“We need the activists to be more entrepreneurial”: Global versus Local modes of thought on the development of social enterprise support systems in transitioning economies.

Abstract

As the processes of market liberalisation and globalisation increase the confidence of international actors involved in national third sectors, there exists a cosmopolitan tension between ‘mobile elites’ and ‘locked in’ nationals (Featherstone, 2002). This paper explores the impact of these tensions on the social enterprise ecosystem in the Republic of Poland and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Focused on the internationalised mechanisms of support, the relationship between the social enterprise incubators and international stakeholders, and power distance inherent to the global versus local debate, the findings suggest that normative isomorphic pressures are causing a fundamental ecosystem shift. The monopolisation of support and terms of reference have led to entrepreneurs detrimentally being treated as ‘organisational heroes’ risking burnout, the primacy of international voices within the local context, and the transference of nationals from being ‘locked in’ to national processes to being ‘locked out’ of national support. The research suggests the cosmopolitan-led transformation of activists into entrepreneurs needs to be more carefully considered, to ensure that enforced alignment to international system does not alienate them from other sources and means of sustainability.

Introduction

Cosmopolitanism is the concept of a global society that transcends national ideals, with distributive principles of justice not being constrained by the state or national boundaries (Tan, Shapiro, and Hardin, 2004). Though cosmopolitan principles are in flux, being made up of aspects of universalism, humanism, and communitarianism, the individual definitions claim to unite humanity under an innate shared system of beliefs (Dockstader, 2018). Currently, cosmopolitan ideals are shaped by a dominant normative paradigm centred on neo-liberalism, due to the hegemony of Western powers in global institutions, which has led to a focus on individualist aspirations and universalist social norms (Pollock *et al.,* 2000). The constraints that this normative thinking places on cosmopolitan systems of thought, leads to questions as to whether there is a true commitment to a global political community, or whether said community instead acts as a coercive force to align ‘outsiders’ to preferred systems of behaviour (Isikel, 2020). The institutional pressure for structural adjustment and democratic transition, for example, has been critiqued as a measure to promote economic alignment, often with significant negative socio-economic costs for local populations (Shefner and Stewart, 2011).

Despite these critiques, the continuing influence of neoliberalism has led to growing confidence in global actors influencing social action in emerging economies. An example of this is the promotion of social enterprise, hybrid third sector organisational constructs that use markets to deliver their primary social objectives (Nicholls, 2010; Mazzei, Montgomery, and Dey, 2021). In the West, these constructs have been the beneficiaries of positive legislative, social, and political environments, with governments seeing them as a cost-effective and ideologically aligned solution to the delivery of public goods and social welfare (Kerlin, 2009; Cooney *et al.,* 2016; Garrow and Hasenfeld, 2014; Staicu, 2017; Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2019). The export of the model to other contexts; however, has been challenging, with differing characteristics of civil society and political transition impacting the support systems, cultural affinity, and funding available for the model. Despite this, promotion of the model has persisted, enabled by the fluid, and contested nature of what social enterprise means across different geographical, cultural, political and socio-economic spheres (Teasdale, 2012). International funders, such as the European Union and other Western organisations continue to support the global social enterprise ecosystem, and specific social enterprise business incubators have been developed to help social entrepreneurs develop their ideas from conception through to sustainable organisation. However, the question has arisen as to whether there is a genuine 'buy-in' to cosmopolitan models of social action, or whether the funding potential of the model is leading to tactical mimicry and the development of ineffective support mechanisms (Dey and Teasdale, 2015).

The research presented in this paper is based on findings from data gathered in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Republic of Poland, two formerly Orthodox Soviet model economies with traditionally collectivist civil societies, that have embarked on processes of market liberalisation. 'Shock Therapy' in Poland was the rapid adoption of market liberal norms which has seen the state in a struggle to re-establish its authority over third sector institutions (Jacobsson and Korolczuk, 2017). 'Doi Moi' in Vietnam saw the state take a dualistic approach to its own market evolution, maintaining the presence of the state whilst offering legislative empowerment to communities through participatory management (Wischermann, 2011). The comparison between the two countries is therefore appropriate as an examination on the implementation of cosmopolitan norms and liberal constructs within national third sectors.

The findings are discussed across three themes: Influence of cosmopolitan ideals on the ecosystem; Normative values and ecosystem shifts; and Importation of skills–. The findings suggest that whilst there is a genuine buy-in to cosmopolitan ideas within the incubator system, there are tensions within the system that is leading to fragile support systems, a reliance on the importation of experts, and the alienation of beneficiaries who are seen as unqualified to influence modes of support. This research adds to our

understanding of emerging ecosystems of collective action by focusing on the role of normative relationships, and monopolies on terms of reference. In doing so, the paper makes an original contribution to knowledge by demonstrating that international models of social enterprise incubation are locked into what Featherstone (2002) termed the cosmopolitan tensions between 'mobile elites' and 'locked-in' nationals. The normative isomorphic pressure leads to standardised approaches to social enterprise incubation globally, disempowering local actors and ignoring the contextual nature of localised communities. This leads to the planting of western-type idealised social enterprise 'phenotypes' into contexts that they are not suited to, and often rejected from (Roy and Hazenberg, 2019), albeit these 'phenotypes' can be presented in a variety of forms.

Social Enterprise as a Global Construct

In the West, the rise of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship has been seen as politically beneficial for many governments, providing a cost-effective, ideologically aligned, model for the provision of public goods (Kerlin, 2009). The adoption of market-based models for social action has been particularly beneficial in developing countries, where the liberalisation of the markets and structural adjustment has weakened the state's ability to provide adequate social welfare provisions (Stewart, 1995). In these environments governments have sought to create sustainable legislative environments to support these organisations and encouraged public-private partnerships to help resolve the social problems they are unable to (Borzaga and Defourney, 2001; Kerlin, 2009; Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2019). Stakeholders, therefore, seek to transform the third sector into a place of arbitration between the private and public sector, and associative space that allows relationships to be developed between societal actors, away from the gaze of the state (Salamon and Anheier, 1998).

Philosophically, social enterprise aligns with the neoliberal agenda; utilisation of the markets, re-distribution of state power, and social impact driven by individualism in the form of social entrepreneurship (Cooney *et al.,* 2016; Garrow and Hasenfeld, 2014). The development of the neoliberal project in the West, was the culmination of a history of evolving social relationships, forms, and networks, and preceded by laissez-faire capitalism, industrialisation and concepts of private property (Tate, 2013; Schwarzmantel, 2007). Despite this historic precedence, neoliberalism has often been considered by stakeholders to be made of natural laws, with countries outside of the immediate Western context encouraged to adopt liberal policies; for example, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, trade liberalisation, and private investment (Kyung-Sup *et al.,* 2012). These considerations were legitimised by the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, seen as the inevitable triumph of liberalism with free association and

individual rights unable to be supressed [famously characterised by Fukuyama's (1992) book].

To support the development of effective social enterprise models in transitioning economic environments of the newly won territories, international organisations have often been charged with the development of support systems (Hoyos and Angel-Urdinola, 2018). A difficulty in the development of 'one size fits all' support models is the range of organisational structures that have developed, with the environmental context of a social enterprise often informing the path of its evolution (Kerlin, 2009). –When considering social enterprise as a global construct, it is necessary to realise that this does not need to be based in an assumption of singular, homogenous organisational models. Indeed, one of the potential strengths of social entrepreneurial action rests in the plethora of different models that have emerged, a factor recognised even by the international NGOs that traditionally seek to promote social enterprise as a global solution to development problems [for example, see the British Council (2022) report titled 'More in common: The global state of social enterprise']. It is important to recognise however, that there are trends that emerge regionally that are embedded within local political and economic governance conditions. These conditions are set both internally and externally, and when innovation is applied to the development context, these conditions are often externally set and based within western notions of innovation's role in poverty alleviation and development (Jimenez et al., 2022).

Whilst solutions to complex social problems should be mainly rooted in local communities, there has been a trend in social enterprise to emphasise the role of 'heroic' individuals (often external to communities), to bring in fast-paced technical solutions that are transposed from other settings (Santos and Bannerjee, 2019). This is a problematic approach often promoted by international NGOs (for example, Ashoka or the British Council) that ignores the extant literature highlighting the critical role of collective dynamics in social enterprise development (Defourny and Nyssens, 2021). The application of this logic to international development settings, or work in transitioning economies, can mean that local communities are disenfranchised, with top-down solutions delivered based on universalist outcomes that are not always centred on participatory approaches (ibid). These inequities are a feature of what has been termed social innovation 'coloniality', whereby uncritical approaches to social innovation in international development maintain power and resource disparities, embedding western conceptions of impact through a focus on market outcomes and funder metrics (Kalema, 2019). Further, such approaches can ignore the importance of culture and place in the development of social enterprise ecosystems (de Bruin et al., 2023). These tensions are also evident in adjacent fields, such as philanthrocapitalism, as calls for philanthropy to be profitable, market-driven, and investment based have developed as it takes up a larger proportion of available development funding (Greenhill et al., 2013;

Menga, et al., 2023). This has led to concerns that the wider availability of philanthropic funding empowers the global elite, allowing them to coerce agendas and influence policy making strategies (Rogers, 2011).

Even in regions such as Western Europe, where it can be argued that social enterprise has emerged from historical traditions centred on cooperative, participatory structures embedded within welfare state systems [see Borzaga et al. (2020) for an overview of the role of welfare regimes in the development of social enterprise], the reality is often that there remains a discord between those that run social enterprises and their beneficiary groups. Indeed, within the Scottish context Finlayson and Roy (2019) identified the problematic nature of 'facilitated social enterprise' when applied to communities through top-down policy and funding systems. These welfare-based models of social enterprise, when exported globally, can fail to align with local approaches to civil society. Indeed, it could be argued that the inherent contradictions based within western conceptions of social enterprise, nominally the heroic/revenue based North American models, and the welfare-orientated social benefit European models, mean that their export to transitioning economies is problematic to say the least.

Cosmopolitan Isomorphism in Social Enterprise Incubation

There has been little consideration given to the impact of cosmopolitanism, as a normative process, on the development of the incubator-entrepreneur relationship and the associated support structure. Examinations of cosmopolitanism have placed it as a contributor to the prosperity of social enterprise, though with less of an interest in the 'other' but rather the creation of marketable images (Garsten, 2003; Mouraviev and Kakabadse, 2021). The current research aligns with this; cosmopolitanism acts as a rejection of national normative behaviours and seeks to create a cognitive alignment with international alternatives. This aligns it with cultural capital examinations of social enterprise, which have focused on entrepreneurial abilities to access novel or distant information by leveraging education or job level (Van Ryzin *et al*., 2009). Importantly, concepts of power distance are embedded within the term, with cosmopolitan constructs gatekeeping both knowledge and resources unavailable to others within the national setting, verticality can develop within the ecosystem and the dominate stakeholders are able to leverage the wider environment (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 2004). In this manner, cosmopolitan orientation can be seen as a tool to embed actors within value matching, resource rich, networks._The normative isomorphic process has often been considered as part of a triumvirate, alongside coercive and mimetic isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Distinctions between these forms of isomorphism are not always clear, with organisations often subjected to more than one type with few examinations with how they interact (Sowa, 2008; Greenwood and Meyer, 2008). Mimetic isomorphism has received most of the academic attention, acting as a

response to uncertainty through the mimicking of successful behaviours within the field (Hersberger-Langloh, Stuhliner, and Von Schurbein, 2020). Coercive isomorphism occurs due to external pressures being applied with meaningful consequences for those who don't comply (Krause *et al.,* 2019). This paper focuses on the normative alignment of entrepreneurs and the creation of shared values, an underdeveloped aspect of social enterprise ecosystems and the related incubator support that underpins it.

Methodology

The research sought to identify the experiences of incubators operating to support social enterprises in both Poland and Vietnam, with data gathered from the incubators themselves (usually the incubator CEO or another senior manager), as well as wider stakeholders including social entrepreneurs, government officials and third sector support organisations/funders. The research adopted a qualitative approach centred on semi-structured interviews to elicit participant perspectives of support for social enterprise ecosystems and incubators specifically. The interviews sought to understand the participant's experiences and therefore their 'lived world', with an in-depth interview approach allowing the exploration of complex issues and privileged information in a two-way process (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Denscombe, 2014).

A total of 24 individuals participated in the research (including seven incubator leads), with participants identified as part of a purposeful sampling strategy and in some instances snowballing, in order to identify rich and relevant data to answer the research question (Patton, 2002). Table 1 below details the sample obtained.

Research Code	***Location***	***Stakeholder type***	***Sector***
PE:1	Poland	Social Enterprise	Health
PE:2	Poland	Social Enterprise	Community spaces
PE:3	Poland	Social Enterprise	Safety and security
PE:4	Poland	Social Enterprise	Health
PE:5	Poland	Social Enterprise	Environmental
PN:1	Poland	Social Enterprise Incubator	Social entrepreneurship
PN:2	Poland	Social Enterprise Incubator	Social entrepreneurship
PN:3	Poland	Social Enterprise Incubator	Social Enterprise start-ups
PN:4	Poland	Social Enterprise Incubator	Social Enterprise start-ups

PN:5	Poland	Social Enterprise Incubator	Incubation and training
VE:1	Vietnam	Social Enterprise	Community resilience
VE:10	Vietnam	Social Enterprise	Sustainable employment
VE:2	Vietnam	Social Enterprise	Sustainable employment
VE:4	Vietnam	Social Enterprise	Work integration
VE:5	Vietnam	Social Enterprise	Tourism
VE:6	Vietnam	Social Enterprise	Green energy
VE:7	Vietnam	Social Enterprise	Agriculture
VE:8	Vietnam	Social Enterprise	Tourism
VE:9	Vietnam	Social Enterprise	Work integration
VN:1	Vietnam	Social Enterprise Incubator	Social Enterprise start-ups
VN:2	Vietnam	Social Enterprise Incubator	Youth social enterprise
VN:3	Vietnam	Social Enterprise Incubator	Social entrepreneurship
VN:4	Vietnam	Social Enterprise Incubator	Social entrepreneurship
VN:5	Vietnam	Social Enterprise Incubator	Social entrepreneurship

Table 1: Research sample breakdown

The interviews were analysed using an approach centred on thematic analysis, with the interviews each coded in order to develop meaning and understanding around the phenomena discussed by the participants (Braun and Clarke, 20~~1~~6). Data was organised in Microsoft Excel and analysed using a Thematic Analysis six-phase process (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2020), focused on 'data familiarisation'; 'data coding'; 'theme development'; 'theme review and development'; 'theme refinement and naming', and 'reporting'. The initial phase enables thorough review of transcripts which leads to coding and labelling of information ('data coding'). These codes and labels are then interrogated with patterns and themes identified ('theme development') leading to further refinement through the 'theme review and development' phase. Two codebooks were created for the social enterprise participants and the social enterprise incubators to allow for clearer evaluation of shared meaning within the participant groups. For the social enterprise participants 257 codes were organised across 25 categories; for the social enterprise incubators 220 codes were organised across 18 categories. From this, three themes emerged: Influence of cosmopolitan ideals on the ecosystem; Normative values and the ecosystem shift; and Importation of Skills. These themes are discussed in the next section.

Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, data protection, data storage, and safeguarding were central to the current research. All information regarding the current study, including consent forms was translated into Polish of Vietnamese where appropriate. All interviewee identifying information was anonymised (including where applicable in quotes) and participant codes are used to identify each individual that participated. Ethical approval for the research was obtained through the authors' University's Research Ethics Committee.

The Influence of Cosmopolitan Ideals on the Ecosystem

The first theme related to the relationship between actors within the social enterprise field and globalised institutions. Although prior literature highlights environmental stimuli and personal characteristics as reasons why an entrepreneur embarks upon social (as opposed to commercial) action, social entrepreneurs are not globally homogenous groups (Sastre-Castillo *et al.,* 2015; Austin *et al.,* 2006). One area that has continued to be influential is employment and education, with social entrepreneurs having higher levels in both categories. Within this data, only one of the 22 participants had not got at least a bachelor's degree, whilst six of the eight incubator representatives had either a master's or PhD degree. Participants noted that time spent within the university environment allowed them to be exposed to the international and socially focused networks the institutions were aligned with:

> *I started as the partner of the organisation in Hanoi, the University of Economics and Business. I was working for the university and the programme was there (Vietnamese Incubator:1)*

> *I studied; I was [an] active member of the Students Association. And that's what the network that I was building because it's a lot more than we are like project oriented. Association and we are doing some different things that come up like the Pew Research or scientist scientific association was networking, and doing in practice on the intersection between management and psychology that therefore we've had the opportunity to meet some person at [Social enterprise support hub] (Polish Incubator:1)*

Networks such as these can allow for top-level experiences to filter down when powerful stakeholders are able to dominate the shared narrative (Granovetter, 1985). This can be evidenced with the alignment in view, with incubators being critical of the national legislation that has evolved for social enterprise, compared to the wider international approach (Minh, 2018; Novakova, 2020; Sestovic, 2017). A particular criticism was the political influence on the social enterprise ecosystem, which was

viewed as corrupt, with normative and coercive isomorphic tendencies which enforced conformity if one wanted to receive support or resources (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983):

> *[Internationally] everything is about the rules, and we follow the rules, there's a checklist, you meet all the qualifications or the requirements, and then you get approved. But in Vietnam or Cambodia, everything is about the human, is about the people who are doing this and how they interpret the law (Vietnamese Incubator:1)*

> *This risk is coming from a different source. I do not really see what system incentives would create some kind of development because of our political situation, which is not very stable (Polish Incubator:1)*

Participants in both countries criticised the higher education system for not encouraging entrepreneurship, national laws for not promoting private enterprise, and the school system developing collective, rather than individual agency. The solution to the perceived problem was to pursue/continue the importation of western behaviours, which were believed to enable the positive development of the social enterprise ecosystem and encourage a vibrant support environment. These mimetic isomorphic pressures played out in both ecosystems through cosmopolitan thinking, which viewed western models as superior and viewed the importation of ideas from global mobile elites, as a means of circumventing these trends (Levy et al., 2007):

> *They believe that the universities in Poland are a bit too weak, and they're not so interested much in this region or working with [Funder]. We decided to design a USA certificate based on [Funder] know how, and with close relation with [UK University]. This is the story of how the [Social enterprise certification programme] started (Polish Incubator 1)*

> *You know, there was no rule of law protecting private enterprise. And so, this made people very risk averse, and the socialist culture rewarded people who are really good at doing what they were told. But the penalties for taking chances and failing were very, very high (Vietnamese Incubator 2)*

When describing incubator and social enterprise support successes, it was often attributed to the leveraging of international networks, such as through the building of relationships with funders, gaining access to training camps, and the importation of international experts into the support mechanisms. These processes denote cosmopolitanism, with stakeholders being less focused on 'participatory' processes, but instead focused on the 'technological' processes that allow for positive change. This demonstrates the role that is perceived in reducing power distance through embeddedness in global social networks and the benefits that can be accrued in being enabled to ignore national or local elites (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 2004):

> *And also there's one partners from Boston College in the USA. They also have like, entrepreneurial camps like us, and we collaborate with them to train design thinking (Vietnamese Incubator 9)*

> *I think that with political willingness is not there, there are no incentives. The debates we have like with the Norwegian funds that they are like coming to Poland [...] But they negotiated that they can dedicate it to some goals, objectives, and they are usually focused on some human rights (Polish Incubator 1)*

These processes and the normative paradigm that has been constructed around them, has led a continued desire to work with international institutions, to leverage cosmopolitan practices, and to develop effective and sustainable environments for social enterprise:

> *[...] we also want to be more active on the European level, which means that we are very active in participating in training and other educational activities ran by other European organisations. We wanted to keep this track by having more cooperation, but we also want to invite European trainers to finance and offering them our workshops showing our methodology just being a part of this huge European exchange network (Polish Incubator 5)*

> *But actually, it's like so personal. We have help to do that from another big organisation which sponsors educational opportunities (Vietnamese Incubator 9)*

As social actors have become embedded in internationalised organisations and partaken in socially minded networks, critical views on the national environment for social enterprise have aligned with the dominant liberal narrative: weak legislative development, inappropriate political conduct, and an ineffective education system for entrepreneurship (Minh, 2018; Novakova, 2020; Sestovic, 2017). The resolution to these problems was the importation of successful mechanisms from their sponsors, such as certification programmes based on Western models, entrepreneur camps, or ideologically aligned funders, further deepening the normative relationships between the involved actors, as well as giving primacy to international solutions to national issues. Whilst in some instances this does and has led to improvements in some sections of the social enterprise support ecosystem, it also tends to delegitimise wider local and national contexts that are better at understanding cultural contexts, which ultimately damages the effectiveness and sustainability of the wider social enterprise ecosystems in transitioning economies.

Normative values and the ecosystem shift

The perceived benefit of social entrepreneurship is that is offers social actors an innovative model of economic organisation, which allows them to benefit from the markets in the support of their social goals (Mazzei, Montgomery, and Dey, 2021). These processes are celebrated as one of the positive aspects of liberalism, championing individual agency, and the capitalist recuperation of self-help, thus challenging state-centric approaches (Nicholls, 2007). The relationship between the incubators and the wider networks has allowed for importation of support models deemed appropriate for the development of a positive, and internationally aligned, social enterprise environment. A challenge to the support model, however, is the recognition that the beneficiaries the support is offered too, may not be natural entrepreneurs, but rather activists exploring new opportunities:

> *It's interesting, because people have a different understanding of what of social enterprising, and is for good or bad, like, say, most of the social enterprises that I've encountered here are mostly coming from a non-profit background, and they'll be doing more like a, like a charity work (Vietnamese Incubator 7)*

> *There's something that [Social Enterprise incubator] has been working on. What else to say about it? [...] I would say more of activists, but also where we are trying to teach them how to work more systemically and financially independently [...] We would like the social activists to be more entrepreneurial (Polish Incubator 2)*

In addition, incubators noted that a pull factor toward them for the beneficiaries is the financial support, which is of growing importance in resource starved environments:

> *So, there's still big investors in Vietnam, but others like the World Bank and USA, actually told me to my face that Vietnam was moving into middle income country status, and they prefer to put their money into, say Laos or Africa, or some places that were much poorer, which I think is perfectly normal (Vietnamese Incubator 3)*

> *[...] because, you know, that in Vietnam, now, you become the country with average income. So, most of international NGO, they, you know, withdraw their project out of Vietnam. (Vietnamese Incubator 1)*

In resource starved environments, conforming to governmental or cosmopolitan strategies can create opportunities for entrepreneurs to access and exploit gatekept resources (Dey and Teasdale, 2015). This was noted by social enterprise participants who argued that securing resources was the main driving factor in joining support networks:

But when it comes to direct fundings, I'm still working on that. There will be investors, scholars, and other investor networks that I been paying attention to, and of course, I could consider crowdfunding and different source of fundings. And that will be my focus for the next few weeks (Polish Enterprise 1)

I have worked in many NGOs since then, but I found that one major weakness of some NGOs in Vietnam is that they depend heavily on external funds, which is an unsustainable source of finance for their operation. What if there is no funding? (Vietnamese Enterprise 8)

Maybe in the next few years. We have no fund. When we have no fund, we have no project (Vietnamese Enterprise 1)

In Vietnam, this has even led to organisations to change their business models to better suit the incubators agenda:

So that's why we fail to apply that kind of business model. And we rely on the funding and the donors and it's like, not charitable, but we have very small profit, because that's why this year I have to change the business model (Vietnamese Enterprise 6)

I was still sceptical about like using business as a tool to solve this, also enterprise, and I never thought that [social enterprise] would go ahead (Vietnamese Enterprise 7)

This organisational change is indicative of the ecosystem shift, with a social enterprise abandoning its previous non-profit model to ensure access to support. These pressures were less likely to lead to organisational change in Poland, however, the incubator networks were seen as a valuable tool for navigating around funding barriers put in place by the state to politically align the third sector. Access was based on value-alignment; however, the experiences of youth and migrant entrepreneurs suggest that this is not necessarily based on potential social impact, but also normative definitions of the in-group and acceptance of power-distance, no longer third sector actors, but rather social entrepreneurs. Once recognised, cosmopolitan approaches towards global and supranational funding streams enabled the social enterprises to bypass domestic pressures and conditions and access resources unavailable to others (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 2004). Thus, they effectively undertook cultural manoeuvrability to gain competitive advantage (Garsten, 2003):

I would say knowledge is power, when you have an idea, when you have passion, when you have enthusiasm, this is never enough. Learning is always the most important thing. You need to learn how the business works in every aspect (Polish Enterprise 1)

The importance of securing new funding sources was also noted by the incubators, who regularly saw the collapse of social enterprises, indicating significant pressures on organisations. However, their attempt at resolution presents a potential feedback loop caused by the cosmopolitan influence within ecosystems. As third sector actors adjust their organisational model or realign internal values to increase their legitimacy, they become reliant on continuing to secure international funding, as they distance themselves from the national third sector construct. This is an example of the interplay of DiMagio and Powell's (1983) normative, coercive, and mimetic isomorphic pressures. Access to support is reliant on the potential entrepreneur's overt belief in cosmopolitan values and a move away from collectivist to liberal organisation models. This is reinforced, however, through funding and other system benefits.

> *It's limited also by strange relationship with money issue as well. Also, you know, quite often, the financial issues are leading to activist burnout (Polish Incubator 2)*

> *So, I mean, I think the last time I really looked at this seriously, I was working with [...] who was the head of the Vietnamese association of social enterprises, and what we found out that was probably 75% of them existed in name only and didn't have any trade started. There was some idea they were going to do something, but they never get off the ground (Vietnamese Incubator 3)*

Aside from the potential of financial alienation, the move toward international alignment has also separated participants from working with the national governments, who have often seen the third sector as hosting competitors rather than partners (Markard, 2011). A trend noted in Vietnam was for social enterprise to develop trends and respond to areas that the government was inactive in, such as mental health (Maher et al., 2022). This suggests that whereas there is a normative shift, beneficiaries still recognise the wider environment and behave in a manner as to not attract negative attention. Relationships they do build with the local government are more productive, though they can depend on political alignment with the potential gatekeeping of at-risk communities or high value social actors: .

> *I knew from local people that people can submit [a problem] to the local authority, then a local authority can send to us by letter. [...] we then send a team directly to the local side and to make a survey about the need to make sure that [...] we are suitable, so we can make a plan (Vietnamese Enterprise 1)*

> *With the local municipalities, we are able to work with the more, let's say, more open, more liberal or more left type of approach. And we have such [other] cities, it's not very successful. [When working with one state department] They understood that [we have specialist] knowledge. So they asked us to do the trainings for them, and they*

> *had to explain quite a lot to their bosses, why they are asking us to do this (Polish Enterprise 4)*

As incubators have developed support networks, the primacy goal has been to support the continued evolution of the social enterprise environment and develop local entrepreneurs. By placing finance as a cornerstone of the model a range of third sector actors have been attracted to the organisational model as a means of securing their finances. This 'tactical mimicry', however, is not unique to the enterprise/incubator relationship, with other behaviours noted that will enable an organisational actor to survive by acting as a partner to the state (or at least not a competitor) (Hoyos and Angel-Urdinola, 2018). What is unique, and suggests an ecosystem shift, is the normative pressure to become 'entrepreneurs' and develop a value-based relationship that may alienate them from localised partners or disadvantaged communities who are 'gate-kept' by political actors.

Importation of Skills

With the cornerstone of the support system being financial provisions and noted weaknesses in innate entrepreneurial traits, the development of organisational support has been challenging for incubators. A particular problem noted by the social enterprises involved in the incubator system was the lack of skills available in the local labour pool:

> *[Finding a] qualified [manager] who has a passion for people with disability not easy to find (Vietnamese Enterprise 9)*

> *[…] But what I like to change maybe some more structure, because we are operating on the moon. We are scaling up, we are doubling our work in each year, but we are not doubling our team (Polish Enterprise 5)*

These issues are noted in wider third sector studies, with organisations struggling to retain staff, tending to pay lower wages than for-profit companies and offering fewer opportunities for career advancement (Ban *et al.,* 2003; Brown and Yoshioka, 2003; Kang *et al.,* 2015; Kim and Lee, 2007). The incubators surrounding the entrepreneurs noted these issues within the organisations they worked with; however, within this they took aim at the lack of liberal market behaviours evolving within the field and the continuing socialist undercurrent hangover from the former Soviet style planned economies:

> *There are some mentees [that] have come with us to have some business idea, but our main goal is like to train about entrepreneurial mindset. (Vietnamese Incubator 2)*

> *Sometimes they have a good business model, but they don't know how to pitch (Vietnamese Incubator 1)*

> *There's also the issue that it's lacking a way of thinking. We have this bad memory, from the socialist times, this is the one thing that that I think has something to do with the situation of social enterprises in Poland (Polish Incubator 4)*

To resolve this, the incubator systems have designed programme of business support that are aimed at the up-skilling of the entrepreneur, treating them as 'organisational heroes' responsible for all aspects of the business:

> *So, I feel the connection. The association meeting is sometimes a little big because it's a programme with a lot of activities and supervision going on all the time. But in general, we find all those activities is very beneficial (Vietnamese Incubator 1)*

Incubators had noted, though, that the continued focus and workload is leading to entrepreneur burnout:

> *So sometimes people are just burning out because they've invested so much of themselves and they have got not enough return (Polish Incubator 2)*

To support this, networks of experts have been created to allow for a continuing importation of skills into the beneficiary social enterprises, as well as cycles of volunteers from the West to support organisational aspects of the business:

> *We are very active now in participating in trainings and other educational activities ran by other European organisations, but we wanted to keep this track and have having more corporations like that but also, we want to invite European trainers to finance and offering them our workshops showing our methodology just being a part of this huge European exchange network. (*Polish Incubator *5)*

> *And today really, that's to my great satisfaction, [volunteers] know, much, much more than [we] do. And they are very capable. So, when I need advice and go and ask them what, what we should do, how we should do, etc.* (Vietnamese Enterprise 2)

> *[...] and they already help us, you know, send a volunteer come to help halfway. And we, last year, we have a one person is named [Volunteer], he happens to build up our microfinance programme.* (Vietnamese Enterprise 1)

This approach has led to the domination of international perspectives, with social entrepreneurs believing that the programmes were focused on internal capacity building, rather that leveraging knowledge from those with direct experience:

> *So, to be frank, we have been invited a couple of times, you know, to some, let's say online meetings and things like that. And the problem is that the focus is not put, as far as I can I have seen is not put on leveraging our knowledge as a company, but rather bringing people that have accomplished something quite a long time ago* (Polish Enterprise 2)

With incubators noting the weaknesses in the national social enterprise support ecosystem, they have used the relationships that they have built within the national and international field to cycle in experts to support their beneficiaries. The first noted issue is the focus on upskilling the entrepreneur with the information needed to run their organisation effectively, such as marketing, HR, or legal advice has normalised high workloads (and burnout) leading to distractions for some organisations from meaningful social action (Hryciuk and Korolczuk, 2013; Marston, 2012) and consequently leading to mission-drift (Cornforth, 2014). The continued importation of support suggests that there remains a knowledge gap, with organisations reliant on Western volunteers in Vietnam, or short-term hires from the 'gig economy' in Poland, to help effectively run aspects of their businesses. However, participants noted that this support was not reflective of their experiences, and that the system did not allow them to contribute, suggesting significant power-distance between the global and local levels.

Discussion

As the world globalises, there has been a growing interest in the concept of cosmopolitanism; a global society that transcends national ideals (Tan, Shapiro, and Hardin, 2004). Although proponents focus on the prospect of global democratisation and the establishment of universal concepts of justice, the Western hegemony and the promotion of neo-liberal ideals leads to questions on its coercive power, with the 'mobile elite', who benefit from the freedom of movement, maintaining positions of power over those who are held captive by location, through their ability to leverage global systems (Dockstader, 2018; Isikel, 2020). This research focuses on how these tensions emerge and impact the third sectors field for social enterprise within transitioning economies. Both the Republic of Poland and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam housed orthodox Soviet command economies, with highly institutionalised third sectors (Jacobsson and Korolcruz, 2017; Minh, 2018). Civil society was heavily influenced by collectivist values that facilitated the building of social relationships, civic norms, and group membership, allowing incentive structures to be defined by powerful social actors, who rewarded collective interests and constrained undesirable behaviours (Christoforou, 2010). The West's attempted realignment of the third sector in post-Soviet environments has led to a confrontation of values, such as the removal of state or powerful social actors from positions of influence and a belief in democratisation and liberal, global, individualised markets has been promoted, alongside the importance of

supporting institutions, such as universities, corporations, and funders (and within this, incubators).

This has created what could be argued as a cosmopolitan, international elite within both countries' social enterprise ecosystems, even though these elites are Polish and Vietnamese nationals. Each of the participants within the incubators identified experiences with internationalised networks and were able to apply knowledge from their international experiences to their national third sector, discussing issues with legislation, corruption, poor system incentives, and the education system. Previous research suggests that the discourse within the networks is led by those with positions of power who can dominate narratives, in this case, international(ised) responses to normative isomorphism (Granovetter, 1985).

This research supports this embedded focus, suggesting that both the highlighting of problems and development of solution is embedded in the conversations between the incubators and their international stakeholders, rather than being inclusive of the beneficiaries. Able to align perceived needs with the dominate narrative, incubator stakeholders can leverage these normative agreements into practical resource support and guidance on how to develop the field. This is evidenced by the application of 'cosmopolitan' solutions to national problems, for example, the development and mimicking of courses and certification processes adopted from western universities, seeking out ideologically aligned international funders, and bringing international experts in to run training seminars. The emerging power-distance that this creates, is then compounded by the categorisation of beneficiaries as 'activists' awaiting transformation into entrepreneurs, having their voices alienated from the development of the support system. Although this is a process of normative isomorphism, it additionally highlights the interplay of the triumvirate of normative, mimetic, and coercive pressures (Sowa, 2008; Greenwood and Meyer, 2008).

The most overt result of the power-dynamic is the positioning of the entrepreneurs as all-encompassing 'organisational heroes', with targeted programmes aimed at upskilling individuals to ensure the successful running of their organisation. The issue with this individualised focus, is that it runs counter to the lived experiences of those on the ground, who have highlighted a labour shortage, rather than a skills gap. Another example is with participants noting the stresses and organisational collapse witnessed in each location, one of the resolutions is a reliance on short-term employment through either international volunteers or freelancers to fulfil skills gaps within the traditionally 'middle management' organisational level, cycles that are at risk of collapse in system shocks (such as the COVID-19 pandemic).

Another tension in the model is defined through resource access. The research highlights that whilst globalised networks offer unique or gatekept resources, they are likely to attract applicants as funding sources decline in growing and/or transitioning economies. This may create long-term issues where third sector actors, such as NGOs, cooperatives, or other civil society organisations are funnelled into support systems that seek to fundamentally change behaviours, which then alienates them from national sources of support. Importantly, this may also place barriers between social enterprises and their own beneficiaries, with powerful social actors seeing them as competitors, and gatekeeping access. This further embeds the power dynamic within the field, with the incubator system importing models to fix their perception of the problem, without input from those within the system. This exacerbates the tensions inherent in cosmopolitanism between 'mobile' international actors and 'locked-in' nationals exacerbating the normative, coercive and mimetic isomorphic tendencies inherent in the system leading to the beneficiaries instead being captured in the system . Table 2 below outlines the tensions inherent in cosmopolitan models of social enterprise support in transitioning economies, centred on isomorphic pressures and the three emergent thematic areas identified in this research.

Thematic Area	***Isomorphic Pressures***		
	Normative	**Coercive**	**Mimetic**
Ecosystem Influence	Import of quality systems; education and training; corruption; embeddedness/social networks; globalisation	Policy/legislative conflict; corruption; funding streams; top-down focus	Tactical mimicry; embeddedness/social networks
Systemic Tensions	Differing quality standards; policy/legislative conflict	Policy/legislation conflict; funding streams; sustainability	Activism versus entrepreneurship; tactical mimicry; cultural manoeuvrability
Sector Skills	Labour quality perceptions; Soviet mindset; organisational heroes; normalised burnout	Subsidised international labour; labour shortages; top-down focus; mission drift	Organizational heroes' education and training

Table 2: Cosmopolitan social enterprise ecosystem support and isomorphic pressures[1].

[1] It should be noted that different ecosystem factors can have normative, coercive and/or mimetic isomorphic tendencies, and therefore factors can appear in multiple areas.

Summary

The impact of the Western influences within the third sector of transitioning economies has been the focus of significant research, highlighting the weak embedding of liberal practices, difficulty in overcoming cultural and collectivist values, and the powerful position of the state and its allies (Jacobsson and Korolcruz, 2017; Wishermann, 2010). This paper has explored the cosmopolitan challenges and the role of normative relationships between the social enterprise incubator system and its international sponsors. As socially-minded actors become involved with globalised institutions, such as universities, access to and participation in international civil society networks is likely to influence their perceptions of appropriate modes of collective action (Van Ryzin *et al*., 2009; Harding, 2006). As these visions align, internationalised institutions offer tools and access to gate-kept resources that enable the development of appropriate support mechanisms, whilst the development of this system is a negotiation between the incubators and the internationalised institutions on how to best 'free' the field from negative influences. Beneficiaries of the system are identified as social actors awaiting transformation, a result of the cosmopolitan tension between 'mobile elites' and 'locked-in' nationals, issues which are compounded by economic growth, as 'middle income' countries see a decline in international philanthropic investment and a growth of institutional funding (Maher *et al.,* 2022). This has led to tactical mimicry as third sector actors embark on organisational change to garner access to the funding provided by internationally aligned incubators (Dey and Teasdale, 2015). The issue with this is that it creates a knowledge-gap that allows powerful global actors to dominate the terms of reference. Practically, this is seen in the definition of what a social entrepreneur is, and the development of suitable support mechanisms that beneficiaries are unable to influence, leading to the building of fragile cycles of volunteers, or the overburdening of entrepreneurs as 'organisational heroes'. It additionally can 'lock in' beneficiaries into a system they are unable to influence, and unable to leave with their newly adopted organisational model only applicable to the international third sector context. As a Western construct, social entrepreneurship is unlikely to ever be free of the values on which it was built; however, the cosmopolitan construct of support systems needs to be reconsidered, to ensure the internationalisation of the mechanisms does not simply replace the keyholders for those who are locked in.

Limitations and Further Research

The research presented was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning interviews were conducted exclusively online. This may mean that the research participants are not fully representative of the respective national social enterprise sector. Technological issues also occurred with limitations on connections or participant

devices, and the conducting of interviews online may have inhibited participation from potential participants with lower digital competency.

The findings of the research can be further explored through the inclusion of third sector actors or incubators who have exited social enterprise incubators, or the wider field. Their perception of the field, stresses and barriers would further enlighten the impact on the exclusion of voice, reliance on external support, and organisation adaption on their third sector entities.

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