity of the method, which made learning more engaging and less monotonous. This led to greater satisfaction and improvement in academic performance, as evidenced by the students' enthusiasm in participating in these sessions and their growing interest in the topics covered.
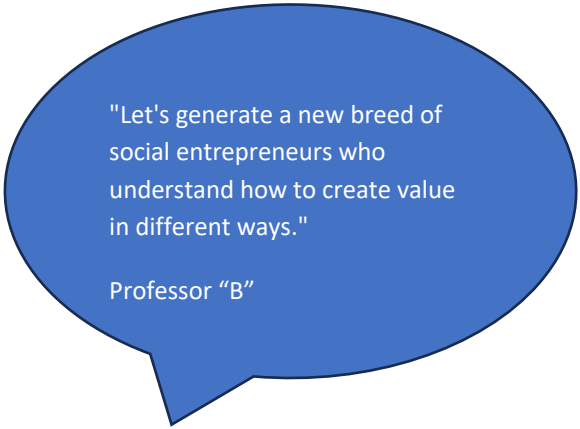
Final Reflections and Future Perspectives

The interview with the teacher offered illuminating evidence of the transformative potential of innovative teaching methodologies and how they contribute to teachers' professional development. Adopting such practices not only improves teaching effectiveness, but also prepares students to function effectively in an increasingly interconnected and complex world.

Looking ahead, Professor "A"'s intention is to expand the use of the "UPSTREAM" game. The expansion of this tool and similar methodologies can lead to a wider adoption of innovative teaching practices that not only enrich students' academic training, but also equip them with the skills needed to navigate the complex social and economic dynamics of the real world.

In conclusion, Professor "A"'s experience with the SE4Ces project and the innovative "UPSTREAM" game represent exemplars of how education can evolve to better meet the challenges of the 21st century. These efforts not only raise the professional profile of teachers, but also strengthen the role of education as a key pillar for sustainable social and economic development.

5.2.2 Second interview

The interview with Professor "B" of the University of Liverpool, also a member of the SAC highlights how the project introduced materials and teaching methods that could revolutionize the way educators perceive and integrate social economy concepts into their pedagogical practices. The approach taken by the project, unlike traditional master's courses focused on a neoliberal business model, promoted according to the professor more critical thinking oriented toward sustainability and collective welfare. This type of training can stimulate teachers to think about how education can contribute to social transformation and a more inclusive economy.
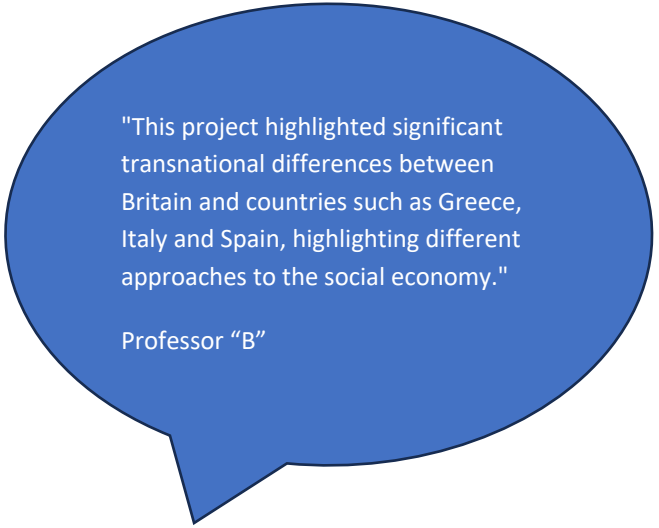
"Let's generate a new breed of social entrepreneurs who understand how to create value in different ways."

Professor "B"

According to Professor "B", the teaching materials developed for the SE4Ces project are superior to those seen previously, which suggests how the adoption of these new materials and methods can significantly enrich teachers' pedagogical repertoire. Educators exposed to these materials are encouraged to think in innovative ways and challenge the conventions of the prevailing economic model, preparing them to train students who are not only critical thinkers but also active agents of social change.

Collaborative and Innovative Practices in Teaching

The element of transnational collaboration is another crucial aspect highlighted in the interview. Professor "B" said he particularly appreciates the comparison and exchange of ideas between different geographic settings, such as those in Greece, Italy, and Catalonia, which contrast with the more commercialized environment of Liverpool. This dynamic of collaborative learning between countries with different economic and social contexts has enriched the educational experience, giving teachers a broader and more varied perspective on the possibilities of the social economy.

"This project highlighted significant transnational differences between Britain and countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain, highlighting different approaches to the social economy."

Professor "B"

International collaboration, therefore, has not only broadened teachers' understanding about different economic and social practices, but has also stimulated the development of teaching methodologies that value pluralism and global interdependence. This kind of collaborative approach can be especially valuable in the current era, where global challenges demand shared and innovative solutions.

Final Reflections and Future Perspectives

In conclusion, the interview with Professor "B" provided profound insights into how projects focused on the social and solidarity economy can play a crucial role in the professional development of teachers and the adoption of innovative and collaborative teaching practices. Through exposure to new teaching materials and participation in international learning networks, teachers can be better equipped to guide their students toward a more sustainable and just future. The challenge remains to integrate these approaches into more traditionally business-oriented environments, but the opportunities for meaningful change are clear and promising.

5.2.3 Third interview

The interview with Professor "C", from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, offered significant insight regarding the impact of international collaborative projects on teachers' professional development and the adoption of innovative teaching practices. By analyzing her reflections, it is possible to better understand how such initiatives influence teacher education and stimulate the implementation of cutting-edge teaching methodologies.

Professional Development of Teachers

Professor "C" contributed to the SE4Ces project, actively participating in the content development process and collaborating with experts from different countries. This experience was an important professional development opportunity for her, as it allowed her to broaden her educational vision through interaction with different international perspectives.

The professor emphasized how the project enriched her understanding to different approaches to teaching social economy, allowing her to engage with different educational practices. This aspect proved crucial to her professional development, as exposure to different methodologies and ideas can stimulate critical reflection and teaching innovation. However, some ambiguity with respect to the ultimate goals of the project also emerged, indicating a possible area for improvement in the communication of the goals and expected outcomes of the training activities.

Collaborative and Innovative Practices in Teaching

The interview with Professor "C" also offered significant insights regarding the adoption of innovative teaching practices through international collaboration. During the co-creation process, different teaching methods were discussed, aiming to integrate more interactive and participatory approaches that depart from traditional face-to-face schemes. The Professor highlighted how these methodologies can be particularly effective in diverse educational settings, where students come from heterogeneous backgrounds.

One of the strengths of the innovative practices discussed was their ability to adapt to groups of students with different levels of preparation. The real-world problem-solving approach allowed students to actively engage in learning, facilitating the assimilation of concepts through direct experience and critical discussion. This not only increased student engagement, but also stimulated the development of crucial soft skills such as critical thinking and the ability to work in teams.

The teacher, however, also pointed out the challenges associated with the implementation of such methodologies, such as the need to ensure some basic homogeneity in the knowledge level of students in order to fully exploit the potential of these innovative techniques. Initial preparation, which may include leveling sessions, therefore becomes essential to maximize teaching effectiveness and to ensure that all students can benefit from the new methodologies.

Final Reflections and Future Perspectives

Professor "C"'s experience in the SE4Ces project clearly illustrates how international collaborative projects can be catalysts for professional development for teachers and innovation in teaching practices. The opportunities for cultural and methodological learning and exchange offered by such projects are invaluable, but they require clear definition of goals and effective communication to maximize their benefits. Despite the challenges, the implementation of innovative teaching practices and international collaboration represent key avenues for the evolution of education in the social economy and can significantly enrich the professional development of the teachers involved.

5.2.4 Fourth Interview

The interview with Professor "D" from the University of Bologna offered an illuminating insight into how innovative projects can function as catalysts for teachers' professional development as well as for the adoption of collaborative and innovative teaching practices. Through the examination of Professor "D"'s experiences and reflections, it is possible to better understand how such initiatives positively influence both educators and students in the context of higher education.

Professional Development of Teachers

The teacher opened the interview by emphasizing the importance of the experience gained in the project, describing how it was "excellent." One of the key aspects highlighted is the interaction with various stakeholders, including representatives from three universities and professional figures from the world of social economy. This extensive networking and collaboration with a variety of experts from different academic and professional backgrounds enriched her experience, providing a broader audience of knowledge and perspectives.

Interaction with "political giants" and professors from a variety of fields has, according to the lecturer, provided unique opportunities for learning and the exchange of ideas that are essential to her ongoing professional development. She acknowledges that despite her previous experience in change management with stakeholders and students, the project enabled her to realize that such management could be improved and deepened. This realization underscored the importance of collaborative projects in providing teachers with new skills and strengthening existing ones, a key aspect of their professional development.

Collaborative Innovative Teaching Practices

The project introduced innovative teaching methodologies that, according to the teacher, have had a significant impact on her approach to teaching. The adoption of techniques such as role play, podcasts and games transformed the students' learning experience, making it more engaging and interactive. The Professor highlighted how these methodologies were chosen and suggested by the students themselves, reflecting a co-creation approach that puts students at the center of the educational process.

The creation of the podcast and the use of role play, in particular, have received very positive feedback from students, indicating that these methodologies not only increase interest and engagement, but also facilitate a deeper understanding of the topics covered. Professor "D" emphasized the effectiveness of these methods in social economic education, a field that lent itself particularly well to a collaborative and inclusive teaching approach.

In addition, the interview highlighted how the project stimulated greater student and stakeholder participation through the creation of "Living Labs" where different stakeholders were actively involved in learning and creating teaching materials. According to the Professor, this living learning environment promoted not only knowledge but also the development of soft skills such as communication, team management and negotiation skills.

Final Reflections and Future Perspectives

Through the interview conducted with Professor "D", the added value of collaborative and innovative projects in education became clear. These projects not only strengthen teachers' professional development journey, introducing them to new teaching methodologies and expanding their professional network, but also enrich students' learning experience, better preparing them for real-world challenges. Ultimately, the multi-stakeholder approach and content co-creation prove to be effective tools that can transform education, making it more dynamic, inclusive and adapted to the needs of the 21st century.

5.3 Social economy self-reflection

This section will report the most relevant information obtained from conducting interviews with representatives of social economy organizations on several key issues related to participation in the learning process, professional development, and the added value of adopting innovative teaching approaches in their activities. The interviews were conducted with three Italian social economy organizations that participated in various SE4CES project activities, specifically:

- a social economy organization involved in the service learning activity "Mentoring";
- a social economy organization involved in the realization of the podcast;
- a social economy organization involved in Living Labs.

Participation in the Learning Process

1. **Innovative Approach with Podcast:** The use of podcasts as a teaching tool was, according to the interviewee, an innovative approach to actively engage participants in the learning process. The podcast format allowed students and professionals to listen and reflect on the content at different times and contexts (e.g., while driving), facilitating flexible and accessible learning.

2. **Interaction and Reflection:** The interviewee highlighted how the podcast stimulated reflection among colleagues and trainees regarding their professional and personal journey. This showed that the approach not only conveyed information, but also encouraged internal dialogue and increased awareness of their own experiences and learning.

3. **Active Participation and Engagement:** The respondent emphasized the effectiveness of the podcast in engaging listeners emotionally, although he acknowledged that the voice of the interviewer could influence the level of emotional impact of the content. Nevertheless, the format allowed for active participation, especially through discussion and sharing of experiences during team meetings.

4. **Student Participation and Engagement in the Mentoring Process:** During the interview with the social economy organization involved in the mentoring program, it became apparent that mentees (students) initially did not have a clear understanding of the business or issues they might discuss with their mentor. This uncertainty may have limited their active participation and engagement in the learning process. It is critical that students have a clear understanding of the goals, expectations, and potential areas for discussion and support before beginning the mentoring program. In parallel, mentors played an essential role in facilitating this participation. The interview revealed that strategies to improve the mentoring process were considered, including the introduction of initial and final reflective moments between mentors and participants to clarify goals and increase student engagement.

Professional Development

1. **Exposure to New Practices:** Interaction with the SE4Ces project and the use of innovative teaching methodologies such as podcasts exposed participants to new ways of thinking and operating in the context of social cooperation. This kind of exposure is crucial for ongoing professional development.
2. **Increasing Interprofessional Collaboration:** One respondent mentioned the importance of increasing collaboration between universities, cooperatives, and the public sector. This type of collaboration is crucial for practical application of acquired knowledge and for the development of a deeper and more integrated understanding of social and economic dynamics.
3. **Reflection and Professional Growth:** Regarding the service learning activity "mentoring," while traditionally non-innovative, this becomes a context for innovation in the way it is implemented. Professionals involved in the program had the opportunity to reflect on their practice and how the relationship between companies and universities could be improved to facilitate direct employment opportunities and professional growth for students within their college career.
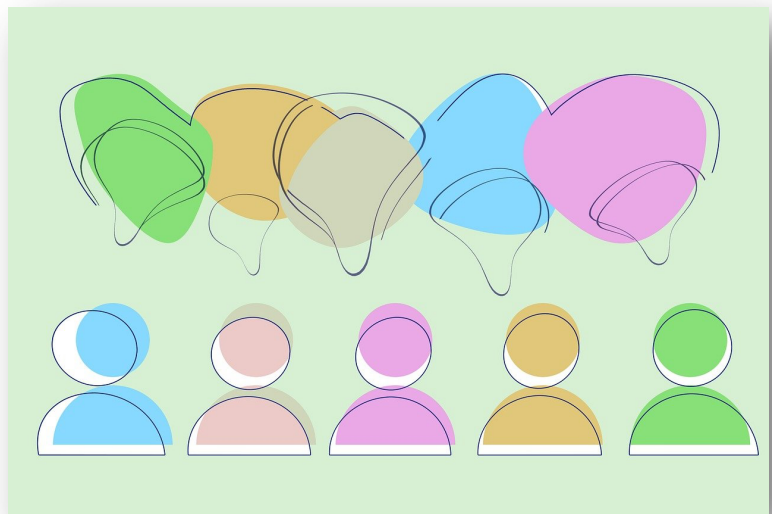
Added Value from Innovative Approaches

1. **Accessibility of Learning:** The podcast audio format has made learning more accessible for people who may have difficulty with other formats, such as extended reading. This has opened the door to inclusive and accessible education for all.
2. **Scalability Potential:** The approach used can be easily scaled and adapted to other organizations and contexts, suggesting that the benefits of the SE4Ces project could extend far beyond direct participants.
3. **Impact on the Educational and Social System:** The SE4Ces project has the potential to strengthen the social economy community by engaging academic and student actors in dialogues that transcend the traditional curriculum. This can lead to increased awareness and implementation of sustainable and socially responsible practices in the corporate world.
4. **Service Learning and Continuous Improvement:** The project adopted innovative methodologies such as role-playing and simulations, which made learning more interactive and hands-on. The use of service learning enabled the integration of academic education with community service, thus significantly enriching the educational experience. Despite the obvious educational benefits, one social economy oraganization expressed doubts about the ready applicability of these approaches in the day-to-day operations of social economy organizations, indicating a potential mismatch between the training received and the practical needs of the sector.

5.4 Focus Group

Focus groups are a commonly used qualitative research technique, especially in the field of marketing and social research. They consist of group discussion sessions led by a moderator, who uses a series of pre-determined questions to stimulate dialogue and interaction between participants. This type of setting is particularly valued for its ability to generate a wide range of responses and promote the exchange of ideas, unlike individual interviews that may not stimulate the same level of critical discussion. The main objective of focus groups is to collect in-depth and detailed data on people's perceptions, opinions and behaviour regarding specific topics or products.

In the context of the SE4Ces project, focus groups were used to evaluate the effectiveness of experimental teaching initiatives and to identify areas for improvement. The target groups were the teachers, students and representatives of SE organisations who participated in the pilot phase of the educational material and thus had direct experience with the proposed material and activities, thus providing concrete, practice-based feedback. These meetings enabled the participants to collectively reflect on their educational experience and to make suggestions for future implementation.

The focus group involved six people (professors, students and lecturers) who participated in the different stages of the development and implementation of the Se4Ces project activities.

5.4.1 Opinions on the Educational Experience

The participants shared their experiences and opinions about the SE4Ces project. A recent doctoral student and now a teacher, reflected on his participation in the early stages of the project, pointing out how he contributed feedback on teaching materials. His involvement, although limited, was significant in formulating the curriculum and ensuring that the material was relevant and stimulating.

One participant, a recent master's student, reported how he was involved in the project as part of a brainstorming group. His account of his experience highlighted the importance of a variety of perspectives and the value of co-creating educational content in an academic environment. The ease of interaction and diversity of participants were, in his opinion, crucial to the success of the creative process.

A Greek lecturer mentioned her participation in the initial stages, specifically in brainstorming sessions, which allowed her to bring her experience in the solidarity social economy in Greece into the British context of the project. Her experience reflected the importance of cultural context and local experiences in shaping education that transcends national borders.

5.4.2 Feelings and Emotional Reactions

The emotional reactions of the participants were predominantly positive and imbued with a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Participants expressed enthusiasm for their work and gratitude for being able to contribute to an innovative educational project. This sentiment is shared by a professor who participated and described his experience as "interesting" and appreciable, especially for the opportunity to work with colleagues and influence the teaching material.

The student who participated, for his part, spoke of the co-creation experience as "fun" and "informative", emphasising how participation in the project allowed him to apply and deepen the knowledge he acquired during his master's degree. The collaborative atmosphere and group dynamics were, according to him, particularly stimulating and rewarding.

A female Professor, although only involved in the initial stages, showed a strong sense of ownership and pride in her contribution, highlighting how participation in an international project had enriched her professional and personal experience.

5.4.3 Reflections on Personal and Professional Development

From a personal and professional development perspective, each participant seemed to have benefited significantly from their involvement in the project. One Professor, who played an active role in teaching and structuring the module, acknowledged that this assignment had been a catalyst for his intellectual and professional development, allowing him to explore new teaching methodologies and deepen his understanding of complex concepts.

Early in his academic career, another Professor reflected on how the experience of feedback and co-creation of teaching materials had enriched his pedagogical skills and broadened his professional network. This type of engagement offered him a valuable opportunity to observe the curricular development process at close quarters, an experience that may not have been common in the early stages of an academic career.

A student, on the other hand, brought a slightly different perspective. As a recently graduated master's student, his involvement in the project offered a unique opportunity to apply theories and concepts in a real-world, multidisciplinary context. This experience had undoubtedly broadened his understanding of the topics covered and provided him with practical skills that can be transferred to the world of work or further studies.

Another participating professor, whose career was already well established, found value in the cultural and professional interchange that such international projects facilitate. Her involvement allowed her not only to share her expertise and experience with colleagues from other countries, but also to learn from these encounters, thus enriching her pedagogical approach and professional outlook.

These collective reflections highlighted a number of common themes: the importance of educational innovation, the value of practical experience and the power of intercultural and interdisciplinary collaboration. Each participant, regardless of their career stage, benefited significantly from involvement in the project activities, suggesting that such projects not only enrich the student experience, but also act as catalysts for the personal and professional development of teachers and staff, as well as promoting a reflective and innovative approach to teaching.

Focus groups in pills:

Opinions on the Educational Experience:

- General appreciation for the effectiveness and innovation of the "Understanding Value and Values" module.
- Importance of the collaborative feedback process in refining teaching materials, highlighting the value of the participative approach.

Feelings and Emotional Reactions

- Feelings of fulfilment and enthusiasm for the opportunity to participate in an innovative educational initiative.
- Gratitude for the less formal and more interactive experience compared to traditional educational approaches.

Reflections on Personal and Professional Development:

- Enrichment of teaching skills and broadening of educational perspectives through the integration of interdisciplinary approaches.
- Evaluation of the co-creation experience as highly formative, improving academic agility and offering new avenues for student engagement.

6.   Conclusions

The SE4Ces project, funded by the Erasmus+ program and implemented by a collaboration among nine European partners, has been a significant innovation in the social economy (SE) educational landscape. Through the implementation of Living Labs, the co-creation of teaching materials, and the application and implementation of service learning activities, the project has greatly influenced both the academic and social economy sectors.

The Living Labs, key pillars of the project, enabled the development of an active collaborative environment among students, faculty, industry professionals and local communities. This interaction fostered the co-creation of innovative solutions, directly responding to current SE educational sector needs and social challenges. The success of these workshops demonstrates the effectiveness of open and collaborative learning environments that integrate research and innovation processes in real-world situations, enriching students' educational and professional experience.

Co-creation of learning materials has been another area of success, with workshops combining community needs with academic learning. This enabled the development of materials that not only reflected academic theories but were also immediately applicable in professional practice, an aspect often overlooked in traditional curricula.

The project also placed a strong emphasis on the continuing professional development of teachers and social work professionals, providing them with tools to integrate innovative teaching practices. This not only enriched their educational approach but also improved their ability to respond to the needs of the SE sector.

Evaluation of the project revealed significant strengths in terms of methodology, educational impact, and interdisciplinary collaboration, although challenges emerged that will require further improvement and adaptation. The reflection sessions emphasized the importance of ongoing self-evaluation and the development of responsive strategies to address emerging challenges.

In conclusion, the SE4Ces project successfully demonstrated how innovation in SE education can be achieved through collaborative and co-creative approaches, which not only enrich students' educational experience but also contribute to professional development and community growth. The results lay a solid foundation for future initiatives and represent a replicable and scalable model in other educational and professional contexts.