



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Business Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ibusrev

Bringing Nordic Slush to Asia: Entrepreneurial internationalization of an NGO as a social movement

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Internationalization
Social movement theory
NGOs
Finland

ABSTRACT

We explore the internationalization of Slush, an entrepreneurship-promoting NGO from Finland that expanded to Japan, China, and Singapore. We incorporate the social movement theory that allows revealing special mechanisms of NGOs' internationalization. We show, first, that international opportunity development of internationalizing NGOs is triggered by the shared dissatisfaction with societal conditions. Second, their collective resource mobilization enables networks and learning in foreign markets. Third, internationalizing NGOs overcome internationalization liabilities through building their social identities. We also offer a model of NGO internationalization that incorporates the social movement theory. Overall, our study broadens internationalization research by bringing a non-business theory into it.

1. Introduction

International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) is not a new phenomenon in practice (Weerawardena et al., 2010). Organizations such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, the Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, COSPAR, and the Library Project are able to combat pivotal problems like environmental degradation, climate change, poverty, access to education and healthcare, human rights etc. Through these activities, they have gained a massive global impact and significant political influence. One of the distinctive features of these organizations is that they are deeply embedded in local ecosystems but, at the same time, largely outward looking, internationally-oriented and seek opportunities across national borders (Madon, 1999). From one hand, INGOs serve as intermediaries between local governments and corporations, transform norms and practices of international business and help other businesses to fulfill their international ambitions (Marano & Tashman, 2012). However, from another hand, they themselves raise funds internationally, establish affiliates abroad and, in general, internationalize vigorously (Doh & Teegen, 2002; Lewis & Opoku-Mensah, 2006). Despite INGOs are increasingly multinational and entrepreneurial (Fee & Gray, 2013; Kourula, 2010), internationalization studies including international entrepreneurship have not yet fully captured their relevance due to the predominant focus on for-profit companies (Teegen et al., 2004; Buckley et al., 2017; Dimitratos et al., 2010;

Ciravegna et al., 2018). Thus, INGOs have remained at a research periphery and mainly studied through their partnerships with multinational enterprises (MNEs) (Vachani et al., 2009). Hence, their own internationalization paths as active independent players have been left without proper research attention (Teegen et al., 2004; Teegen, 2003).

To encourage more research on INGOs, Teegen et al. (2004) proposed that they can be studied from the perspective of social movements applied in sociology. The authors posited that this approach had beneficial implications for studying INGOs because their collective actions reflect many elements of social movements; hence, it would not only allow for understanding INGOs on global economic landscape but also delimit and enrich internationalization research through bringing in theories from cognate fields and disciplines. This observation is consistent with ideas from social movement research that organizations and social movements have strong similarities in their mechanisms of development and change (Davis et al., 2005). Thereby, using the concepts from social movement studies can offer useful implications for understanding organizational processes (such as internationalization, in this paper) (Campbell, 2005). However, surprisingly enough this invitation by Teegen et al. (2004) has not received enough awareness, and the application of social movement theory (SMT) in internationalization studies has not been advanced further. We believe the reason for this lies in the lack of interdisciplinarity in internationalization research (Chabowski et al., 2017) as scholars still work predominantly within a single

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2020.101749>

Received 3 April 2019; Received in revised form 6 August 2020; Accepted 17 August 2020

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discipline, report to peers with a similar background and may not have competences needed for crossing field boundaries (Cheng et al. 2014). Overall, the call by Buckley et al. (2017) for newer non-business theories from social sciences that would strengthen our knowledge about NGOs in the global context is yet without response.

Addressing these unanswered calls, we would like to bring the attention towards SMT back and recommend it is a prominent conceptual tool adding to our understanding of internationalizing NGOs. This theory and its specific focus on collective action, collective resource mobilization and collective identity (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Diani, 1992; Westd, 2004) can deepen our understanding of NGOs' internationalization. Therefore, taking entrepreneurial internationalization and SMT as our theoretical stepping stones, we follow an exploratory approach and frame our research question as follows: *how do NGOs expand across borders?* We bridge these two conceptual foundations through the empirical case of Slush, a nongovernmental and nonprofit organization run by students to support entrepreneurship. Launched in Finland, it has expanded to Japan, China, and Singapore (slush.org).

Our study intends to make several important theoretical contributions. *First*, by bringing in SMT we respond to the calls for new theoretical tools for studying the internationalization of NGOs and their global strategies (Teegen et al., 2004; Buckley et al., 2017). Our study offers a model of NGOs' internationalization as a result of collective action. Through this model, we weave SMT into the internationalization process of NGOs, therefore, show how this theory adds to existing internationalization research. Bringing the NGOs into the agenda of entrepreneurial internationalization research, we also intend to discharge it from focusing predominantly on small and young firms (Reuber et al., 2017; Dimitratos & Jones, 2005; Rialp et al., 2005). Applying SMT from sociology, we also address the calls to involve a wider array of disciplines into international entrepreneurship to foster its further development (Verbeke & Ciravegna, 2018; Reuber et al., 2018). Because interdisciplinary studies cross-fertilize both intersecting research domains, our *second* contribution is to the SMT. We propose a new contextual application for this theory, namely internationalization, and link social movements with their organizational manifestations, i.e. NGOs, through which certain societal trends spread globally. We also propose further applications of the SMT in business scholarship.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section covers our main theoretical standpoints originating from entrepreneurial internationalization research and studies on INGOs, which also gives us the link to SMT. Further, we present the empirical methods and procedures of our study. The section Results demonstrates our findings, from which we then derive our propositions and a model in the section Discussion. In Conclusions, we outline our implications for theory and practice, directions for future research and limitations.

2. Theoretical standpoints

2.1. Entrepreneurial internationalization

Entrepreneurial internationalization has been a strong focus in the international entrepreneurship literature (e.g., Knight & Cavusgil, 2004; Jones & Coviello, 2005; Kahiya, 2020). Even though the term "international entrepreneurship" (IE) has been in use since 1988 (Morrow, 1988), the IE field only started to gain real momentum after Oviatt and McDougal (1994) introduced the notion of international new ventures or firms that seek early and rapid internationalization from inception. They often experience three types of liability: *the liability of newness* related to their inexperience limits access to resources and networks, thus raising questions on their credibility; *the liability of smallness* hinders their survival due to a lack of slack resources, thus challenging their internationalization; and, *the liability of foreignness* raises the barriers to their entering new foreign markets and building relations with potential customers and suppliers (Zahra, 2005). Generally, IE began to develop with a strong interest in younger and smaller firms, thus, excluding other

types of organizations (Zahra & George, 2002; Keupp & Gassman, 2009), such as nonprofits and NGOs. The exclusion was conceptually eliminated when McDougall and Oviatt (2000) suggested a broader definition of IE as a combination of innovative, proactive, and risk-seeking behavior across national borders for value creation in organizations. In light of this broader definition, scholars have been encouraged to focus on the discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of international opportunities rather than firm types (Oivatt & McDougall, 2005; Zahra, 2005). Further research has demonstrated that international opportunity is a rather complex concept. For instance, the review by Mainela, Puhakka, and Servis (2014) emphasizes the need to appreciate the social setting and locate international opportunities in a wider context, in order to understand how they emerge and are enacted. International opportunity and its development are recognized as the key drivers of the entrepreneurial internationalization (Kontinen & Ojala, 2011b). Overall, despite the conceptual delimitation of IE and calls for the inclusion of various types of firms into its domain, this research stream has been mainly focusing on profit-seeking small and new firms. Therefore, the internationalization of NGOs has been left outside the IE research agenda (Sullivan & Daniels, 2008; Buckley et al., 2017).

Entrepreneurial internationalization studies should not neglect the importance of the internationalization process theory known as the Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). This process theory uses a behavioral approach to explain internationalization decisions; Johanson and Vahlne (1977) theorized an internationalization model focusing on the gradual acquisition and use of knowledge about foreign markets and on increasing commitments to foreign markets incrementally. Thus, it is a model of risk reduction through experiential learning of business environments and the internationalization process itself as the firm internationalizes. Specifically, firms expand abroad gradually through acquiring experiences, knowledge, and commitments in foreign markets. Hence, they internationalize first into markets with a low psychic distance, progressing to high psychic-distance markets (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977).

Later, researchers have challenged the Uppsala model by studying rapidly internationalizing firms such as international new ventures (Oviatt & McDougal, 1994) and born global firms (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004), and found that firms do not always follow incremental internationalization but could expand to high psychic-distance markets from inception. Later, Johanson and Vahlne (2009) revisited their model and changed their perspective from markets to relationships. They suggested that firms discover and develop opportunities through their network positions, and internationalization would be difficult without gaining insidership position in a foreign market network. Hence, the roots of uncertainty changed from psychic distance to liabilities of outsidership. This new model of internationalization is in line with the network theory of internationalization (Johanson & Mattson, 1988), based on which, firms do not decide on entry modes but select entry nodes representing "establishment points in a foreign market network" and directly or indirectly connect expanding firms with customers and suppliers (Jansson & Sandberg, 2008: 67). Along with it, Johanson and Vahlne (2006) posit that international opportunity development is an important outcome of relationship commitments with firms in the market. Their recent study of the evolution of the multinational business enterprise highlights the importance of intertwined knowledge development and relationship commitments between multinational business enterprises and their partners (Vahlne & Johanson, 2017). Notably, knowledge development can also produce changes in relationship commitments (Vahlne & Bhatti, 2018). Overall, despite the original 1977 model was to a great extent incompatible with entrepreneurial-internationalization thinking, its later modifications have been applicable to explain fast internationalization of entrepreneurial firms of all sizes and ages (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Vahlne & Johanson, 2017); in the revisions of the model, the authors emphasized the importance of entrepreneurial actions for reducing uncertainty and opportunity discovery processes (Vahlne &

Johanson, 2020). The above development of internationalization models has offered us a comprehensive theoretical basis to study the internationalization of NGOs.

2.2. International NGOs

The terms “nonprofit organization” and “nongovernmental organization” are often used interchangeably (see e.g., Herman et al., 2005: 105). For instance, Teegen et al. (2004: 466) define NGOs as “private, not-for-profit organizations that aim to serve particular societal interests by focusing advocacy and/or operational efforts on social, political and economic goals, including equity, education, health, environmental protection and human rights”. This definition shows NGOs can be nonprofit-making entities formed by citizens of civil societies for various societal and humanitarian purposes, functioning autonomously from governments. As nonprofit entities, NGOs do not share profits among their members but use them to promote their objectives. Defining INGOs, we refer to NGOs whose operations spread across national borders (Herman et al., 2005).

INGOs have been attracting research attention for several decades and been studied from a variety of perspectives. Thus, scholars have investigated INGOs’ strategic and practical accountability (Cavill & Sohail, 2007), their extensive reliance on voluntary labor (Lacey & Ilkan, 2006; Won, 2018), and their learning experiences in foreign environments (Madon, 1999; Power et al., 2010; Fee & Gray, 2013). However, the key sense in which NGOs have become involved in the IB research agenda is through their interactions with MNEs. For example, Teegen (2003) and Vachani, Doh, and Teegen (2009) examined these relations from the transaction costs perspective. Others show that MNEs can build partnerships with NGOs in order to manage their own social legitimacy (Marano & Tashman, 2012), and gain localized knowledge and embeddedness in local informal networks (Webb et al., 2010). Kourula (2010) provides insights on various forms of engagement in business-NGO relations. However, this research direction still prioritized attention on MNEs (Lucea & Doh, 2012; Buckley & Ghauri, 2004). Hence, Buckley, Doh, and Benischke (2017) posit that in researching MNE-NGO dyads, IB scholars have predominantly focused on MNEs, whereas their counterparts, NGOs, have been neglected.

In their important work to advance our understanding of INGOs, Doh and Teegen (2002) and Jad (2007), acknowledge that often they are formalized organizational manifestations of broader social movements and trends occurring in societies. Teegen et al. (2004) establish the connection between social movements and INGOs explaining that collective actions spread across borders because of their tight interconnectedness through networks; if these collective actions are sustained over time as distinct activities targeted for a social change they form social movements; further, social movements can structurally evolve into stand-alone organizations like NGOs. Despite accepting the concepts of social movement and collective action as relevant to INGOs, scholars have yet to further deepen this linkage, and the SMT has remained unfairly neglected by internationalization researchers. We introduce this theory in more detail below, in order to demonstrate its applicability to understanding the internationalization of NGOs.

2.3. The social movement theory

The SMT is a highly diverse area of research located at the intersection of sociology, political sciences, and collective psychology (Diani, 1992; Westd, 2004). It seeks to explain social mobilization and collective actions, their manifestations and repertoires, and their possible cultural, societal, and political effects. A social movement can be defined as “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977: 1217–1218).

A common assumption in the SMT is that there has to be some collectively perceived inconsistency between the actual and desired

states of some social condition for the social movement to emerge and develop. Depending on the context of a social movement, the literature has referred to it as a grievance (Opp, 1988), discontent (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), relative deprivation (Morrison, 1971), or perceived injustice (van Zomeren et al., 2008v). For example, various ecological and green movements are discontented with environmental conditions and policies around them; different peaceful movements act against inter-human violence or/and some particular war. The necessary conditions for this discontent are: wanting something you do not have, and feeling you deserve this missing component (Walker & Smith, 2002). Overall, it triggers desires for activism and social movement participation more effectively than individual characteristics of each group member separately (Kay LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2016). Importantly, this discontent is not a sufficient condition alone for the social movement to emerge. McCarthy and Zald (1977) state that there is always enough discontent in any society; moreover, it can be created and manipulated externally.

Shifting the prevailing emphasis on grievances and discontent, the resource-mobilization approach started to develop in SMT (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). It posits that a viable social movement has to be well organized and ensure that it “secures collective control over the resources needed for collective action” (Jenkins, 1983: 532). This approach builds on the assumption that social movements produce outcomes that have a public-good nature; also, resources and costs of working to obtain these goods can be collective (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). For example, collective resources can be cities (Healey, 2002) or social benefits (Sjöberg, 2010); they can have important external benefits for those beyond the direct beneficiaries. Edwards and McCarthy (2004) develop a typology and claim that the resources required for social movement can be categorized into five dimensions: moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material. They also argue that mobilization can be achieved in four steps: 1) creating social movement organizations and building organizational capacity; 2) mobilizing money; 3) mobilizing labor; and 4) creating movement structures. The effectiveness of mobilization is impacted by political opportunity structures, shared interests that define group identity and solidarity, and by social infrastructure. This infrastructure may relate to network ties available to movement activists, and forums where the movement’s purpose, philosophy and agenda are discussed. Importantly, the effectiveness of resource mobilization requires an organizational body to handle interactions with external collectivity, control resource transactions, and be responsible for the costs of and rewards for social movement activity (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

Another stream of SMT indicates that effective social movements should have strong identities. This identity is built at three levels: individual identity, collective identity, and public identity (Johnston et al., 1995). Individual identity is “the wholly personal traits that...are internalized and imported to social movement participation as idiosyncratic biographies” (Johnston et al., 1995: 12). Collective identity refers to “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution” (Poletta & Jasper, 2001: 285). Collective identity is a “moving target” and never final, a matter of continuous reflexive revisions of group representations and its relations with others (Melucci, 1995). It differs from ideology because it is associated with positive feelings for other members of a group (Poletta & Jasper, 2001). Neither is it the same as solidarity, which is a unifying sense of belonging, rather than an outcome of collective identity (Saunders, 2008). Public identity “captures the influences that the external public have on the way social movement adherents think about themselves” (Johnston et al., 1995: 18). Overall, the identity of a social movement facilitates or inhibits participation therein (Poletta & Jasper, 2001), and generates favorable or unfavorable public opinion concerning the movement, which is in turn decisive on resources available to the movement (McCrigh & Dunlap, 2015). It is also important for the legitimacy of social movements. Legitimacy reveals to insiders, members outside the movement and potential members that they can positively evaluate their group, its goals can be accepted as valid and reasonable,

and the movement is qualified to achieve them (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Andrews, Beyerlein & Tucker Farnum, 2016). This legitimacy is crucial for social movements' survival because membership is voluntary and there are no coercive relations between members and leaders (Kwok & Keung Chan, 2017).

This article aims to examine how NGOs expand across borders; to do so, we bring together entrepreneurial internationalization research and the SMT. At this point, we have presented our conceptual standpoints that stem from these two theories. In what follows, we demonstrate how we intersect and integrate them empirically through the case of Slush.

3. Methodology

The philosophical commitments of this research belong to the constructivist paradigm; it suggests that “the meanings of social phenomena are constantly set in the minds of social actors” (Bryman, 2004: 438). Subsequently, the ontological premise of this project belongs to relativism, which implies that there are numerous locally constructed realities existing out there. Further, the epistemological premise of this project is interpretivism, which supposes constant interaction between the researcher and the research object who mutually co-create knowledge along the research process. Accordingly, qualitative methodology is a consistent and relevant choice because it puts contexts and subjective meanings of reality into consideration. It implies the exploratory type of inquiry that does not aim to verify cause-effect relations in a form of testable hypotheses but searches for a deeper and context-rich understanding of a phenomenon interpreted from the perspective of respondents. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

Our research has been conducted as an in-depth *single-case study* (Dyer et al., 1991; Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 2009), which is also a common strategy in social movement research (Snow & Trom, 2002). It is based on the case of Slush, an entrepreneurship-promoting INGO and nonprofit organization from Finland (slush.org). This case has been selected because it represents a unique form of INGO combining features of a voluntary-based community of like-minded young enthusiasts, with a strong mission of collective action and an annual international event; and, all these characteristics are together bridging national borders and changing entrepreneurial culture both domestically and abroad. With all these features, Slush differs from and goes beyond conventional entrepreneurship-supporting organizations, such as local incubators, innovation parks, and regional development companies, supported by governments following a top-down approach. Slush also goes beyond a simple start-up community or entrepreneurial ecosystem. As a nonprofit organization, it has employees on the payroll, budgeting, management, and strategy. Further, Slush has chosen not to stay local, embedded only in the local context, but expanded its concept into other countries where the entrepreneurial environment and culture are very different from those of the Nordic countries. We use this case as a contextualized explanation (Welch et al., 2011) on the mechanism of INGOs' internationalization.

The empirical data for this study include primarily 36 qualitative interviews: 11 semi-structured in-depth interviews with the key decision-makers at Slush (see Table 1 and Appendix 1 for the interview guide), and 25 shorter informal interviews conducted with Slush attendees during events in 2016 and 2017. In addition, the data comprise additional follow-up interviews, undertaken following a question and answer structure by WeChat video messaging (e.g., with Antti Sonnien) or e-mail (e.g., with Marianne Vikkula, CEO of Slush in 2016–2017). All interviews were conducted by the authors of this article. We also employ secondary data, such as published interviews with key Slush personnel, press releases, secondary interviews, Slush web pages, and their Facebook page.

Interview transcripts have been analyzed both manually using tables, matrices, mind maps, and so on, and electronically using NVivo software, version 11. The secondary data have been used in part for interview preparation and fact verification. Gathering the data together from

Table 1
Data collection with key decision-makers of Slush.

Interviewee	Date	Duration of the interview
1 Ilkka Kivimäki, Chairman of the Board, Slush	October 6, 2017	53 min.
2 Olga Balakhina, Head of Global Operations	October 19, 2017	57 min.
3 Hai Sun, Producer, Slush China	November 23, 2017	47 min.
4 Anna Ratala, Head of Slush Singapore	November 27, 2017	58 min.
5 Hannes Kallioinen, Head of Volunteering Team	November 20, 2017	50 min.
6 Alexander Pihlainen, Head of Marketing Team	December 15, 2017	49 min.
7 Chen Wang, Head of Slush China	April 10, 2018	50 min
8 Sami Jääskeläinen, Investors Slush Singapore	July 18, 2018	56 min
9 Jouni Laitinen, Partnership Slush Japan	July 6, 2018	72 min
10 Antti Sonninen, Head of Slush Japan 2014–2018	October 9 and 11, 2018	20 + 30 min
11 Lauri Tammi, Head of Slush China 2015–2017	October 29, 2018	126 min

different sources enabled more nuanced and thick descriptions, and ensured data triangulation (Patton, 2001). To ensure the accuracy of our interpretations, the interview transcripts, and preliminary results of our analyses were sent to our informants for checking.

Based on our theoretical background and themes identified in the literature, we developed *a priori* codes, which were assigned to the interview excerpts and data chunks from secondary sources. Besides, adhering to an exploratory interpretivist approach, we also stayed flexible to embracing emerging new themes and categories from the data; they evolved from the meanings in the interpreted meaning units (e.g., interview excerpts, secondary data chunks). Further, following Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013), our interpretations proceeded analytically back and forth from these raw data to codes, first-order concepts, and second-order themes, towards aggregate theoretical dimensions. Both authors were involved in the data collection, coding, and analysis. It allowed for a close “dialogue” with the data, preserving deep meanings and inductive development of new interpretations and themes. Notably, the data structure (see Fig. 1) indicates several overlapping concepts common to both the entrepreneurial internationalization literature and the SMT, which points to the integrative compatibility and appropriateness of both theoretical lenses to depict the studied phenomenon, internationalizing NGOs. Further below, we will describe the case and present our findings.

4. Introduction to the case

Slush is a nongovernmental and nonprofit student-driven organization from Finland that was founded in 2008 by entrepreneur-minded enthusiasts as an entrepreneurship-supporting body. Several successful entrepreneurs, such as Niklas Zennström (Skype & Atómico), Taizo Son (GungHo), Ilkka Paananen (Supercell), Risto Siilasmaa (Nokia), and Peter Vesterbacka (Rovio), have been involved in the establishment of this initiative. Slush celebrates entrepreneurship and manifests itself through an annual event organized at the end of November or beginning of December, the darkest time of the year in Finland. It brings together a variety of participants, such as start-ups, investors, speakers, media, executives, and so on. The first Slush gathered around 300 people and the event has grown massively over the years. In 2018, the number had swelled to more than 20,000 people, including over 3000 start-ups, about 1800 investors, and more than 600 journalists, from some 130 countries (slush.org).

The aims behind Slush are to gather “people from all around the world

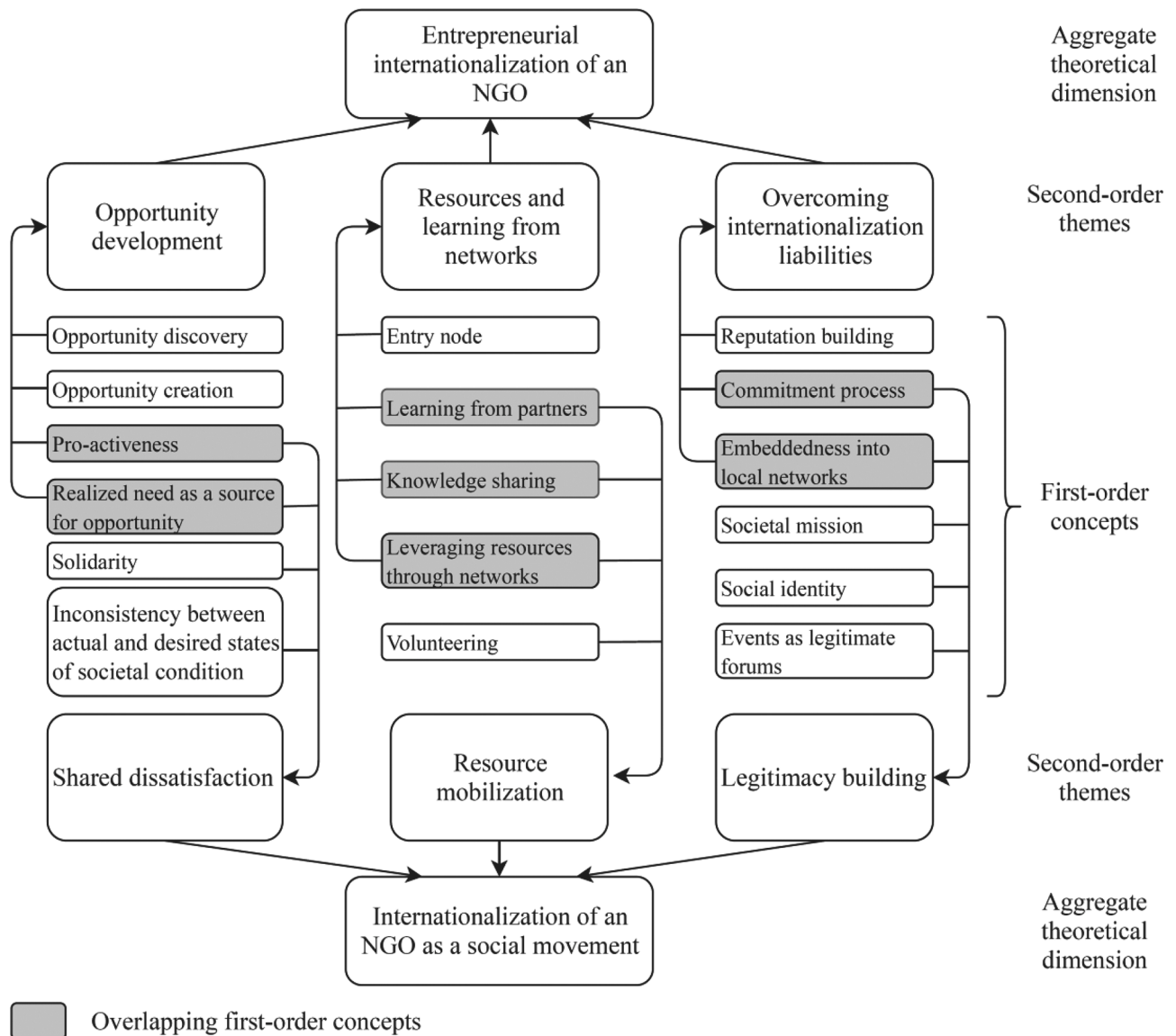


Fig. 1. Data structure.

to share their passion and enthusiasm for entrepreneurship” and “to change the attitudes towards entrepreneurship” through a bottom-up approach, meaning that entrepreneurial initiatives are not imposed top-down by governmental bodies but are developed and spread by start-up firms, universities, investors, and the like (slush.org). Slush has a strongly articulated societal mission to make a difference in how entrepreneurship is perceived in Northern Europe and Asia (slush.org). As Chairman of the Board, Ilkka Kivimäki, explained “Slush is not only a two-day event. It’s likeminded young people sharing their vision of a new world built on entrepreneurship. The two-day event is just the surface, the roots run a lot deeper”. Aware that numerous initiatives supporting entrepreneurship exist in Finland and abroad, Slush organizers wanted to create something really different and outstanding and be different from other similar events and organizations in the world. The Head of the Marketing Team, Alexander Pihlainen, explained that it was the reason why Slush is organized during the toughest time of the year in Finland. He added that “this goes for everything we do, in all things and in every small detail...”.

In addition, Slush relies heavily on volunteers’ work, which is an important part of their management and spirit. In 2018, Slush in Helsinki involved more than 2000 volunteers, many from outside Finland (slush.org). Hannes Kallioinen, Head of the Volunteering Team,

described volunteering at Slush as follows: “Volunteering adds to the Slush concept. It’s not only a way to reduce costs but also to have people work without feeling they are actually working. They [volunteers] come into this community, acquire new skills, and most likely plan to set up their own company”.

The initial internationalization ideas started to develop in 2014. As the Head of Global Operations at Slush, Olga Balakhina, explained, Slush was contacted by two people who suggested hosting the Slush event in Tokyo, Japan. In 2015, Slush was organized outside Finland for the first time, in Tokyo and Beijing. In 2016, it ran in Singapore. Interestingly, the internationalization of Slush specifically to Asian countries is a strategic decision. The organizers did not see the value of having yet another entrepreneurial event, for example, in Silicon Valley. They believed it would have a greater societal impact in Asian countries. Ilkka Kivimäki explained this focus on Asia as follows: “...we’ve been trying to have a special focus in Asia. So, as Slush, we can’t differentiate by doing something in the US. Bringing an Asian flavor into the game is much more interesting and adds more value.” Even the web page sends a clear positioning message “Not the Californian Sun, but honest slush” (slush.org).

The most challenging aspect of internationalization has been the difference in entrepreneurial cultures between Finland and the three

Asian countries. Start-up and risk-taking activities undertaken by young people are positively accepted in Finland but not in these three countries. Also, organizing Slush as an event has been difficult because these kinds of conferences are often handled and guided by the government through top-down directives. In addition, proactive volunteering is not a commonly shared behavior due to the weak volunteering culture in Asian countries. Despite these challenges, Slush has in its first 10 years grown into a truly global entrepreneurial community that creates change in people's mindsets and makes them more entrepreneurial. Chen Wang, the CEO of Slush China, spells it out as follows in terms of the spirit of "making the impossible possible"; she also told several stories of how Slush totally changed life paths of its participants, and many of them started own companies. She concludes Slush helps local start-ups and the local entrepreneurial ecosystems to become more international and "to connect local with international." Moreover, except for the annually organized events in Asia, Slush also runs some 300 registered side events all around the world. Therefore, quoting Niklas Zennström (CEO and founding partner, Atomico), "Slush is having a worldwide impact. A big worldwide impact" that makes it "a movement, not just a conference". (slush.org)

5. Findings

We found the Uppsala empirical observations of internationalizing firstly into psychically similar markets did not hold in our case. In the case of Slush, entrepreneurs' collective identity and their like-mindedness, described by Ilkka Kivimäki, the Chairman of the Board as "like-minded young people sharing their vision of a new world built on entrepreneurship", becomes more decisive than country psychic distance considerations. Moreover, we found Slush did not follow a gradual and path-dependent establishment chain (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). Slush expanded from Finland to Japan, China, and Singapore in a form *communities* where collective actions took place across the globe. Marianne Vikkula, the CEO of Slush in 2016–2017, explained that "the teams in China, Tokyo and Singapore aren't Slush subsidiaries; I would avoid using that word. They are communities". Our findings demonstrate that Slush as an INGO spread abroad with several important features of a social movement that enabled and enacted its internationalization.

5.1. Shared dissatisfaction as an opportunity development mechanism

The idea behind founding Slush, and its further internationalization into Japan, China, and Singapore, was triggered by an awareness that the existing conditions and infrastructure for business start-up have drawbacks and can be improved. From the point of view of Anna Ratala, The CEO of Slush Singapore, "[In Singapore] there is still a lot of traditional thinking that success in life means as being a doctor or a lawyer... Many people are afraid to take the risk and become entrepreneurs. The culture does not favor failures". This dissatisfaction with the actual conditions of the entrepreneurial environment, and the realized need for more support of next-generation entrepreneurs on a global scale, was one of the key drivers for expanding Slush. Our findings show that this inconsistency between actual and desired states of entrepreneurial conditions served as a realized need or gap to be filled, and was treated as a source of international opportunity. For example, the Head of Marketing Team, Alexander Pihlainen, explained: "Young people there [in Japan] are not used to the idea that they can do something by themselves without asking permission. That is the hardest cultural thing to change. We are trying to accelerate this change".

Slush not only realized the need for change but also understood that change requires collective action and solidarity. Hence, this dissatisfaction with the existing entrepreneurial conditions was shared amongst Slush enthusiasts. It pushed collective activism, the desire to be discrete and non-redundant on a global scale, and constantly challenging own innovativeness. All these enabled Slush to discover and create international opportunities and expand abroad. This line of thinking has

sparked "the creation of an entire international entrepreneurial community around Slush", as Lauri Tammi, Head of Slush China, said. Fig. 2 provides more evidence to support our findings.

5.2. Collective resource mobilization as a mechanism of developing foreign network relations and learning through networks

Initially, Slush emerged as a result of a network of relations between entrepreneurship-minded enthusiasts, and their realization that together they could have a greater impact on the change in the entrepreneurial environment in Nordic Europe and further into Asia. Also, the internationalization of Slush was extensively network-driven and enabled by local contacts. In fact, the Slush CEOs in each country either were of a local origin or lived there for many years; this ensured local embeddedness and resourcefulness in connections. For example, Slush in China was supported by the network relations established with the science park together with local government support. Head of Slush China 2015–2017, Lauri Tammi, emphasized that "There was a lot of cooperation with the local government, with their introductions, and the ministry of foreign affairs also supported us. Further, we networked with start-ups and start-up events". Similarly, Sami Jääskeläinen, the Head of Investor team of Slush Singapore, told that initial support from the Singaporean government in terms of infrastructure and funding had been very critical for the successful launch of Slush Singapore. Hence, our data show Slush internationalization as a joint effort, which could happen only through the collective staking of various resources (see Fig. 3 for more evidence). Importantly, Slush also underwent learning about the local entrepreneurial contexts and establishing trusting relationships with these diverse stakeholders (e.g., universities, governments, venture capitalists, executives, politicians, etc.). This learning, for instance, led to the strategic decision of Slush China to switch locations from Beijing to Shanghai.

Interestingly, these networks of relations also enabled collective resource mobilization and collective ownership in the form of volunteer labor. As the interview excerpts from Fig. 3 show, local volunteers not only enabled cost reductions in organizing Slush events, but also served as a network pool, through which Slush could be better embedded in local networks, learning about the local start-up environment and culture. Hence, attracting volunteers became an important resource-generating mechanism for Slush, which, in turn, exposed it to even wider networks and more intensive learning about entrepreneurial infrastructures in three Asian countries. Antti Sonninen, the Head of Slush Japan says that "Slush brought a lot of positive spirit with volunteering. We gave a lot of responsibilities and freedom to our volunteers, it created an attitude in the community". In fact, the spirit of volunteering is very similar to the entrepreneurial spirit of opportunity creation; it builds on staking volunteers' available resources (e.g., time, skills, knowledge) to leverage the unexpected without knowing their future returns.

5.3. Social identity building as a mechanism for overcoming internationalization liabilities

Our findings also show that the internationalization of Slush has been to a great extent enabled by building social identity. It was achieved through the articulation of its societal mission to foster entrepreneurship, thus growing employment, societal wealth, personal wealth, innovation, and economic growth. This mission was a crucial component of Slush's social identity and building the spirit of a unique community. Lauri Tammi, the Head of Slush China emphasized that "Slush is a movement. It spreads like religion, an extreme religion about entrepreneurship. Its mission is to show that entrepreneurship is the best way towards freedom, creativity and happiness. It shows that everything is possible and failures are ok. It is a philosophy... It is a revolution in entrepreneurial culture". More evidence quotes can be found from Fig. 4.

This identity was important for Slush to be accepted by external and internal stakeholders, such as volunteers and event attendees. Thus, the

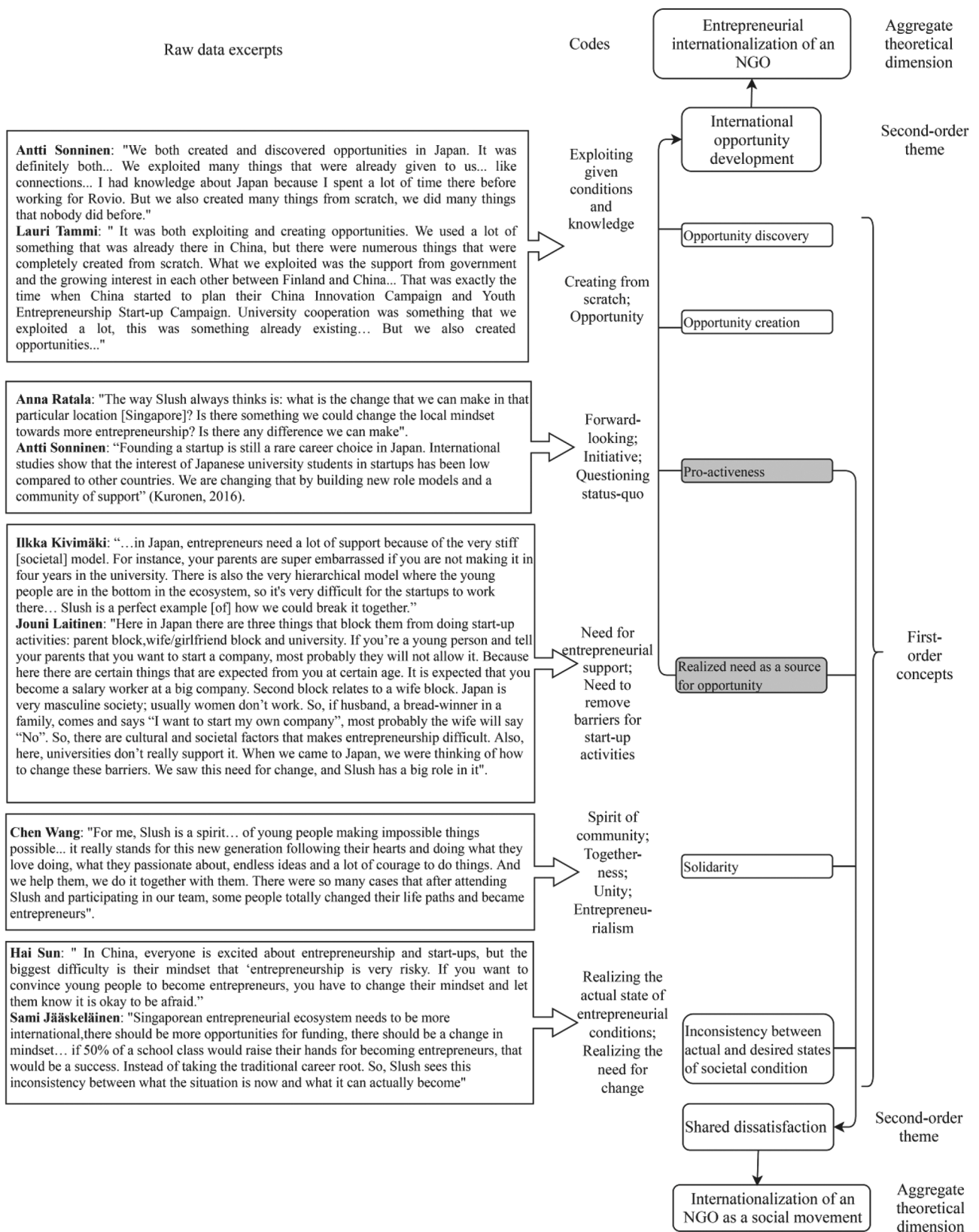


Fig. 2. The inference from raw data to themes and concepts -1.

data indicate the social identity of Slush at three levels, namely individual, collective, and public (see Fig. 4). The individual identity is visible in the interview excerpts where the interviewees talk about internalizing their personal characteristics into Slush; thus, Slush as a

movement not only influences its members but also absorbs their traits. For instance, Olga Balakhina, the Head of Global Operations, highlighted that "we at Slush are a global movement, the more - the merrier, that's our mentality and identity". The collective identity of Slush is built

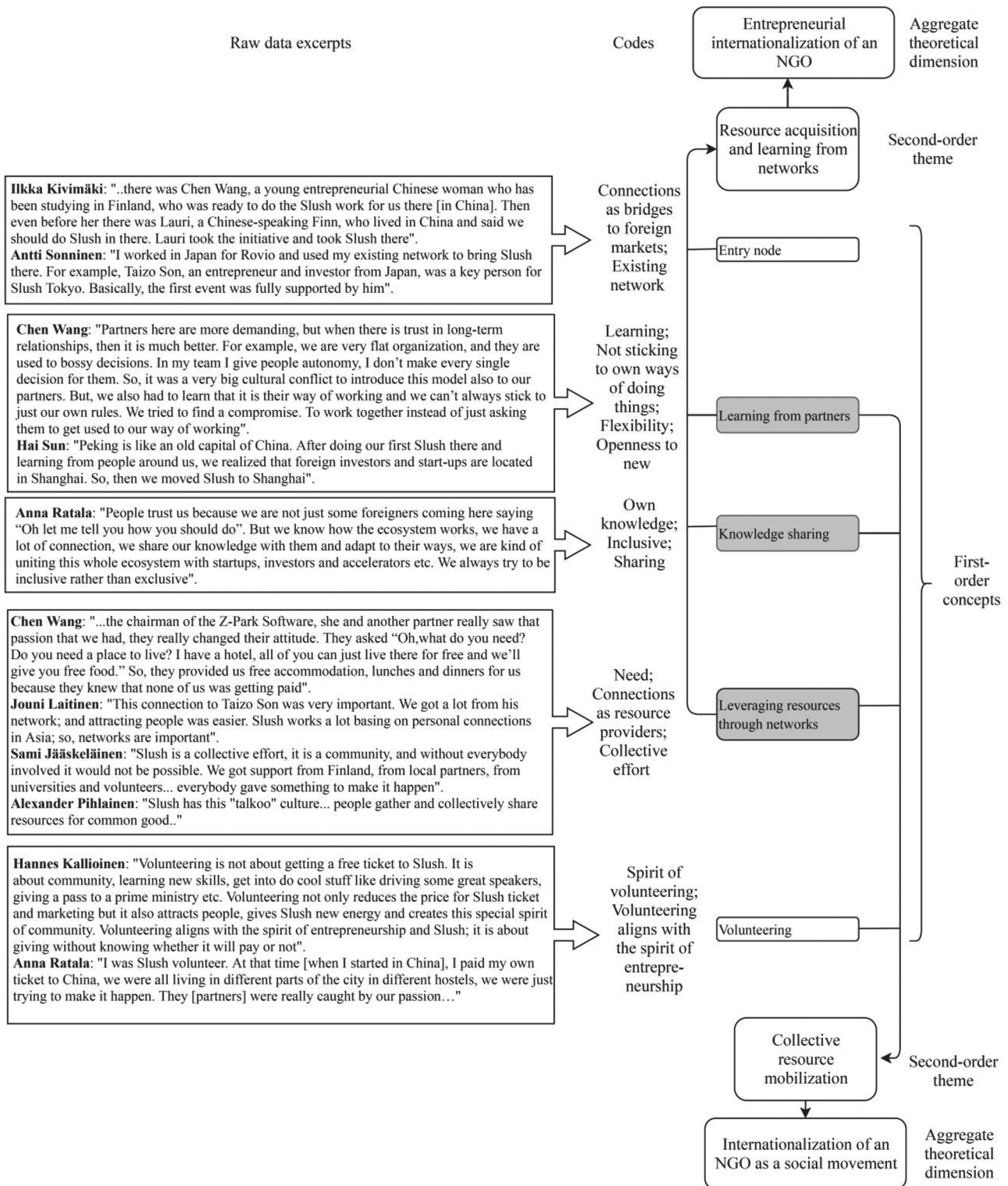


Fig. 3. The inference from raw data to themes and concepts - 2.

through the emotional and cognitive attachment of its members to Slush's ideology, values, mission and activities, in order to achieve its goals. The public identity is presented by the excerpts from the informal interviews with Slush attendees, who represent the external public. For example, one start-up representative said that for him "Slush is unconventional and energy making; it is an electric atmosphere... mind-opening".

Also, a constantly growing number of involved stakeholders (e.g., start-ups, investors, keynote speakers, governmental stakeholders,

executives, volunteers, etc.) aided the solidarity and legitimation of the community and highlighted it as valid and reasonable. Moreover, Slush events in Helsinki, Tokyo, Shanghai and Singapore, as well as side events, served as legitimate forums to articulate and spread its goals both domestically and abroad. Hence, this special spirit and identity served as a lubricant for Slush's expansion abroad and, in fact, enabled its internationalization. In what follows, we discuss our findings against existing theories and develop a model of NGO internationalization.

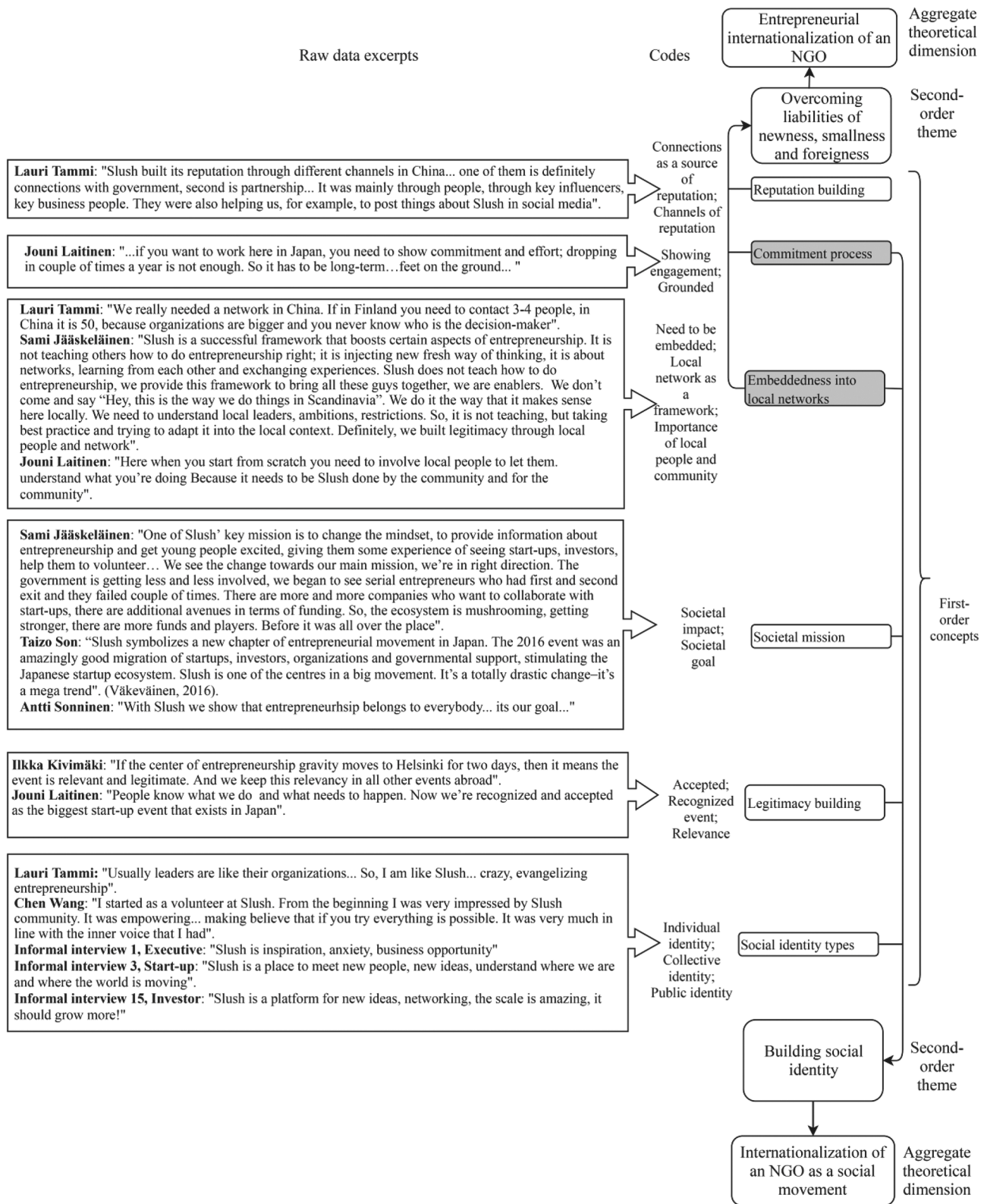


Fig. 4. The inference from raw data to themes and concepts - 3.

6. Discussion

Our research presents Slush as an INGO, internationalization of which depicts several important features of a social movement. By showing the evidence of these features, we demonstrate that explaining the internationalization of NGOs by means of received entrepreneurial

internationalization research alone is limiting. Thus, this study incorporates SMT and offers additional enriching explanations from non-business scholarship.

First, we demonstrate that Slush' dissatisfaction with the societal conditions sparked its opportunity development thinking and proactiveness towards entrepreneurialism. It pushed Slush decision-makers to

consider how they could create change and improve conditions for start-up activities. This *shared dissatisfaction* stays in line with the concepts of discontent (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) and perceived injustice (van Zomeren et al., 2008v) described in the SMT; it also fulfills the criterion of the missing component (Walker & Smith, 2002), which pushes activism and participation in collective action. However, unlike its assessment in collective psychology (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), Slush's activism is not based on social deprivation or collective anger. We see it not as reactive fighting against some injustice, rather collective activism of like-minded people for entrepreneurialism. In addition, this shared dissatisfaction triggered Slush' alertness to international opportunities, which has been widely discussed in the IE literature (Mainela et al., 2014; McDougall et al., 1994; Crick & Jones, 2000). The difference in Slush as an INGO, however, is that the stimulus for international expansion is embedded not in profit maximization but in the shared dissatisfaction with the existing entrepreneurial infrastructures. Therefore, INGOs' *international opportunity development* has a societal rather than monetary value.

Second, network relations have been crucial for the internationalization of Slush, which is consistent with both the network research in IE (see e.g., Coviello & Cox, 2006; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Etemad & Lee, 2003), and the *collective resource mobilization* from the SMT (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Also, these relations in three foreign countries served as entry nodes (Jansson & Sandberg, 2008) that allowed for securing resources for internationalization, as it is stated in, for example, Hadley and Wilson (2003) and Coviello and Cox (2006). Besides, the established network relations allowed for *learning* about foreign markets, which is consistent with the knowledge development and commitments described in the Uppsala models (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Vahlne & Johanson, 2017). It also aligns with Madon (1999), who indicated that to gain accountability, advocacy, and strengthen their impact on the institutional structure, INGOs should deliberately network with various intermediaries, governmental entities, and intended beneficiaries, and learn from the field.

Third, *building social identity* has been an important enabler of Slush internationalization. We find it congruent with the SMT, which states that social identity helps to build legitimacy (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Andrews et al., 2016). This identity allowed Slush to build its reputation abroad and establish its name in the Asian entrepreneurial arena. It was enacted by embeddedness in local networks, establishing a favorable *network position*, and developing commitments to local partners in Japan, China and Singapore, which stays in line with

internationalization research (Ellis, 2000; Zahra, 2005; Zaheer, 1995; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). Therefore, it served as an important additional mechanism of dealing with various *internationalization liabilities*, such as liability of newness and outsidership.

Based on the discussion above, we develop the following model that explains the internationalization of NGOs (see Fig. 5). The model consists of the left-hand state variables and the right-hand side change variables. The state variables include: firstly, shared dissatisfaction with the actual and desired societal conditions. It triggers activism and participation in a social movement (Kay LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2016), such as culture movement (e.g., entrepreneurship culture), green movements, children's benefits movement, etc. Secondly, network position and internationalization liabilities indicate the pros and cons of an NGO's readiness for internationalization. For instance, an NGO may have a sufficient network embeddedness in the foreign market but still experience the liabilities of newness and smallness (Zahra, 2005). The change variables include international opportunity development by NGOs, which can be studied with multiple perspectives based on current literature, such as opportunity discovery (Shane & Venkatraman, 2000), opportunity creation (Alvarez and Barney, 2007), arbitrage opportunities (Chandra & Coviello, 2010). Only a very small number of studies investigate international opportunity development as an iterative entrepreneurial process (e.g., Zahra et al., 2005). Further, the change variables also include NGOs' collective resource mobilization and their social identity-building activities.

Inspired by the work of Johanson and Vahlne (2009), the state and change variables influence each other—the current state affects change and vice versa. The transition mechanism between the variables is about enhancing societal impact, as INGOs seek to maximize their societal value internationally. An increased level of shared dissatisfaction with societal conditions may positively or negatively influence NGOs' international opportunity development. Here, international opportunity development refers to the process of discovering opportunities (Kirzner, 1973; Shane, 2000) or creating opportunities (Alvarez and Barney, 2007) abroad through interacting with international partners. In our case of Slush, this shared dissatisfaction had a positive impact on creating the opportunity to build an international entrepreneurial community in foreign markets. However, there can be always some discontent in any society; also, this discontent can be created and manipulated externally (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Thus, the dissatisfaction could have a negative impact if not combined with other conditions, such as a favorable network position and reduced internationalization liabilities that the internationalization of NGOs is

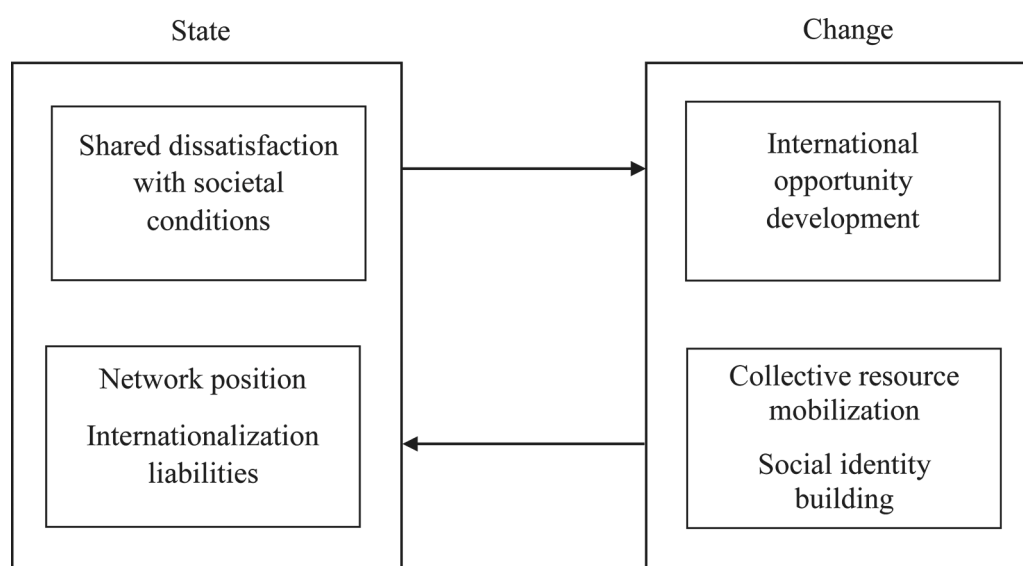


Fig. 5. The internationalization model of NGOs.

highly dependent on. Furthermore, we think the two state variables could also have an impact on resource mobilization and social identity building. For example, shared dissatisfaction with societal conditions can facilitate groups' collective control over the resources needed for internationalization. In addition, when an NGO suffers from a weak network position in the foreign market and the liability of newness or smallness, it may hinder the social identity building in that market. Moreover, the change variable of international opportunity development can affect the state of the shared dissatisfaction with societal conditions. When an NGO discovers or creates opportunities in a new foreign market, it may enhance the awareness of the focal societal problem thus triggering the shared dissatisfaction with the society conditions in the foreign market (e.g., World Vision's protecting and caring for children in the third world countries). The other change variables of collective resource mobilization and building social identity can enhance the network position and reduce the internationalization liabilities of an NGO.

7. Conclusions

7.1. Theoretical contributions

This study has focused on Slush, an INGO from Finland that expanded to Japan, China and Singapore. We bring in SMT to depict its internationalization, and this theory allows for revealing three distinctive mechanisms that enact the internationalization of NGOs. *First*, we show that the mechanism of developing international opportunities in internationalizing NGOs differs from that in profit-driven firms (e.g., international new ventures, born global firms, internationalizing SMEs or other firms traditionally discussed in the entrepreneurial internationalization research). It is triggered and enacted by the shared dissatisfaction with some societal condition and willingness to improve it. *Second*, collective resource mobilization enables networks and learning of internationalizing NGOs. *Third*, we indicate that building a social identity is an essential component helping INGOs to overcome internationalization liabilities. Social identity is distinct to INGOs and has not been widely discussed in entrepreneurial internationalization literature. Overall, these three mechanisms of NGOs' internationalization stem from their social movement qualities and they have not been addressed to in received literature, and it is exactly the SMT that allows to reveal them. Based on these mechanisms, we develop a model that explains the internationalization of NGOs through state and change variables.

Our work provides both empirical and theoretical contributions at the intersection of entrepreneurial internationalization research and SMT. *First*, we respond to the calls for broadening the scope of entrepreneurial internationalization research (Dimitratos & Jones, 2005; Chandra & Coviello, 2010; Reuber et al., 2017, 2018) and open its boundaries to NGOs. We show that their internationalization and international opportunity development can be very entrepreneurial and that they cohere with the agenda of international entrepreneurship. Including non-firm actors, such as NGOs in this article, offers new empirical attributes for the field and broadens its context (Teegen et al., 2004; Zucchella & Scabini, 2007). This, in turn, can open up new avenues for further studies and consolidate the position of the international entrepreneurship domain (Reuber et al., 2017). To date, INGOs have been predominantly excluded from its mainstream empirical scope, which mainly focuses on the internationalization of for-profit firms (Sullivan & Daniels, 2008). At the theoretical level, the adapted SMT allows to see entrepreneurial internationalization process as a collective activity, a perspective that has not been taken earlier but been called upon (Coviello et al., 2017). We show that the collective identity of entrepreneurs and their like-mindedness can be more decisive for internationalization than psychic and geographical distances.

Second, we also contribute to the SMT by suggesting a novel application of this theory to entrepreneurial internationalization research. By

studying INGOs as organizational manifestations of social movements, we develop the organizational view on social movements (Davis et al., 2005). We show the international expansion of social movement not as a chaotic and elemental development but as an organized and strategic campaign orchestrated by INGOs. Thus, we add to understanding of governance structures behind the internationalization of social movements (Smith et al., 1998). Given that internationalization is the major context of our study, we also shift the generally accepted focus on studying protest-based social movements towards more peaceful ones (Tarow, 2011); therefore, we enhance the diversity of social movement studies. In addition, we go beyond the narrow recourse-mobilization understanding of social movements (Buechler, 1993). Both in our theoretical discussion and in model development, we take a holistic approach and consider social identity and deprivation perspectives from social movement research.

7.2. Implications for future research

Our contributions can be advanced in future research. *First*, our study adds to opportunity development discussion in international entrepreneurship (Kontinen & Ojala, 2011b; Dimitratos et al., 2016; Reuber et al., 2018); it shows that international opportunity has a different nature in the case of INGOs. It is non-monetary and hard to measure because its exploitation leads to the type of results that produce outcomes for the public good, which, as in the case of Slush, can be described as improved entrepreneurship conditions and better opportunities for the next generation of entrepreneurs. Also, our study shows that the spirit of volunteering within INGOs is very similar to the entrepreneurial principles of contingency leveraging and affordable loss (Saravathy, 2001). Thus, Slush volunteers did not give their labor for free but staked it as something they could afford to lose in return for new opportunities; in fact, many volunteers became business founders. Again, this supports our earlier argument that NGOs can be highly entrepreneurial, and their internationalization should be included in entrepreneurial internationalization research, which advocates the opportunity-centered interpretation of international entrepreneurship phenomenon (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005). Further research can investigate various questions; for example, how to estimate the costs of non-monetary opportunities of INGOs, how to recognize, explore and exploit these opportunities, and, what roles altruism and volunteering spirit play in this process.

Second, our study shows that an INGO can serve as organizational manifestations of wider trends in society. Incorporating the SMT into our understanding of entrepreneurial internationalization opens up exciting avenues for the examination of entrepreneurship, not as an individual- but societal-level phenomenon, as a social movement on a global scale (Vyakarnam & Hartman, 2011), and as a collective tool for social change (Steyaert & Hjorth, 2008; Montgomery et al., 2012). From this perspective, we need to know more about the spirit of collective entrepreneurship at societal and institutional levels, as an embedded and contextualized behavior, and as a movement, which does not stem from any protest but rather unfolds from solidarity as group activism for the common good (Stewart, 1989; Lounsbury, 1998; Zito, 2001; Montgomery et al., 2012). For instance, future research can study how wider social forces shape entrepreneurial opportunity structures, how entrepreneurship escalates and spreads as an international social movement, what precise effects and change arise, and how to measure the change.

Third, our findings can be taken further for developing an institution-based view on entrepreneurial internationalization (Szyliowicz & Galvin, 2010; Sadeghi et al., 2019); scholars can examine in greater detail the influence of institutional factors on the internationalization of NGOs, such as entrepreneurial culture, the availability of start-up funding, and the extent of involvement of state regulations in start-up activities, both at home and in host countries. Comparative type studies could examine how these factors shape NGOs' foreign activities, and how they adjust to local realities to achieve the best fit and 'become acclimatized' to local

entrepreneurial ecosystems.

7.3. Practical implications

Our findings provide several practical implications for those NGOs that aim to expand overseas. *First*, we recommend they identify the actual state of a societal condition they are not satisfied with, and clearly define the desired scope of change they want to make. Understanding this gap would help outline directions for further development and what international opportunities to pursue. *Second*, internationalizing NGOs should leverage collective resources through local networks, both domestic and foreign, and also learn from local partners about culture, institutional norms, and regulations. This would help them engage with local stakeholders, and gain location-specific knowledge of needs, in order to foster change. However, when attracting local volunteer labor as a collective resource, they need to be aware of the short-term nature of volunteer commitments and the high turnover of volunteer workers. Developing a system of non-monetary incentives (e.g., training, recognition as a showcase, trips to INGO's other foreign location) can help to overcome this challenge. *Third*, building an NGO's own social identity and legitimacy embodied in a societal mission is crucial to those expanding abroad. In this regard, arranging events in target foreign locations, organizing real and virtual communication spaces and forums for interested stakeholders, and maintaining a discrete image and reputation are important.

7.4. Limitations

As stated earlier, our study has been conducted as a single case, Slush from Finland expanding to China, Japan and Singapore. While this case is unique and allows for theory building, it is also very sensitive to domestic and internationalization contexts. Also, due to the qualitative course of this study, our interpretations and implications follow the principle of analytical, not statistical, generalization. This can be considered a limitation for scholars adhering to the positivist and post-positivist research paradigms.

Appendix 1 Interview guide

Questions related to interviewee

- 1 Please tell me what your role is in Slush. How are you involved?
 - When did you start?
 - What are your main responsibilities and tasks?
- 2 If you compare Slush at the time you joined and now, what are the main changes?
- 3 What is Slush to you?

Internationalization

- 4 What was the motivation to bring Slush to Japan, China, Singapore (depending on interviewee's position)?
- 5 Were there any other attempts (e.g., failures) besides Tokyo, Shanghai and Singapore?
- 6 Key events along the process?
- 7 What were the key success factors for Slush Japan, China, Singapore (depending on interviewee's position)?
- 8 Why has Slush attracted so many people from different backgrounds?
- 9 Did Slush use local partners and networks in Japan, China, Singapore (depending on interviewee's position)? If yes, how? Please, provide examples.
- 10 How did Slush develop opportunities in Japan, China, Singapore (depending on interviewee's position)?
- 11 How did Slush build legitimacy in Japan, China, Singapore (depending on interviewee's position)?

- 12 When Slush entered Japan/China/Singapore, were there any similar organizations there?
- 13 What were the main difficulties in this process? How were they solved?
- 14 Challenging issues remaining?
- 15 What are the future plans for Slush in Japan, China, Singapore (depending on interviewee's position)?

Thank you for your time!

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