„Problemy Zarządzania (Management Issues)"
Vol. 20, No. 1(95), p. 43–66, e-ISSN: 2300-8792
https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.95.2

Social Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Do They Fit?

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Submitted: 27.10.2021 | Accepted: 08.03.2022

Abstract

Purpose: This paper attempts to answer the question to what extent the entrepreneurial ecosystems theory fits in with the social entrepreneurship phenomenon. The objective is to fill this gap by presenting findings from an integrative review of prior systematic reviews available in the entrepreneurial ecosystems literature.
Design/methodology/approach: In the paper, we apply a scoping review and an umbrella review focused on an in-depth analysis of findings obtained in previous reviews, thus taking the form of a review aiming for theory development.
Findings: Our paper contributes to addressing the gaps in the current literature on social entrepreneurship and ecosystems. First, it points to the different types of actors in social entrepreneurial ecosystems (SEE), whose existence may foster social entrepreneurship and facilitate creating social impact. Second, it brings into focus the potential of SEE by drawing attention to the fact that a productive entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) results in job creation and reduction of unemployment, both of which are crucial for social entrepreneurship. Third, as a result of this scoping review, it proposes an extension of Isenberg's model of EE which can be seen as a cumulative contribution to existing knowledge in the field.
Research limitations/implications: This study has certain limitations typical for reviewing investigations.

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Suggested Citation: Klimas, P., & Wronka-Pośpiech, M. (2022). Social Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Do They Fit?. *Problemy Zarządzania (Management Issues)*, *20*(1), 43–66. https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.95.2.

Originality/value: The special value of the paper can be seen in the scoping literature review itself. So far, there has been limited study on social entrepreneurial ecosystems, the role of entrepreneurial ecosystems in development of social enterprises, and conversely, the role of social "components" in entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Keywords: social entrepreneurs, social impact, cooperation, inter-organizational relationships.

JEL: L14; L26; L31

Przedsiębiorczość społeczna i ekosystemy przedsiębiorczości: dopasowanie poznawcze

Streszczenie

Cel: w artykule podjęto próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jakim stopniu przedsiębiorczość społeczna wpisuje się w teorię ekosystemu przedsiębiorczości. Celem jest wypełnienie tejże luki badawczej poprzez przedstawienie wniosków z integracyjnego przeglądu wcześniejszych systematycznych przeglądów dostępnych w literaturze dotyczącej ekosystemu przedsiębiorczości.
Metodologia: w artykule zastosowano metodykę przeglądu zakresu literatury (*scoping review and umbrella review*), koncentrując się na dogłębnej analizie wyników uzyskanych w poprzednich przeglądach, przyjmując w ten sposób formę przeglądu mającego na celu rozwój teorii.
Wyniki: artykuł przyczynia się do wypełnienia luk w obecnej literaturze na temat przedsiębiorczości społecznej i ekosystemów. Po pierwsze, wskazuje na różne rodzaje podmiotów w ekosystemach przedsiębiorczości społecznej (SEE), których istnienie może sprzyjać przedsiębiorczości społecznej i ułatwiać tworzenie wpływu społecznego. Po drugie, zwraca uwagę na potencjał SEE poprzez zwrócenie uwagi na fakt, że produktywny ekosystem przedsiębiorczości (EE) skutkuje tworzeniem miejsc pracy i zmniejszeniem bezrobocia, a oba te czynniki mają kluczowe znaczenie dla przedsiębiorczości społecznej. Po trzecie, w wyniku przeprowadzonego przeglądu literatury proponujemy rozwinięcie modelu ekosystemu przedsiębiorczości D. Isenberga, które można postrzegać jako wkład do istniejącej wiedzy w tej dziedzinie.
Ograniczenia/implikacje badawcze: artykuł ma pewne ograniczenia typowe dla badań opartych na przeglądzie literatury.
Oryginalność/wartość: szczególną wartość opracowania można dostrzec w samym przeglądzie literatury przedmiotu. Do tej pory przeprowadzono niewiele badań na temat ekosystemów przedsiębiorczości społecznej, roli ekosystemów przedsiębiorczości w rozwoju przedsiębiorstw społecznych i odwrotnie – roli komponentów „społecznych" w ekosystemach przedsiębiorczości.

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorcy społeczni, wpływ społeczny, współpraca, relacje międzyorganizacyjne.

1. Introduction

Ecosystems were successfully incorporated into management science from biology in 1993 by J.F. Moore, who revealed a new perspective on firms' environment and competition-cooperation mix (i.e., coopetition) within this environment. Since then, ecosystems have become very popular (Adner, 2017; Bouncken & Kraus, 2021; Klimas & Czakon, 2021; Tsujimoto et al., 2018; Zhang & Watson, 2020). In fact, our knowledge is still developing and evolving around the ecosystems definition, operationalization, taxonomy, and their role in the modern economy (Tsujimoto et al., 2018). With the

https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.95.2

growing interest in ecosystems, researchers are devoting more and more attention to studying different types of ecosystems such as business, innovation, knowledge, platform, and entrepreneurial – all shown as crucial in managerial research, with the last one having been significantly gaining popularity just recently (Bouncken & Kraus, 2012; Fernandes & Ferreira, 2021).

Entrepreneurship is considered as driving technological, economic, and social growth. Thus, it is acknowledged as a means of creating growth dynamics in developed, emerging, and less developed economies (Zahra & Wright, 2016). Numerous researchers claim that through introducing new technologies, creating jobs, and improving the social and economic conditions (McMullen, 2011), entrepreneurship improves the quality of life (Baumol, 2010). The ecosystem approach draws attention to the fact that entrepreneurship takes place in a community of interdependent actors, individuals, entities, in regulatory environment and with factors that enable and constrain entrepreneurship within a particular territory (Cavallo et al., 2019; Malecki, 2018; Kuratko et al., 2017). Given the widely acknowledged importance of new venture creation for innovation, employment, and economic growth, it is not surprising that entrepreneurship and new ventures have recently been seen as potential mechanisms for addressing various types of issues, including social problems (Markman et al., 2019).

While prior work on entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE) has made noteworthy progress in understanding the phenomenon (Wurth et al., 2021), much remains to be discovered (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017; Maroufkhani et al., 2018; Cavallo et al., 2019; Fernandes & Ferreira, 2021). One of the gaps in the existing stock of knowledge is the lack of both theory and empirical research on distinguishing a specific type of actors involved in entrepreneurial ecosystems: social entrepreneurs. While the main objective of an entrepreneur is to create economic impact (i.e., generate profits), social entrepreneurs link the pursuit of social objectives like eliminating hunger, resolving poverty or inequitable opportunities with innovative methods by creating products, organizations, and practices that yield and sustain social benefits (Defourny et al., 2021; Manolopoulos et al., 2022; Okano, 2019; George et al., 2016; Zahra & Wright, 2016). Despite the rapidly growing interest of scholars in social entrepreneurship (SE) and entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE) (Kabbaj et al., 2016), the literature points to the lack of works investigating social entrepreneurial ecosystems (SEE) (Roy & Hazenberg, 2019).

Social entrepreneurs realize themselves in the activities of social enterprises. It is noteworthy that social enterprises often face different challenges and rely on the support of others to achieve their goals (Diaz Gonzalez & Dentchev, 2021). In that sense, ecosystem thinking, where the ecosystem is "*characterized by a large number of loosely interconnected participants who depend on each other for their mutual effectiveness and*

survival" (Moore, 1996, p. 26), may help social enterprises, and social entrepreneurs as well, to enhance their social impact. Nonetheless, although social enterprises attract growing interest, their incorporation to well-grounded concepts in business and management is still needed (Manolopoulos et al., 2022).

In the context of ecosystems, the literature reviews show that entrepreneurial ecosystems are still in conceptual infancy and further works are required (Maroufkhani et al., 2018). For instance, a broad scope of actors should be investigated as there are probably those who play significant roles, hence have not been even identified so far (De Brito & Leitão, 2021). We see social entrepreneurs as a type of actor worthy of consideration as they have not been deeply considered in the ecosystem perspective so far. Moreover, following Wurth et al. (2021), we claim that it would be valuable to reveal "*what social processes within EE are associated with discrimination or exclusion*?" (p. 30). This points also at social issues, including social entrepreneurship, as worthy of consideration. Indeed, although there are works presenting ideas for incorporation of social entrepreneurship into entrepreneurial ecosystems, those works remain somehow limited as ecosystems, including the entrepreneurial ecosystems literature, are not used (Roy & Hazenberg, 2019) or the social facet of an ecosystem is boiled down to the individual level, thus considered through social network theory, social ties (Chen et al., 2020; De Brito & Leitão, 2021), and social capital (Wurth et al., 2021). All in all, even the findings from the very recent reviews of literature on EE do not point at social entrepreneurship in any contexts under EE (see, for instance, Chen et al., 2020; De Brito & Leitão, 2021). Indeed, social entrepreneurship remains outside of consideration even if different entrepreneurship-related perspectives are used (e.g. like general entrepreneurship, high-growth entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial environments – Wurth et al., 2021). Given the above, the "*social*" facet of EE seems to be under-investigated, thus the existing approach to EE can be seen as adopting an old-fashioned understanding of entrepreneurship as a "*profit-making process*" (Maroufkhani et al., 2018, p. 546). Therefore, an unaddressed question would be: *to what extent does the entrepreneurial ecosystems theory fit in with the social entrepreneurship phenomenon*? The objective of this paper is to fill this gap by presenting findings from an integrative review of prior systematic reviews available in the EE literature (Rumrill et al., 2010; Aromataris et al., 2015).

2. Methodological Approach to Literature Review

Entrepreneurial ecosystems are not newly explored phenomena and gain a lot of growing interest. Indeed, in the literature, one can find relevant, up-to-date, and methodologically solid systematic literature reviews (SLR) focused on them. We saw no need to reinvent the wheel and conduct

https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.95.2

another SLR. Instead, we used existing reviews to preliminarily recognize the possibilities of linking EE with social entrepreneurship. Methodologically speaking, we decided to run a scoping (Pham et al., 2014; Munn et al., 2018) and an umbrella review (Aromataris et al., 2015) focused on an in-depth analysis of findings obtained in previous reviews (Mikton & Butchart, 2009), thus taking the form of a review aiming for theory development (Paul & Criado, 2020).

The research process was organized in five stages (Paul & Criado, 2020). First, we asked the research question (i.e., *To what extent does the entrepreneurial ecosystems theory fit in with the social entrepreneurship phenomenon*?) and prepared the reviewing protocol (i.e., collection of descriptive information like year/country/journal of publication but also merit ones like EE definition, types of EE, actors of EE, inclusion of any kind of social entrepreneurship related issues). Second, the literature gathering process was organized using two search criteria combining one term referring to the considered type of ecosystem (i.e. "entrepreneurship ecosystem", "entrepreneurial ecosystem") and one term restricting the works to reviewing works only (i.e. "review"). We searched for phrases in the title, abstract or keywords. The literature was collected via the Scopus database in August 2021. Among the inclusion criteria were the following: works in English, peer reviewed works, full text available, articles published in journals. The third phase focused on literature screening, thus abstracts of the identified papers were read to ensure that they matched the posed research question. Fourth, the research team ran a thematic analysis of the identified 10 previous reviews. The focus was on integration of existing knowledge/insights on EE (Mikton, Butchart, 2009; Rumrill et al., 2010) and consideration of potential compatibility of EE with social entrepreneurship. Moreover, as recommended in methodological works (Paul & Criado, 2020), we focused also on the identification of relevant directions for future research. The analysis was run on the following works identified in previous stages: Alvedalen & Boschma (2017); Nicotra et al. (2018); Cavallo et al. (2019); Kuckertz (2019); Liguori et al. (2019); Mujahid et al. (2019); Neumeyer et al. (2019); Cao and Shi (2021); Kang et al. (2021); Wurth et al. (2021). Fifth, we reported the findings in the subsequent part of this paper.

3. Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Although the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems is relatively young, with the first paper published in 1999 (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017), it is hard not to notice its popularity in research and practice over the past decade. This growing interest is reflected by the number of papers increasing year by year (Chen et al., 2020; Kang et al., 2021) and by the fact it has entered the mainstream of consideration, being commonly used in practice

e.g. by the World Economic Forum, the OECD, the Kauffman Foundation (Wurth et al., 2021). What is more, EE is widely discussed at academic conferences and has its "*own*" special issues in prestigious management journals (e.g. Review of Managerial Science – Bouncken & Kraus, 2021).

While entrepreneurial ecosystems have quickly achieved the status of an emerging (Kang et al., 2021) and prominent concept (Volkmann et al., 2021), there still exist many gaps to be addressed. One of the primary allegations is that EE is generally under-theorized and conceptually fragmented (Maroufkhani et al., 2018; Wurth et al., 2021), which results in a lack of comprehensive understanding of EE triggers (Cao & Shi, 2021), outcomes (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017) or even components (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017). What is also emphasized in the existing literature is the static view with no focus on EE evolution (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017) and dynamics (Cao & Shi, 2021). Therefore, the life cycle of EE is shown as an interesting future research avenue (Cavallo et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is still little evidence on how entrepreneurial ecosystems develop and operate and how they impact venture performance (Bouncken & Kraus, 2021). Importantly for this study, the social perspective is considered deficient (Neumeyer et al., 2019).

3.1. Conceptualization of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

By definition, an ecosystem, or rather an ecological system, is '*a biotic community, its physical environment, and all the interactions possible in the complex of living and nonliving components*' (Tansley, 1935, p. 299). In the same spirit, an entrepreneurial ecosystem was used by Cohen (2006, p. 3), who coined the term by defining it as '*an interconnected group of actors in a local geographic community committed to sustainable development through the support and facilitation of new sustainable ventures'* (as cited by Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017, p. 1).

Nonetheless, despite the growing research interest resulting in a number of definitions (e.g. De Brito & Leitão, 2021), the concept itself remains quite fuzzy and chaotic (Cavallo et al., 2019). For example, Stam and Spigel (2017, p. 1) define EE as '*a set of interdependent actors and factors coordinated in such a way that they enable productive entrepreneurship within a particular territory'* (as cited by Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017, p. 5). Building on previous contributions, Cao and Shi (2021) consider EE as a community of multiple coevolving stakeholders that provides a supportive environment for new venture creations within a region. EE can also be seen as the interaction of some structural elements focused on entrepreneurship (interaction logic), as a system of resource allocation driven by entrepreneurial processes (resource logic), or a governance tool for entrepreneurship-driven economic development (governance logic) (Cao & Shi, 2021).

Although conceptual and definitional issues are one of the mainstreams in papers on EE (Liguori et al., 2019), many scholars focus their attention

https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.95.2

on describing the actors and components involved in EE. For instance, as Mujahid et al. (2019, p. 3), who view EE as a '*a composition of coordinated and mutually dependent factors that result in the formation of a creative environment for entrepreneurship in a country'*. In the same vein, Vogel (2013, p. 446) defines an entrepreneurial ecosystem as '*an interactive community within a geographic region, composed of varied and inter-dependent actors (e.g. entrepreneurs, institutions and organizations) and factors (e.g. markets, regulatory framework, support setting, entrepreneurial culture), which evolves over time and whose actors and factors coexist and interact to promote new venture creation'*. Similarly, Roundy (2017, p. 1252) points to inter-connected collections of actors, institutions, social structures, and cultural values that produce entrepreneurial activity.

Besides the actor-dominant structural approach, one of the most popular conceptualization among both researchers (e.g. Kabbaj et al., 2016) and theorists (e.g. Roundy, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018) interested in EE is the one developed by Isenberg (2010), who distinguishes six domains making up the entrepreneurship ecosystem, namely: culture (success stories and societal norms); finance (financial capital); policy (government and leadership); markets (early customers and networks); human capital (labor and educational institutions); and supports (infrastructure, support professions and non-governmental institutions). Regardless of the definition, the entrepreneurial ecosystem is composed of all the elements that are necessary to keep entrepreneurship in a particular territory active.

When attempting to underline some key features of EE, one may notice that in contrast to related concepts like clusters, industrial districts, or innovation systems, EE concentrates on entrepreneurs, new ventures, and start-ups and on the impacts of both economic and social context on entrepreneurial processes inside (Nicotra et al., 2018). Indeed, the entrepreneurial ecosystem concept places its focus on entrepreneurial ventures (Bouncken & Kraus, 2021), the huge role of social relationships and social capital (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017). Furthermore, the attention is drawn to '*high quality or ambitious entrepreneurship*' (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017, p. 5) referring to the recognition and exploitation of opportunities for new products to maximize the value generated. It is also emphasized that EE not only operates at multiple levels (e.g. city, county, state, region, national – Ligouri et al., 2019), but also across multiple sectors (Bouncken & Kraus, 2021). Since EE is perceived as not industry-specific (Cavallo et al., 2019) and leading to sustainable economic growth of a given region (Kang et al., 2021), it should be also considered significant both in urban and rural areas (Roundy, 2017). However, it is important to notice that – although existing literature suggests that EEs are geographically bound (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017) and territory limited (Cavallo et al., 2019) – besides geographical boundaries, the social ones are also shown as relevant (Neumeyer et al., 2019).

It is important to note that each ecosystem is unique and as such, its components will vary from one ecosystem to another (Isenberg, 2010). As Isenberg (2010) points out, factors like local culture, banking systems or educational policies may all easily impact the nature of local ecosystems. Following that thought, the expanded perception of EE will vary as the level of maturity in this area and the understanding and acceptance of the social enterprise concept by policy makers, practitioners and researchers varies significantly between EU member states and beyond (Murzyn, 2021).

3.2. Structure of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

In addition to creating an abstract conceptualization of EE, the existing literature has also created a significant number of approaches to the question of whom such a system consists of. Given the actors' perspective, EE can be understood as a '*collaborative network of stakeholders in a specific entrepreneurial environment*' (Kang et al., 2021, p. 3). In a more detailed way – as Mason and Brown (2014) suggest – it as "*a set of interconnected entrepreneurial actors (both potential and existing), entrepreneurial organizations (e.g. firms, venture capitalists, business angels, banks), institutions (universities, public sector agencies, financial bodies) and entrepreneurial processes (e.g. the business birth rate, numbers of high growth firms, levels of 'blockbuster entrepreneurship', number of serial entrepreneurs, degree of sellout mentality within firms and levels of entrepreneurial ambition) which formally and informally coalesce to connect, mediate and govern the performance within the local entrepreneurial environment"* (as cited by Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017, p. 5). In general, the EE's actors range from governments, private and public sectors (including NGOs), universities, society to entrepreneurs (Bouncken & Kraus, 2021) and others, much more specific, such as incubators and accelerators (Cao & Shi, 2021). Nonetheless, the one that has a principal place in the EE and is the core actor in building and sustaining the ecosystem is the entrepreneur (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017) who – through EE – creates new opportunities.

It is important to note that although actors are necessary for EE development, what is also important are the links among them (Wurth et al., 2021). The relationships between actors may vary from mutually dependent (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017), co-dependent to even loosely connected (Cao & Shi, 2021).

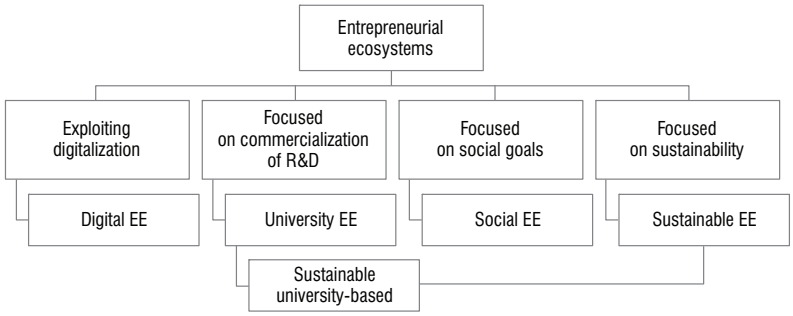
The literature points also at different specific types of entrepreneurial ecosystems (Figure 1).

For instance, Bouncken and Kraus (2021) draw attention to the existence of digital EE, where digital technologies and progress in ICT can strengthen local, regional, and international links between actors (Kraus et al., 2019). The recent research accordingly implies that the concept of an ecosystem is becoming increasingly important also in the university context, where university entrepreneurship ecosystems (UEE also labeled as academic

https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.95.2

entrepreneurial ecosystems) gain interest as accelerating commercialization of research results, supporting academic spin-off firms at the global scale, and strengthening academic culture (Kobylińska & Lavios, 2020). Moreover, as shown by Theodoraki et al. (2018, p. 3), a specific type of UEE, namely sustainable university-based entrepreneurial ecosystems (U-BEE), can be distinguished as well. A sustainable U-BEE is understood as various members who share the same goal of entrepreneurial support within a local geographic community and who are associated with a specific university (Theodoraki et al., 2018, p. 3), including the huge role of incubators operating as stimulators for other ecosystem actors. Other scholars point to the existence of social and sustainable entrepreneurship ecosystems (McMullen, 2018; Muñoz & Dimov, 2015), or a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem (Theodoraki et al., 2018), which (following Cohen, 2006, p. 3) can be understood as '*an interconnected group of actors in a local geographic community committed to sustainable development through the support and facilitation of new sustainable ventures*'. A sustainable EE contributes to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Volkmann et al., 2021), and therefore sustainability dominates, putting sustainable (rather than social) entrepreneurship at the forefront.

Figure 1
Specific types of entrepreneurial ecosystems



Source: Own elaboration based on the literature review.

4. Social Entrepreneurship

In the entrepreneurship literature, the ecosystem approach is one, but not the only, dynamically growing stream of investigation. Another area of keen interest is the social approach to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs.

The concepts of social entrepreneurship (SE) and social enterprise have gained popularity in the last two decades, both in the US and in Europe. Quite rapidly, social entrepreneurship has become a noteworthy area of research (Sinclair et al., 2018; Hota et al., 2020). It focuses on organizations

representing a combination of business and altruistic behavior, so-called hybrid organizations, aiming at having social impact and using tools and strategies from traditional for-profit firms at the same time (e.g. Nicolopolou, 2014; Pache & Thornton, 2021).

An underlying building block of SE is "*entrepreneurship*", defined by Gries and Naudé (2011, p. 217) as "*the resource, process and state of being through and in which individuals utilize positive opportunities in the market by creating and growing new business firms*". However, the fundamental element that defines social entrepreneurship is the purposefulness of social change or the creation of social value, rather than the creation of wealth (Defourny & Nyssens, 2021). Essentially, social entrepreneurship links the pursuit of social objectives like resolving poverty or unequal opportunities with innovative methods by creating products, organizations, and practices that yield and sustain social benefits (Dacin et al., 2011; Grieco, 2015). It is often seen as a mechanism for addressing unfair situations contributing to exclusion or marginalization of those who are incapable of changing these situations themselves. Therefore, social entrepreneurship is critical for regions with some of the biggest social challenges and has been widely recognized as a helpful instrument of social and economic policy, particularly when dealing with unemployment, social exclusion and sustainable regional and local economic development (Borzaga & Defourny, 2004). The term is still catchy both in the corporate world, where there is a growing consciousness that profit and social justice can go hand in hand, and among charity organizations, which increasingly appreciate the need to generate income from more sources.

With the increasing number of studies on hybrid forms, it became apparent that social enterprises are not only not homogeneous but also vary in many respects (Defourny et al., 2021; Salavou & Cohen, 2020). What is more, various terms are often used in the subject literature such as social businesses (Molyneaux, 2004), social-purpose businesses (Cooney, 2011), community enterprises (Tracey et al., 2005), social ventures (Sharir & Lerner, 2006), social entrepreneurial ventures (Bacq et al., 2016) and hybrid organizations (Saebi et al., 2019). The concepts themselves strongly overlap and are often used interchangeably. This multitude of concepts and definitions partially results from the heterogeneity of the social sector worldwide, in which organizations addressing social challenges may take different legal forms and different organizational types, as well as the fact that the theoretical and practical debate has taken place in parallel in the three academic schools of thought on both sides of the Atlantic ("*earned income"* and "*social innovation"* in North America and "*EMES approach"* in Western Europe – Defourny et al., 2021).

First, the "*social innovation"* school of thought adopts a Schumpeterian concept of the entrepreneur giving a central role to an individual who possesses fundamental personal characteristics to tackle social problems and unmet social needs in an innovative manner (Dees & Anderson, 2006),

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such as dynamism, creativity, and leadership. The social entrepreneur is therefore a change agent. Importantly, the emphasis is put on the individual characteristics of the agent rather than on the organizational form, attributes, or on the specific business model. This view of social innovation has been supported by foundations such as Schwab and Ashoka whose primary goal is development and the professionalization of social entrepreneurs (Petrella & Richez-Battesti, 2014).

Second, the "*earned income"* school of thought focuses on the enterprise itself, understood as an entrepreneurial, nonprofit venture that generates "*earned income"* while achieving social aims and surviving in the market at the same time (Dees & Anderson, 2006). This generates revenue streams independent of grants and subsidies (Hoogendoorn et al., 2010). In that sense, organizations – in order to ensure continuity of services – develop market-oriented economic activities, generating revenue that is reinvested for their social purpose. In addition to the topic of funding, this school also fosters the idea that adopting business methods is an effective way to improve the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations and make them even much more entrepreneurial.

Third, the European model of social enterprise (EMES) emerged in the 1990s with the work of the EMES European Research Network. This school of thought provides nine guiding criteria – social, economic and governance – that an organization should meet to be closer to "*an ideal*" type of social enterprise (Defourny & Nyssens, 2021). Those criteria allow researchers to position these entities within the "*galaxy*" of social enterprises and to draw the boundaries of what can be considered a social enterprise (Defourny et al., 2021). It is launched by a group of citizens, possesses a high degree of autonomy, is participatory in nature, and does not base decision-making power on capital ownership (Hoogendoorn et al., 2010).

To conclude, while the American approach is based on individual and financial success as well as short-term financial gains, the European model puts collective success and long-term planning at the forefront. In addition, the European approach stresses the importance of democratic and participatory governance models within the social enterprise discourse and is focused more on service providers (Schmitz, 2015), while the American approach highlights the dividing line between charity and social entrepreneurship and includes for-profit product providers and for-profit strategies (Ridley-Duff, 2007).

Although there are main threads in the literature and the definitions of SE can be clustered, this is a field that is still being studied for its diversity. Depending on the adopted approach, social entrepreneurship embraces a range of activities from the non-profit sector (e.g. activity of a pure NGO), through social entrepreneurship in a corporate setting, to commercial ventures having a social purpose. Moreover, the characteristic organizational forms that social enterprises adopt depend on the existing

legal frameworks, on the political economy of welfare provision, and on both cultural and historical traditions of non-profit sector development in each country (Wronka-Pośpiech, 2018). Therefore, adopting a very narrow definition will cause a significant number of potentially relevant organizations to be left out. Conversely, the adoption of too exhaustive definitions will result in a group of organizations highly diversified in terms of many organizational variables.

Regardless of the school of thought as well as understanding and acceptance of the social enterprise concept, it is definitely a driver of emerging economies (Kabbaj et al., 2016) requiring a combination of both market and social welfare logics (Roundy, 2017). It is linked with social innovations, social (not market-driven) economy, solving social demands and societal challenges (i.e. focus on social problems and environmental issues) (Howaldt et al., 2016). Despite the great potential to help solve social problems in innovative ways, social entrepreneurship faces many challenges that hinder its operation. Social enterprises, regardless of their nature or guiding mission, often deal with various constraints in achieving their objectives. Some of those include difficulties in accessing finance (Santos et al., 2015), financial constraints (Roundy, 2017), institutional challenges (Robinson, 2006), growth constraints and the difficulty to scale the social enterprise (Davies et al., 2019), mission drift (Bielefeld, 2009), resource deficits (Austin et al., 2006), high barriers to entry into markets (Robinson, 2006), lack of management skills and entrepreneurial competences (Bull & Crompton 2006), and the need to reconcile stakeholders' interests (Sinclair, 2018) or mismatched support schemes for social enterprises (Mazzei & Steiner, 2021). Given the challenges, ecosystem thinking may be of great help to understand how different stakeholders can help SE (Diaz Gonzalez & Dentchev, 2021). However, in spite of rapidly growing interest (Kabbaj et al., 2016), still there is an unsatisfactory level of studies on social entrepreneurship (Howaldt et al., 2016) adopting the EE perspective.

5. Combining Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and Social Entrepreneurship

As the ongoing debate about entrepreneurial ecosystems progresses, interesting threads emerge. For example, it is suggested that in the EE literature there is a switch from focusing on productive entrepreneurship into social entrepreneurship, reaching much beyond economic issues only (Wurth et al., 2021). Indeed, since EE covers not only economic and institutional factors but social ones as well (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017), this remark suggests that EE taps into the debate on sustainable development of entrepreneurship (Kang et al., 2021). The social perspective is also shed by Neumeyer et al. (2019). Nonetheless, in their reviewing paper, EEs are considered at individual, interpersonal, and social networks levels and not

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at the social, the society level. All the above points to the need and the relevance of in-depth investigation of the social facet of entrepreneurial ecosystems, including for instance social entrepreneurial ecosystems (SEE).

On the one hand, the study of SEE is needed, as further development of the EE concept *"calls for an opening up of the concept of productive entrepreneurship, to also include social and ecological value creation that cannot always and directly be measured in monetary terms, but which is regarded to be valuable for society at large"* (Wurth et al., 2021, p. 7). In any case, the social entrepreneurship ecosystem is increasingly featured in recent literature (Kabbaj et al., 2016; Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020; Roy & Hazenberg, 2019), despite the fact that no clear definition of SEE exists (Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020), nor has it been identified among thematic clusters in existing literature (Kang et al., 2021). Some scholars try to introduce the SEE concept understood as an EE in which social entrepreneurs operate (Roundy, 2017). But even though Roundy logically discusses the compliance, reciprocal interpenetrations, and cognitive overlaps of social entrepreneurship and EE, those two concepts are not lumped together.

On the other hand, social entrepreneurship seems to suit the ecosystem concept as the most frequently indicated drivers of social innovations targeted by SE are individuals, groups and networks (Howaldt et al., 2016). Indeed, as empirically proven, this is definitely the dominant motive, which in fact simultaneously is a pillar of the ecosystem concept. Therefore, the ecosystem approach and the entrepreneurial ecosystem concept fit social entrepreneurs as they have to leverage and handle complex systems of interacting actors, usually highly varied and strategically distant (Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020).

What is more, social entrepreneurs deal with the same issues as traditional entrepreneurs in the ecosystem context (Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020), as they are a unique type of conventional entrepreneurs (Roundy, 2017).

First, the reason why social entrepreneurship suits entrepreneurial ecosystems is also connected with the fact that factors conditioning social entrepreneurship (e.g. infrastructure, legal context, funding for social issues, etc.) are simultaneously considered under EE (Kabbaj et al., 2016). Roundy (2017) suggests that the more complex EE is in terms of diversity of inventors, the higher likelihood of the successful creation of social ventures under EE, thus the higher opportunity for SEE emergence.

Second, such likelihood increases if EE covers social-entrepreneurship-focused support organizations. Moreover, he also claims that the type of culture models adopted under EE matters here (i.e., altruistic culture favors the most), the same as the number of opportunities for vicarious entrepreneurial learning. Needless to say, social entrepreneurs are capable of making a higher social impact if there is a more favorable environment

(Kabbaj et al., 2016) and the environment of EE fits very well (Roy & Hazenberg, 2019). A slightly different view is presented by Howaldt, Kaletka, and Schröder (2016), who consider social entrepreneurs as relevant components of the ecosystem of social innovation. In that perspective, social entrepreneurs, as well as social entrepreneurship are seen as important for another specific type of ecosystems, namely innovation ecosystems, and their specific type focused on social innovation co-creation and operating usually as an eco-centric innovation ecosystem (not an ego-centric one). As shown by field studies, although social entrepreneurs do play an important role in the social innovation ecosystem, they do not appear as a dominant structural component (Howaldt et al., 2016).

Summing up, at this stage, social entrepreneurship seems to be unexplored and under-investigated in the EE literature, usually not considered at all or treated peripherally (Roundy, 2017) although social entrepreneurship and EE seem to have a lot in common (Roy & Hazenberg, 2019; Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020). Indeed, as shown by systematic literature review, the social facet of entrepreneurship, so far, has been a rarely mentioned issue, whereas never been used as a leading phenomenon or perspective in works on EE (see Figure 3 in Maroufkhani et al., 2018). In particular, it still remains unclear what kind of role social entrepreneurs can play under EE (Roundy, 2017). This mainly stems from the fact that links between entrepreneurship and societal challenges are explored through several research streams (Hossain et al., 2017) and differences between these research streams are not always emphasized enough[1]. Simultaneously, as claimed by Roy and Hazenberg, "*process of social entrepreneurship needs a supportive environment in order to flourish*" (2019, p. 13) while EEs, including SEEs in particular, give such supportive environment providing also access to the many benefits of close interdependencies between different types of actors (Bernardino et al., 2019). The key importance of the environment as conducive to the development of social entrepreneurship has also been noticed by Roy et al. (2015), Roy and Hazenberg (2019), or Bernandino et al. (2019), with a particular reference to the institutional environment, as "*various social, cultural and political norms (institutions) determine the way social actors operate"* (North, 2017, p. 6).

5.1. Models of EE with Social "Component"

Besides the ontological commonalities, one would point at the possibility of identification of some social "*components*" within entrepreneurial ecosystems.

First, considering the specificity of social entrepreneurship, actors do differ in terms of importance and social impact as shown – using the Marocain case – by Kabbaj et al. (2016). Given their results, there are five leading actors, namely (1) funders and international donors,

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(2) support structures, (3) social entrepreneurs, (4) public institutions and (5) beneficiaries.

Second, in their literature review, Diaz Gonzalez and Dentchev (2021) use an ecosystem perspective to propose a classification of SE support – fuel, infrastructure and DNA – which opens the way to understanding how to support social enterprises to scale up their social impact. The first support category for SEs, being "*fuel*" (resources), consists of the following elements: availability of resources, variety of actors, and human capital. The other two categories are "*hardware*" (infrastructure) covering (1) research and development and (2) infrastructure, and "*DNA*" (SE culture) consisting of (1) entrepreneurial culture, (2) policies and (3) visibility.

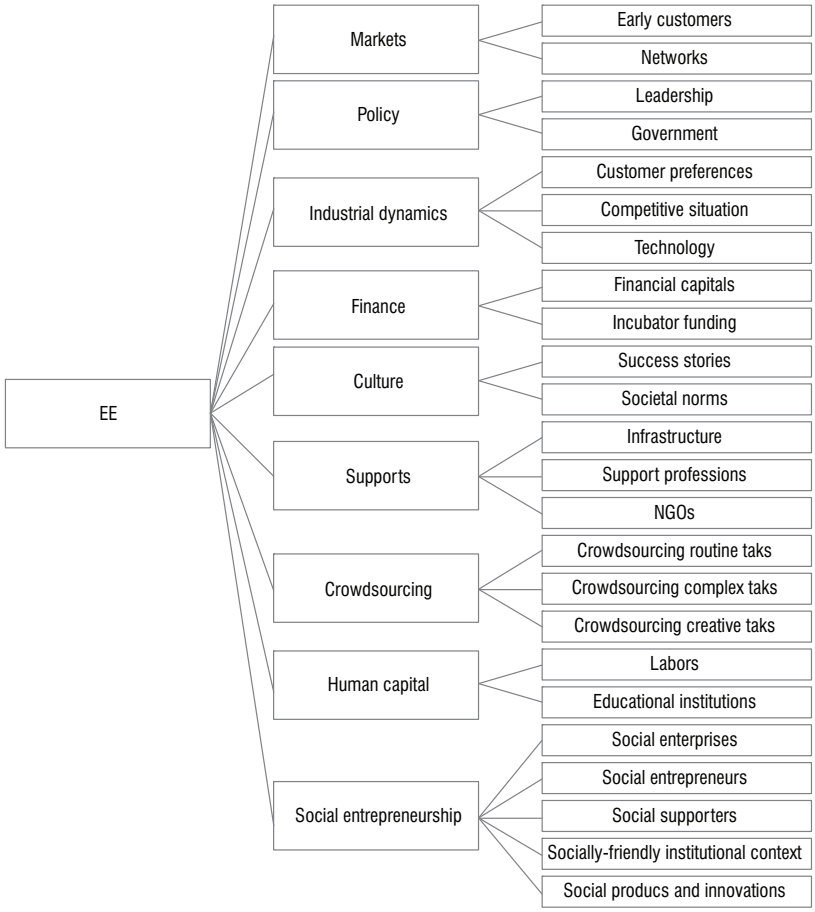
Third, the elements of SEE identified in research run in Mexico point towards components such as demand, supply (funding institutions), social intermediaries (social partners), social context, structural context. Next to those elements, there are specific, socially important actors: social labs and accelerators, funds focused on social impact, government agencies, networking, corporations funding social entrepreneurs, university labs (Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020).Fourth, SEE key areas (note: a wider perspective than the actor-focused one) have also been identified using qualitative study in 10 countries (Roy & Hazenberg, 2019): procurement policies and regulation; financial activities for ecosystem growth; inclusive labor market practices; collaborative stakeholder systems; training and education in support of ecosystem growth; impact and dissemination; and a general '*system drivers*' category.

Finally, there is a growing need for delineating "*social*" components due to the fact that EE performance – no matter what type of EE we are thinking about – is shaped by the specific interactions between EE actors (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017). It means that each component's performance depends on the performance of others, while those performances all together determine the EE performance (Bouncken & Kraus, 2021) determined by financial and social factors (Manolopoulos et al., 2022).

Given the above, we claim that it is reasoned and required to incorporate social entrepreneurship to the EE framework. Using one of the most acknowledged models of EE, namely the one developed by Isenberg (2010), we suggest considering EE as covering nine components (i.e., markets, policy, industrial dynamics, finance, culture, supports, human capital – Isenber, 2010, crowdsourcing – Maroufkhani et al., 2018), including one newly added, namely "*social entrepreneurship*" – Figure 2. Following the works emphasizing the social perspective, the newly distinguished component covers such sub-components like (1) social enterprises and organizations as suggested by Villegas-Mateos and Vázquez-Maguirre (2020), (2) social entrepreneurs as suggested by Kabbaj et al. (2016), (3) support for social entrepreneurship and social initiatives as suggested by Diaz Gonzalez and Dentchev (2021), (4) institutional context favoring social entrepreneurship as suggested by

Roy and Hazenberg (2019) and Bernandino et al. (2019), and (5) social products but also social innovations shown as crucial in modern economy by Cameron (2012).

Figure 2
Expanded entrepreneurial ecosystem framework



Source: Based on Isenberg, 2010 and Maroufkhani, Wagner, & Wan Ismail, 2018.

The expanded approach to the entrepreneurial ecosystem addresses the recent calls regarding the need for inclusion of social issues (Roy & Hazenberg, 2019; Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020; Manolopoulos et al., 2022). Moreover, we see the proposed modification compliant with three main subdomains of industrial dynamics impacting the changes of EE concept (Maroufkhani et al., 2018): (1) changes in customer

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preferences as customers are more aware, socially sensitive and responsive; (2) changes in the competitive situation as long-term advantage does not solely relies on economic performance but also on social performance as well; (3) technology changes as technological advancements make it easier to be socially responsive.

Last but not least, it should be noted that we see it is justified to incorporate social entrepreneurship to every EE no matter what specific type is considered (see Figure 1). In that perspective, SEE should be seen as a specific type of EE which not only covers social entrepreneurship as other types of EE, but does prioritize social issues in contrast to other types of EE.

6. Conclusions

Although the notion of social entrepreneurship has surely gained ground, there has been limited study on social entrepreneurial ecosystems, the role of entrepreneurial ecosystems in development of social enterprises, and conversely, the role of social "components" in entrepreneurial ecosystems. To address the gaps in the current literature on social entrepreneurship and ecosystems, this article points to the different types of actors in SEE, whose existence may foster social entrepreneurship and facilitate creating social impact. Second, this study brings into focus the potential of SEE by drawing attention to the fact that productive EE results in job creation and reduction of unemployment (Nicotra et al., 2018), both of which are crucial for SE. Third, as a result this scoping review develops an extension of Isenberg's model of EE (c.f. Figure 2), which can be seen as a cumulative contribution to existing knowledge in the field (Maroufkhani et al., 2018).

Considering limitations, one should mind all typical limitations for reviewing investigations (e.g. Munn et al., 2018; Paul & Criado, 2020). Furthermore, regarding our review, it should be noted that we used only the Scopus database, which can be seen as a limitation as some work remained outside our pool of reviewed works (e.g. Maroufkhani et al., 2018; De Chen et al., 2020; Brito & Leitão, 2021; Wurth et al., 2021). To alleviate this limitation, the discussion of findings was not limited to the analyzed works only. All in all, in the future, in the case of the adoption of a full-scale literature review, it would be recommended to use a few complimentary literature bases (e.g. following suggestions of Paul and Criado (2020)) or the most influential journals within the field of entrepreneurship (Chen et al., 2020).

We acknowledge other limitations that help to outline promising directions for further research.

First, our study builds on the assumption that differences between EE and SEE exist. In addition, this study is based on theoretical considerations, therefore we suggest carrying out further research, including qualitative

research, on social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurs in the context of EE, as it is needed not only for scientific purposes, but also for policymakers and entrepreneurs *per se* (Roundy, 2017).

Second, as EE is highly contextual (Wurth et al., 2021), it is recommended to focus on a specific territory when considering EE (Cavallo et al., 2019). Such attempts have already been made in Morocco (Kabbaj et al., 2016), Mexico (Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020), and partly in Poland. However, the last one seems more like very general, comparative exploration of social entrepreneurship in the EE context carried out using three case studies from Poland, Italy and North Macedonia (Murzyn, 2021[2]). Furthermore, most EE papers focus on EE in advanced economies, leaving emerging and less developed ones behind (Cao & Shi, 2021). Thus, focusing on emerging economies such as Poland may blaze a trail for further research regarding the role of EE components in the development of the social enterprises. Third, since traditional (usually business) ecosystems may change into entrepreneurial ones (Song et al., 2021), future research may however address more inquiring questions of how the traditional ecosystem – and later how entrepreneurial ecosystem as well – can transform into SEE.

Finally, like many other organizations, SEs cannot function normally on their own and therefore ecosystems can help them acquire many of the resources, knowledge, information, competencies and capabilities that enable social value creation (Diaz Gonzalez & Dentchev 2021) and the ability to scale their social impact. It has become even more important recently, as the scale of challenges we face has increased rapidly together with the emerging need of understanding and tackling them, as they not only relate to the objective of building a sustainable future for the planet (George et al., 2016), but also affect the well-being or even the survival of humankind. These challenges include issues such as climate change, natural resource use and exploitation, digital workforce, (gender) inequality, sustainability and grand societal challenges (George et al., 2016). Therefore, future research may address how these challenges affect SEs and how SEs can or should respond to them. Such challenges open up new research opportunities in the search for appropriate organizational structures, necessary organizational changes or relevant ecosystems. Indeed, taking into account the role of social enterprises in tackling social and environmental challenges, we consider that it is meaningful to undertake empirical research targeting the recognition of additional attributes that significantly differentiate social entrepreneurship ecosystems from other EE (c.f. Figure 1) and other types of ecosystems.

Acknowledgments

This paper was submitted to the VI International Scientific Conference: Entrepreneurship for the XXI Century. Images and Perspectives (Warsaw; October 2021). We would like to thank the conference Organizers for all the remarks and suggestions on our very first version of the paper. We also thank the Editors from Management Issues and the Reviewers for their insightful and constructive comments.

https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.95.2

Funding

The dissemination of findings received funding from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland under the program "Regional Initiative of Excellence" 2019–2022 contract number 015/RID/2018/19 signed at 12/20/2018 for a total funding amount of PLN 10 721 040,00 and the subsidy for development of Young Scholars 2021.

Endnotes

1 First, environmental entrepreneurship connects responses to pollution, climate change, deforestation, and other ecological issues with entrepreneurial activity (Schaper, 2002; Dean & McMullen, 2007). Second, social entrepreneurship links the pursuit of social objectives like resolving poverty or inequitable opportunities, with innovative methods, by creating products, organizations, and practices that yield and sustain social benefits (Austin et al., 2006; Dacin et al., 2011). Third, sustainable entrepreneurship (considered as a hybrid of the above two) links entrepreneurs' efforts to resolve societal and environmental problems simultaneously (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). Fourth, impact entrepreneurship applies economics logic and business principles in order to remedy environmental, social, and/or economic damage and apply science and technology principles to tackle Grand Challenges rather than creating wealth as such (Markman et al., 2019).

2 In the paper, there is a section on SEE, nonetheless there are no findings or even descriptions devoted to SEE. Instead, we can find some information about social entrepreneurship, social enterprises, and social economy.

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