

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: CONCEPTUAL FRAGMENTATION AND MULTIDIRECTIONAL PATHS TO GENERATE VALUE. A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship has had a predominant techno-economic perspective; however, its social approach has grown significantly as a response to the specific issues of particular sectors of society, generally, the ones neglected by the State. This paper aimed to analyze the conceptualization of social entrepreneurship, its characteristics and the categories linked to its contextualization when the State is surpassed and there are actors that promote communities to undertake collective action. Through the systematic review of classic and current literature, relevant aspects of social entrepreneurship and the main related concepts were identified, and four cases of Latin Americans were analyzed to understand its contribution as welfare mechanism. The findings showed the main types and categories that directly or indirectly incise their study. Based on its core, income generation, profit distribution, and capability for collective action, the conceptualization fragmented was identified into three strata –non-profit, for-profit outside the market, and for-profit in the dynamics market-. It was concluded that social entrepreneurship is a mechanism to generate public, social, and local value and respond to the weak institutional capability in their territories.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship, fragmented conceptualization, collective action, social value, public value, local value.

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Emprendimiento social: fragmentación conceptual y rutas multidireccionales para generar valor. Una revisión sistemática de literatura

RESUMEN

El emprendimiento ha tenido una connotación tecno-económica preponderante, no obstante, su enfoque social ha crecido significativamente como una respuesta a las problemáticas concretas de sectores específicos de la sociedad, generalmente, desatendidas por el Estado. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la conceptualización de emprendimiento social, sus características y las categorías ligadas a su contextualización cuando el Estado está rebasado y hay actores que promueven que las comunidades emprendan acción colectiva. Mediante la revisión sistemática de literatura clásica y vigente se identificaron aspectos relevantes del emprendimiento social y los principales conceptos relacionados, y cuatro casos latinoamericanos fueron analizados para comprender su contribución como mecanismo de desarrollo. Los hallazgos mostraron las principales corrientes y categorías que directa o indirectamente inciden en su estudio, y la evidencia de su conceptualización fragmentada en tres estratos –sin fines de lucro, con fines de lucro al margen del mercado y con fines de lucro en la dinámica de mercado- debido a su fin de origen, generación de renta, distribución de utilidades y la capacidad de acción colectiva. Se concluyó que el emprendimiento social sí es un mecanismo para generar valor público, social y local, y responde a la débil capacidad institucional en los territorios donde opera.

Palabras clave: Emprendimiento social, conceptualización fragmentada, acción colectiva, valor social, valor público, valor local.

Introduction

From the classical theories of economics –with Smith, Schumpeter, and Friedman as the main referents- to the vision of other social sciences, entrepreneurship has had a market approach (techno-economic) and has been considered a key driver of economic growth in regions, as it connects the market, capital and technological progress (Alvarez de Mon et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2020; Klarin & Suseno, 2023; Vilanova & Vitanova, 2020). However, various social, environmental, institutional, cultural, and political factors have contributed to the transformation of entrepreneurship towards a social perspective –with Keynes, Dees, Drayton, and Yunus as the main referents-. The social approach to entrepreneurship can be traced back to Smith, who viewed it as an income-generating mechanism (individual egoism) and recognized its social dimension through its ability for self-regulation and job creation (DelliSanti, 2021). Keynes, while acknowledging entrepreneurship along similar lines, distanced himself from the essential role of the State as its regulator (Dalton & Logan, 2022). However, it was Schumpeter who placed entrepreneurship or "creative destruction" at the core of territorial development and thus recognized its positive social impact (Dalton & Logan, 2022).

Over time, Social Entrepreneurship (SE) has included discussions regarding for-profit or non-profit organizations or foundations that aim to address specific social issues or advocate for the human rights of vulnerable groups, as well as business areas of social responsibility, among others (Acs et al., 2013; Bojica et al., 2018). The literature review reveals that various actors within communities have directed entrepreneurship towards resolving problems such as unemployment, social inequality, gender inequality, or the social disadvantage of native people;

this approach has been considered as a mechanism for development and a promoter of social changes (Barki et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2020; Klarin & Suseno, 2023). Furthermore, recent literature indicates a growing interest in correlating entrepreneurship with sustainable development objectives and incorporating the "community" category as the foundation of entrepreneurship; this perspective adopts a bottom-up vision with a co-responsibility approach (Dahri et al., 2021). It is possible that this evolution and involution of entrepreneurship has caused the lack of consensus in the conceptualization of SE; despite this, the literature largely agrees on the impact, interest, and social value that it generates.

This social approach to entrepreneurship or SE is still subject to ongoing discussions, and its conceptualization remains a work in progress; however, there are identifiable characteristics, actors, factors, and contextual elements that support entrepreneurship focused on addressing social issues and reshaping interests to prioritize public welfare and strengthen institutional capabilities (OECD, 2022). The integration of social entrepreneurship in political-economic models has become increasingly prevalent in recent times –for instance, in Europe, it has gained special importance, as evidenced in the ESID v2 database, which contains records of approximately 13,000 social projects (Gök et al., 2022)-. SE has been acknowledged as a mechanism for generating social, local, and public value, and one of its main characteristics is its cooperative model of income distribution (de Sousa-Filho et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2020; Rangan & Creeg, 2019). Entrepreneurship has yielded diverse outcomes across different regions of the world. In the case of Latin America, CEPAL (2019) has shown that entrepreneurship faces significant challenges and limited prospects for sustainability as a source of income and assets in the medium and long term.

According to Montiel et al. (2022), Latin-American entrepreneurship path has had three disruptive moments: ancient Latin American civilizations –the frontier knowledge was generated, and innovative business models of commercial exchanges were used-; the colonial era –the extractivism, the cultural and religious domination, and a few family businesses put a strain on entrepreneurship-; the independence movements –the entrepreneurship in the region was resurfaced with poor and inconsistent results-. According to CEPAL (2022), Latin America has not achieved mitigated social inequality and poverty because corruption and other factors have influenced the Latin-American entrepreneurship model and have kept the entrepreneurial intention based on approaches rooted in linear individualism. However, Latin American entrepreneurship at the dawn of the 21st century has been revaluated as a development mechanism and has shown a new generation of Latin American thinkers and entrepreneurs who understand and recognize their origins, the social disadvantages, and the deeply heterogeneous in our territories (CEPAL, 2019, 2022; Montiel et al. 2022).

In this tessitura, the research is fundamental to proposing new visions of entrepreneurship and clarifying emerging research routes. Various empirical approaches are shown that SE emerges as a response to specific issues of particular sectors of society, which have been neglected by government institutions. Therefore, this paper focuses on analyzing the conceptualization of social entrepreneurship, its characteristics, and its categories of contextualization when the social actors foster community-driven collective action due to weak institutional capability. The contribution of this paper is theoretical and practical because SE is analyzed as a complex, multifactorial, and multidimensional social phenomenon but in the Latin-American reality. Besides, the results could have practical implications that policymakers could

consider for designing public policies under heterogeneous conditions and in socially disadvantaged territories.

Methodological framework

The research was qualitative to understand the phenomenon complexity due to the slim lines between social and economic priorities of social entrepreneurship. Thus, this research considered that the core of entrepreneurship, the income source, the profit distribution models, and the social capability are the basis for its analysis from a social perspective. The methodological process comprised two phases. The first was the systematic literature review to elucidate its conceptualization, characteristics, and categories linked to its contextualization. The second one was the analysis of four SE cases at different territorial scales to catch up with the possibilities of SE as welfare mechanism.

The first phase was conducted with a deductive approach through four keywords—entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship + social impact, social entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship- and the ScienceDirect database was used with Spanish and English syntax. Initially, the syntax had no other filters, however later on, the syntax was complemented with AND ("Latin America" OR "Latin-American") to capture specific regional interest. 5833 publications were identified from 2000 to 2022. These articles were scanned to find the four given keywords. Afterwards, frequency table was made based on the relevance criterion –the relative frequency of mention of the searched terms in each publication-. From each of these four categories, the highest classes -those with the highest frequency of mention for the correspondent keyword- were chosen. Table 1 shows the screening analysis which was performed for each of the keywords to select a total of 183 journal papers to examine their abstracts. A skim lecture was performed of 54 articles, from which 28 were finally selected for a content analysis.

Table 1.
 Screening analysis based on relevance criterion

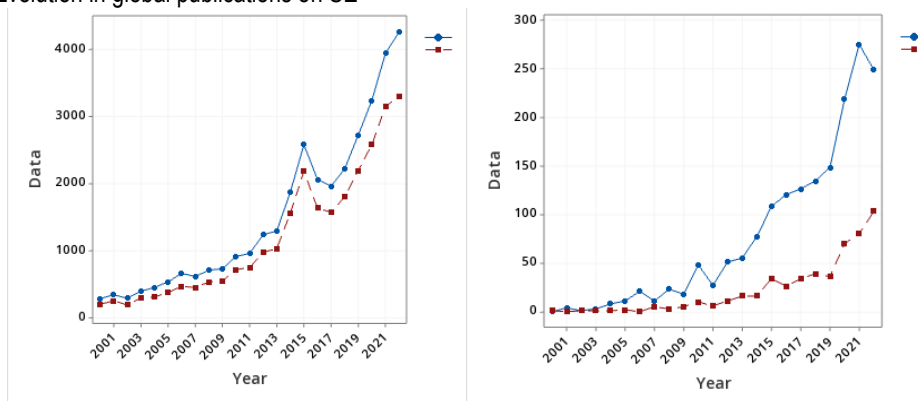
Class	Frequency of mention	Keyword 1	Keyword 2	Keyword 3	Keyword 4	papers (no.)
1	0 - 6	2491	98	-	27	
2	7 - 13	437	123	3	9	
3	14 - 20	8	367	11	4	
4	21 - 27	-	425	18	-	
5	28 - 34	-	561	26	-	
6	35 - 41	-	489	48	-	
7	42 - 48	-	396	21	-	
8	49 - 55	-	58	42	-	
9	56 - 62	-	140	31	-	

Selected papers	8	140	31	4
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The number of publications related to the topic registered a mean rate of 112.4% annual growth during 2000-2022. The data of the five months from 2023 was omitted from the figure to avoid creating the impression of a decline in public interest in SE. However, it is highlighted that in less than half a year, the 2023 publications are equivalent to 66.3% of the 2022 publications. The three journals with the highest number of publications are Journal of Business Research, Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Technological Forecasting and Social Change.

Figure 2 shows the evolution of global publications on entrepreneurship and their focus on the social aspect since 2000. It also shows the shifting interest towards SE and its transition towards sustainable entrepreneurship –4.1% of total publications and 117.3% of mean growth–.

Figure 1.
Evolution in global publications on SE



The analysis of publications in Latin America reveals a growing trend. However, there was a five-year delay in the expression of interest in the social approach to entrepreneurship and a decade-long delay in the interest of transitioning towards a sustainability-focused approach to entrepreneurship (Figure 3). It is relevant to highlight that Latin America is classified as an unequal territory whose productive structure is based on low-productivity sectors, and its development has had an unstable behavior (Álvarez & Palacios, 2021; CEPAL, 2019).

In the second phase, the selection of these SE cases was through an intentional sampling (Patton, 2014) based on the evidence of their social impact. The dense description (Clifford, 2003) was integrated with available information from their official websites and some papers that mentioned them. Table 2 shows their axis mission and target community.

The qualitative information collected was systematically coded using a combination of phenomenological and hermeneutic analysis (Clifford, 2003; Creswell et al., 2007) to elicit an in-depth understanding of the conceptualization, characteristics, and contextualization and an evaluation of a real chance of it being a welfare mechanism. The analysis was performed with the support of ATLAS.ti® v.8.4.5 to analyze the global hermeneutical unit. The frequency of use

of key terms and phrases was analyzed utilizing the word cloud counting technique. Later on, the codes were associated with the most representative categories through frequency tables.

Figure 2.
 Evolution in Latin-American publications on SE

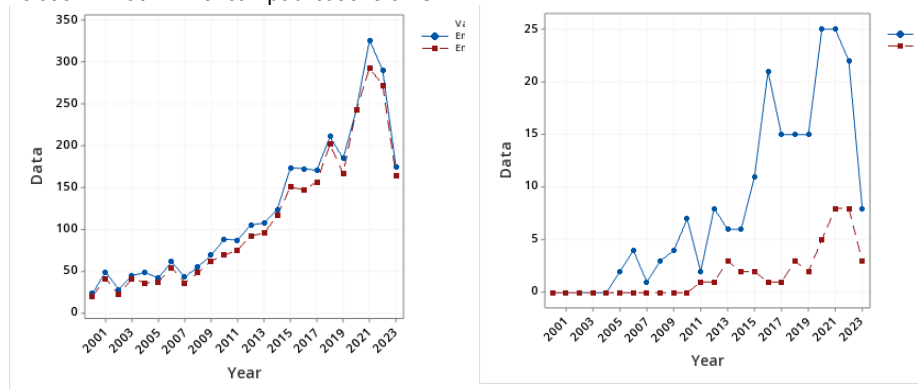


Table 2.
 Practical cases of Latin-American SE

Case	Creation year	Core	Target community
“Nuestros ahijados de Guatemala” (Hereinafter, these will be called Case 1)	1991	Development of the Guatemalan population in poverty and extreme malnutrition through education.	Socially disadvantaged Guatemalan women.
“Telecomunicaciones indígenas comunitarias” (Hereinafter, these will be called Case 2)	2013	Fair relationships to strengthen the community life of indigenous people so that they can exercise their right to digital communication as content creators and technology users.	Indigenous and rural communities in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero (Mexico).
“Pízza” (Hereinafter, these will be called Case 3)	2015	Labor inclusion of young people from 17 to 35 years old. Building capabilities with a multidimensional-welfare approach.	A person in a situation of social abandonment.
“Lady Meche” (Hereinafter, these will be called Case 4)	2015	Social and business intervention to claim women’s rights in commercial sex through strategies to overcome the stages of “network	Female sex-workers.

depression" and reduce psychosocial damage.

Source: based on Chávez (2022), Martínez & Barroso (2019), Rodas (2022), Unruh & Arreola (2023), and official WEB of the cases.

Findings

The main coincidence between authors and cases that call themselves "social entrepreneurship" is that their operative model impacts social issues and transforms a part of their reality (Gupta et al., 2020; Manjon et al., 2022). Based on the content analysis, Table 2 presents the keywords and phrases most frequently associated with SE that reported the highest frequency of co-occurrence, which together add up to 72%. The SE has focused its interest on issues of poverty, education, or employability; however, intersectionality has strongly increased its interest. Besides, the achievement of sustainability has grown through the reconciliation of economic and social interests and its duality with technology.

Table 3.

Main phrases and keywords associated with SE

Keyword	Frequency of co-occurrence (%)
Social welfare	17,2
Human development	16,3
Inclusion [inclusivity and inclusive]	10,4
Social action	8,9
Ethical action	7,4
Socio-institutional networks	5,2
Intersectionality	4,4
Social, cultural and environmental capital	2,2

In the literature review, arguments were also found regarding the relationship between the level of social entrepreneurship and weak institutional capability. It was observed that in territories where the State's influence is limited, the level of SE tends to be higher, with social actors playing a crucial role in promoting community engagement. In this sense, the analysis of the cloud of contextual words correlated with SE is presented in Table 3. In this table, the approaches of university social intervention –frequently associated with action-research methods- were recognized as mechanisms relevant to transform the social reality in which entrepreneurship intervenes and fosters change (transformation).

Table 4.

Categories in the contextualization of the SE

Category	Keyword	Frequency of co-occurrence (%)
Communities of Practice entrepreneurial ecosystem	Physical environments, virtual environments.	24,6
Social transformation	Social innovation, change, social cohesion.	19,8
Action-Research	Orientation to action, social intervention.	13,1
Social technology	Digital transformation, food sovereignty, self-consumption markets.	10,9

Local approach	Institutional memory, local governance	10,5
Sharing and social economy	Third sector, fourth sector.	9,7
Culture of collaboration	Territorial culture, vernacular knowledge.	9,2
Sustainability	Climate action, social and environmental interaction, sustainability.	2,2

According to classical approaches, there is a variety of SEs based on their size, the level of innovation involved in their operations, and their impact on sustainable development; however, this research aimed to elucidate the SE based on its core, income generation, profit distribution, and social capability. Figure 4 shows the three identified strata of SE based on the content analysis, which considers the abovementioned criteria. All three coincide with the social purpose of entrepreneurship, and their social issues are neglected by the State; thus, these ES are diverged from “classic” profit distribution schemes and encourage collective action.

Figure 3.
 Taxonomy of social entrepreneurship

Profile	SE I	SE II	SE III
Core	Social	Social	Socioeconomic
Income generation	Donations	Services	Products or services
Profit distribution	It does not	Cooperative approach	Cooperative or classical approach
Social value creation			
Public value creation			
Economic value creation			
Local value creation			

The figure shows that SE I is a non-profit entity. Its entrepreneurship is inherently driven by social goals, often presenting itself as a foundation, and it does not intervene in the market – therefore, it does not generate income- and it operates through donations to create social value (Kaushik et al., 2023). In recent studies, its operation is aligned with the 2030 agenda, especially with SDGs 1 (end of poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (health and welfare), 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality) and 10 (reduction of inequalities) (Dhahri et al., 2021).

In the case of SE II, it operates as a for-profit entity but outside the traditional market framework. The purposes of this entrepreneurship are rooted in social objectives, such as the mitigation of specific social issues, generation of income through the provision of services, and redistribution among the socially disadvantaged communities involved in its operation through collectivist or cooperative schemes (Gupta et al., 2020; Kaushik et al., 2023; To et al., 2020). The axis mission of this type of SE focuses on minorities, gender, ethnic groups or youth to create public value. According to Mazzucato and Ryan (2022), public value serves as a “translator” between actors in the social sector and the public sector, facilitating the (re)configuration of public purpose markets and achieving intersectoral collaboration to address the main social challenges within a given territory.

SE III operates as a for-profit within the dynamics of the market, and its original aim is financial; however, it addresses social or environmental issues that have been overlooked by the State. It generates income through products or services and uses social marketing and certifications to demonstrate its socio-environmental commitment –for instance, Socially Responsible Company, ISO 14000, B or impact triple company, “Best company to work”-. This type of entrepreneurship generates local value, since it revalues the territory and youth leadership, and promotes responsible local consumption –the local value includes encouraging social participation, fostering a risk-taking culture and building local capabilities-. The literature also refers to them as “sustainable entrepreneurship” or “conscious entrepreneurship” or “behavioral entrepreneurship”. Moreover, it should be noted that recent works consider it an evolution of the “classic” entrepreneurship with a techno-economic approach and propose the hybridization of actors and interests to achieve the prioritization of the social dimension (Dhahri et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2020; Hoogendoorn et al., 2019).

A fourth strata related with social approach was identified; these enterprises are large or medium-sized who aim to maximize profit and generate income through the manufacture or commercialization of goods or services; however, their social approach is based on aggressive marketing strategies to show their social commitment and environmental responsibility. Therefore, numerous papers call out their greenwashing or social-washing (Mateo et al., 2022; Meisinger, 2022). This fourth stratus is not considered social entrepreneurship, as their primary productive activity responds to market demands and promotes socio-environmental responsibility to increase their profits. Although they have a foundation or engage in systematic donations to SE I organizations –hereinafter, these will be called ESR-.

SE as a mechanism to mitigate the inequalities

The literature provides arguments regarding the potential of SE as a welfare or development mechanism (Alvarez de Mon et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2020; Klarin & Suseno, 2023; Vilanova & Vitanova, 2020). The four selected empirical cases have a social mission, innovatively use diverse resources, and take advantage of opportunities to capitalize on social change. Nowadays, the Latin American pattern searches for social revitalization through entrepreneurship –for instance, through cooperatives or entrepreneurial associations- (Morales et al., 2020). Based on the content analysis of the cases, clarity is shown in what they want to solve and how they want to do it; therefore, it is inferred that this clarifies their income distribution model and the types of incentives that make them sustainable. Table 4 shows some characteristics of these cases.

Table 5.
Practical cases of SE

	Income generation	Profit type	Social contribution
Case 1	Donations	Social	Capabilities based on education as a long-term solution against poverty. Empowerment based on building dynamic capabilities to eradicate circles of domestic violence and to get out of poverty or extreme poverty.

Case 2	Services	Socioeconomic	Digital inclusion and social cohesion of native people. Defense the right of communication and the autonomy of people.
Case 3	Services and products	Socioeconomic	Social action for the sustainable inclusion of people with a profile of social abandonment through capability building and empowerment strategies.
Case 4	Services and products	Socioeconomic	Economic and personal empowerment through a socio-productive project. Multidisciplinary capabilities based on the right to decide.

The “community” was a fundamental coincidental element in the four cases. The community, in each case, is shown as an ally (bottom-up). The community's position as a beneficiary (top-down) is not detected, but rather as a leading and dynamic actor. This co-responsibility could be the key for being a mechanism of development or social welfare. The construction of capabilities was a relevant characteristic in which these cases agree that could motivate collective action or social action.

The equation of opportunity + risk + innovation could be the one that fosters interactions in these ES and generates the social capital to guide them towards sustainability. Based on the lifetime of these four ES, it is assumed that the political volatility of the territories where they operate has not influenced their sustainability and allows them to close gaps.

Cases 3 and 4 are hybrid organizations in three aspects: the markets, the actors, and their interests. This hybridization is a very relevant characteristic because it could explain their sustainability model. Moreover, the intersectionality component is strongly present in the cases. Finally, complex motivation factors to create social value were identified in these cases; these factors could be correlated with the absence of a mature state for entrepreneurship –deficient infrastructure and incipient social capital-.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the conceptualization of the SE is fragmented; nevertheless, four criteria to stratify them –core, income generation, profit distribution, and social capability- were identified. Thus, SE distinguishes itself from techno-economic entrepreneurship by emphasizing its civil and social commitment through non-profit, for-profit outside the market, and for-profit in the market dynamics. Furthermore, the analyzed cases show their potential to contribute to inclusion and their capability to mitigate inequalities.

Therefore, the SE generates social, public, economic and local value by addressing social issues outside or within the market dynamics and leads to multidimensional impacts on specific sectors of society. In conclusion, ES is a development mechanism and there are multidirectional paths to motivate collective action through it. Likewise, these paths articulate the conceptual and the practical aspects within each unique context.

Finally, regarding the discussion that motivates this special issue, it is relevant to put on the table of debate that SE in Latin America could have a triple contribution to the transformation and development of the territory. First, SE could generate a collective opportunity

for entrepreneurs and fellow citizens who are related to or involved in the operation of entrepreneurship. Second, the SE could generate social opportunities through taxation since increasing public budgets would cause welfare spillovers to regenerate local and regional productive fabrics with a social and collaborative economy approach. Third, SE could generate public opportunity through its contribution to achieving the SDGs, if and only if its relational capital is based on principles of efficiency, transparency, equity and inclusion. However, the pressing Latin-American challenges for SE as a development lever are the following:

- a) The disruptive transformation of the educational system at all levels, since it is essential to break the current business education model based on approaches rooted in linear individualism.
- b) The strengthening of its social and technological infrastructure, since it is necessary to reduce the gaps and decrease social indifference to build sustainable opportunities based on the combination of knowledge.
- c) The permanent conversation between the public, private, and social sectors, in which the university is the articulating hinge based on mutual trust, brotherhood, and mutual respect.
- d) Open access to collaborative platforms to (re)discover SE experiences that generously and transparently disseminate the lessons learned.

Future lines of research in SE

The literature on the subject is abundant and continues with a strong growth pattern. Based on the findings, it is inferred that in Latin America it has not been extensively investigated and there are unexplored lines of research. The main ones are the following:

1. Measurement of the impact of the SE. How to measure progress and direct and indirect impact, and account for the interdependencies of contextual elements to SE. Moreover, the study of the social capital that develops around SE and the policies that respond to the dynamics of public markets is necessary.
2. Multiscale and multilevel analysis of SE, from the degree of inter and transdisciplinary to different operational and research methodologies, and the necessary discussion of social marketing. Likewise, research on the transfer and social adoption of innovation and technology –includes the category of digital transformation- necessary in entrepreneurship focused on minorities.
3. Approach to sustainability and inclusion of SE. What are the boundaries of using natural resources for the development of society's activities and consideration of the intergenerational capability and reproductive capability of ecosystems. Furthermore, the reconciliation of social and environmental interests and the approaches to care for minorities and human rights are lines to be explored.
4. Contribution of higher education institutions to the development through SE. It is relevant to deepen the study of SE in aspects such as transparency, orientation to planetary limits, comprehensiveness, integration, balance of social and environmental interests, scalability, and sustainability strategy. It is proposed to focus on how to generate a responsible entrepreneurial culture and how to translate university research into action.

Interest conflict declaration

N/A

Authors contribution

Author	Concept	Data curation	Analysis/ Software	Research/ Methodology	Project/ sources	Supervision/ Validation	Initial write	Final editon
1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	X		X	X			X	X
3	X		X	X			X	X

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N/A

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