

# Moving beyond local roots to make a global impact: cultural dynamics in social entrepreneurship and globalization

European Journal  
of Management  
Studies

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Received 4 August 2025  
Revised 30 October 2025  
7 January 2026  
Accepted 12 February 2026

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This research aims to fill gaps in understanding how cultural dynamics impact international social entrepreneurship (ISE) within the context of globalization, particularly in decision-making, scalability, and sustainability. This study advances theoretical frameworks and offers practical strategies for navigating the complexities of global SE by examining the interplay among cultural dynamics, globalization, and SE.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The research employs a qualitative case study approach within the interpretive paradigm to investigate the cultural influences on SE in global development. Focused on decision-making, scalability, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement, this analysis examines a multicultural SE venture. Data collection involves semi-structured interviews and secondary sources, enabling a thorough exploration.

**Findings** – The research highlights the importance of understanding cultural dynamics in ISE, emphasizing genuine adaptation rather than superficial changes. Chief executive officer insights underscore the strategic importance of social networks in the global dissemination and adoption of SE practices. Three key themes, such as social networks, global governance, and social opportunities, significantly influence the cultural core of ISE.

**Practical implications** – The research's practical implications are significant for stakeholders, including practitioners, policymakers, and social entrepreneurs in global activities. Multidimensional models are crucial for advancing SE ventures, given challenges in generalizing outcomes across diverse cultural contexts.

**Originality/value** – This study explores how cultural and institutional factors influence decision-making, scalability, and sustainability in international social enterprises, proposing a multi-dimensional model based on CEO-level, long-term data from multiple countries.

**Keywords** Social entrepreneurship, Globalization, Cultural dynamics, Multi-dimensional model, International social entrepreneurship

**Paper type** Research article

## 1. Introduction

The effect of the pervasiveness of the opportunity on the scope of internationalization could be mixed . . . These significantly different underlying forces could reduce the entrepreneurs' urge to pursue social opportunities on a wide international scale . . . local adaptation is necessary. Such adaptation requires a thorough *understanding of local cultures*, ideologies, and institutions.

(Zahra *et al.*, 2008, p. 128)

Social entrepreneurship (SE) has emerged as a powerful force for change, addressing significant social issues with innovative solutions that integrate business approaches to create value for society (Dees, 1998; Martin and Osberg, 2007). This development, with its early roots in local settings, has taken a remarkable path, transcending geographical boundaries to adopt a global perspective. Both aspects related to the convergence of SE and globalization are the subject of growing scholarship. They are increasingly scrutinized by practitioners and

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European Journal of Management  
Studies  
Emerald Publishing Limited  
e-ISSN: 2635-2648  
p-ISSN: 2183-4172  
DOI 10.1108/EJMS-08-2025-0118

scholars alike for the cultural forces driving such emergence. The globalization of SE can be seen as a paradigm shift from local ventures to a far-reaching, interconnected approach that spans borders. [Bornstein and Davis \(2010\)](#) and [Mair and Marti \(2006\)](#) have highlighted this dimension. Recent research underscores that innovation and the circular economy are increasingly regarded as integral to the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the need for organizational models that link cultural and institutional adaptation to sustainability-oriented innovation ([Vera et al., 2025](#)). This perspective reinforces the view that SE must evolve through culturally embedded innovation to address global sustainability challenges.

Several factors significantly impact the effectiveness of international social entrepreneurship (ISE) programs. These economic, political, and institutional factors, combined with cultural refinements, help shape the modus operandi of a large-scale, internationally operating business. This relates to the intertwined nature of the factors suggested by [Griffiths et al. \(2013\)](#), [Dacin et al. \(2010\)](#), and [Zahra et al. \(2009\)](#), among others. Such factors create a multifaceted network that necessitates a nuanced investigation to comprehend the diverse nature of ISE. While complexity is embraced, cultural dynamics appear to be a crucial factor in determining the direction of the global field of SE. Cultural elements and SE are embedded within the context of globalization and have become an important research domain. Culture shapes people's values, norms, and behaviors, as well as the societies in which they live, and profoundly influences the design and implementation of SE projects and their outcomes ([Dacin et al., 2010](#); [Khavul et al., 2010](#)).

With increasing attention to SE and globalization, significant research gaps remain, particularly in understanding the specific role and impact of cultural dynamics in ISE. Despite rapid growth in SE scholarship, empirical evidence demonstrates that international and culturally grounded perspectives remain underdeveloped. Large-scale reviews show that SE studies focus on single-country or domestically embedded cases, predominantly in Western contexts, with limited attention to cross-border dynamics ([Saebi et al., 2019](#); [Bhardwaj et al., 2025](#)). Building on this, [Dacin et al. \(2011\)](#) and [Muñoz and Gamble \(2024\)](#) similarly note that culture is most often treated as a static background variable, operationalized through national value proxies or institutional indices, rather than examined as a dynamic mechanism shaping entrepreneurial decision-making and scaling processes. Furthermore, while international entrepreneurship research has produced robust models of firm internationalization, these frameworks largely privilege commercial logic and under-theorize hybrid social-commercial missions ([Johanson and Vahlne, 2009](#); [Oviatt and McDougall, 2005](#)). As a result, core outcomes central to ISE, such as culturally contingent decision-making, long-term sustainability, and legitimacy maintenance across institutional contexts, are rarely examined in an integrated manner.

Our research aimed to fill this gap. The study examines cultural factors, discussing their influence on international social entrepreneurs' decision-making, their impact on the scalability and sustainability of global social ventures through cultural adaptability, and how cultural dynamics shape ISE. This raises the primary research question: *How do cultural dimensions impact decision-making, scalability, and sustainability in ISE?* It therefore constitutes a significant contribution to SE, as it informs readers about the complex interrelationships among cultural dynamics, globalization, and ISE.

This paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of these highlighted gaps, offering valuable insights that enrich the academic discussion and illuminate practical strategies for internationally oriented SEs as they navigate a complex world. Addressing these gaps is critical, as it delves into the specific challenges SE faces in the global arena. The anticipated outcome of this research will not only advance the theoretical perspective but also produce practical insights for ISE decision-making and operational strategies. Previous research has shown that culture influences entrepreneurial behavior and outcomes; however, it often treats culture as a background factor or a broad construct within SE/ISE (e.g. cultural values, norms, and institutional support), without examining how culture shapes strategic choices and facilitates cross-border scaling. We advance this discussion in three ways. First, we view

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culture as a dimension of ISE and propose three pathways: adapting to local meaning systems, diffusing through network-connected cross-border ties, and aligning with multi-level governance regimes. These pathways together explain how decisions, scalability, and sustainability vary internationally. Second, we draw on insights from institutional theory and internationalization research to demonstrate where traditional models (the Uppsala process, born-global/INVs) underrepresent the hybrid social-commercial logic and the cultural effort required for mission-driven ventures to go international. Third, based on a longitudinal single-case study, we develop propositions and identify boundary conditions (e.g. institutional distance, network openness) that determine when these dimensions succeed and when they fade. This focus on dimensions directly addresses calls for stronger theory development and contextual understanding in the fields of SE and entrepreneurship research.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. *First*, the paper develops a cultural lens on ISE by combining insights from culture, globalization, and entrepreneurial internationalization into a multidimensional framework. *Second*, it draws on a qualitative case study to examine how cultural adaptation, network diffusion, and governance alignment affect decision-making, scalability, and sustainability across borders. *Third*, the analysis reveals how these cultural dynamics shape the internationalization of social ventures. *Fourth*, the paper reflects on the theoretical and practical implications of these insights for scholars and social entrepreneurs in culturally diverse contexts.

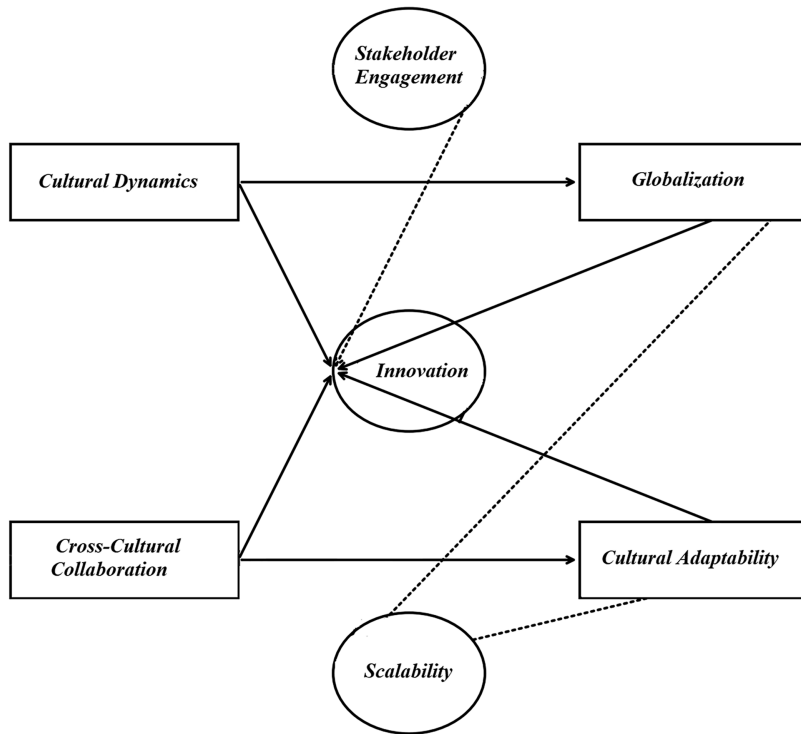
## 2. Theoretical frameworks for global SE: an integrated model

This theoretical model summarizes the multifaceted interrelationships between *cultural dynamics, globalization, cross-cultural collaboration, cultural adaptability, innovation, stakeholder engagement, and scalability* within the context of SE. As elements interact, this highlights the increasing globalization of environmental concerns and underscores the importance of cultural understanding and adaptability. To build on this research base, the model illustrates the process by which ISE succeeds or fails (see [Figure 1](#)).

### 2.1 The cultural dynamics of SE

Culture plays a constitutive, rather than merely contextual, role in SE. While early SE research primarily conceptualized culture as a background set of values influencing prosocial motivation, recent work emphasizes its performative function: how cultural meanings, narratives, and social expectations actively construct the meaning of “entrepreneurship for social good” across societies ([Stephan et al., 2015](#); [Welter, 2011](#)). Distinguishing SE from related terminologies such as corporate social responsibility or philanthropy, therefore, requires cultural precision. Defining SE in terms of related terminologies ([Nigam et al., 2014](#)) highlights that linguistic and institutional connotations differ significantly across regions, influencing legitimacy and scaling potential.

Building on this foundation, a growing body of research connects culture to sustainable competitive advantage in SE. The enduring advantage of the contextual framework arises from culturally congruent hybrid logics that align commercial discipline with community-based norms ([Prasetyo, 2016](#)). This complements findings from the social dimension of entrepreneurial motivation in Central and Eastern Europe ([Bartha et al., 2019](#)), which show that collective cultural orientations foster intrinsic and relational motivations that differ from Western individualistic models. Together, these studies signal that SE cannot be detached from its sociocultural environment; rather, culture shapes the very motives, opportunity structures, and legitimacy frames through which social ventures emerge. Empirical advances extend this argument to emerging-market contexts. [Anh et al. \(2022\)](#) present several strategies to improve both social and commercial entrepreneurship in rural areas. These include strengthening mutual support, fostering their synergistic effects, and encouraging expansion to achieve sustainable development. These insights align with the demands in international



**Figure 1.** Theoretical framework: global SE with cultural influences. *Solid arrows* indicate stronger, more direct relationships between elements, and *dotted arrows* represent indirect or secondary influences

entrepreneurship to recognize the contextual dimensions of venture growth and legitimacy transfer (Saebi *et al.*, 2019; Stephan *et al.*, 2015). They also align with comparative institutional theory, which posits that cultural–institutional fit is central to sustainable scaling.

Finally, recent studies on growth dynamics reveal that governance of social impact is itself culturally embedded. Strategies for the growth of social ventures necessitate a nuanced governance of the means–end dynamics of social impact, wherein growth is not conceived as a linear trajectory but rather as a culturally mediated negotiation between localized expectations and the coherence of a global mission (Roche and Siebold, 2024). This resonates with hybrid organizing theory (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Ebrahim *et al.*, 2014) and highlights the need for dimension-based explanation of how culture mediates SE scalability, an agenda our study advances.

## 2.2 Culture, context, and globalization

Globalization has reconfigured the spatial and institutional landscapes in which social entrepreneurs operate. However, despite widespread recognition that cultural distance affects internationalization, research in international entrepreneurship (IE) often abstracts from the distinctive social mission logic that complicates cross-border scaling. The emerging field of ISE bridges these domains but remains conceptually fragmented. Foundational, i.e. synthesizes the importance of integrating contextual and institutional contingencies (Micelotta *et al.*, 2017; Dana and Salamzadeh, 2024), whereas SE research has only recently begun to explore how these contingencies influence the creation of impact (Muñoz and Gamble, 2024; Bhardwaj *et al.*, 2025). Our study builds directly on this intersection by

identifying culture as a multi-level dimension that links local legitimacy work to global diffusion processes. ISE Research's recent exploratory study highlights cross-cultural translation, partnership adaptation, and reflexive identity work as essential to international scaling, but it does not theorize the dimensions underlying these practices (Mahmood, 2024; Sousa and Iizuka, 2025). We address this gap through a dimension-based framework that integrates insights from, i.e. cross-cultural management (House *et al.*, 2004; Leung *et al.*, 2005), and globalization studies (Ghemawat, 2001; Guillén, 2001). This synthesis provides the conceptual scaffolding for our empirical analysis of how cultural dynamics shape decision-making, scalability, and sustainability in ISE.

### 2.3 Cross-cultural collaboration and innovation

Cross-cultural collaboration serves as a catalyst for innovation in SE, as ventures enriched by diverse cultural perspectives are better equipped to address globally salient challenges (Harrison and Klein, 2007). Cognitive diversity within SE teams enhances creativity and problem-solving, enabling innovative solutions that span diverse cultural contexts (Page, 2007). However, cross-cultural collaboration also poses potential barriers to communication, including differing social norms, among other challenges (Adler, 1986). To mediate these issues, social entrepreneurs must develop cultural intelligence and master effective strategies for intercultural communication (Ang and Inkpen, 2008). The model suggests that effective management of these dynamics will enhance innovation through successful cross-cultural collaboration (Earley and Peterson, 2004).

### 2.4 Cultural adaptability

Social entrepreneurs operating across borders must exhibit cultural adaptability, the capacity to tailor strategies and solutions to diverse cultural contexts, ensuring relevance, practicality, and enabling international success (Austin *et al.*, 2006). Dacin *et al.* (2010) further note that successful global entrepreneurs are those who walk this middle line, maintaining the core values of their ventures while adapting the products and services to fit local cultural norms (Zahra and Wright, 2011). In the theoretical framework, cultural adaptability is associated with both scalability and innovation; therefore, ventures that adapt effectively across different cultural environments are much more likely to achieve scalable and innovative solutions (Schweizer, 2005; Trivedi and Stokols, 2011).

### 2.5 Engagement of stakeholders and the power of scalable innovation

Stakeholder engagement is critical in ISE, as it involves sustained interactions with diverse actors, such as communities, governments, and investors, that enhance the long-term viability of SE (Murphy and Coombes, 2009). Culturally informed stakeholder engagement is mandatory; otherwise, misaligned values can lead to resistance and failure (Freeman *et al.*, 2010). Within this framework, stakeholder engagement is linked to innovation, with co-creation helping to ensure cultural relevance and acceptability (Miles *et al.*, 2014). Second, it must engage various stakeholders across multiple cultural and geographical contexts, which requires continuous adaptation to new market dynamics (Mair *et al.*, 2012; Meyskens and Carsrud, 2013).

### 2.6 Engaging with contemporary debates: from “culture as backdrop” to “culture as dimension”

The literature highlights the importance of cultural dynamics, with scholars such as Hofstede (2001, 1984) and Hayton *et al.* (2002) emphasizing how societal values influence entrepreneurial practices. However, more recent studies underscore that social entrepreneurs must be attuned not only to these cultural dimensions but also to diverse institutional contexts. Institutional theory, as articulated by Scott (2008), offers valuable

insights in this context. It helps explain how institutional environments, comprising formal regulations, informal norms, and cultural values, shape social entrepreneurs' ability to innovate and scale their ventures across borders. While models such as the Uppsala internationalization model (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977) and the Born Global framework (Oviatt and McDougall, 2005) address gradual and rapid internationalization respectively, they fall short of capturing the cultural and institutional complexities encountered by social entrepreneurs.

Classic internationalization models offer valuable insights but remain incomplete for ISE. In contrast, the Uppsala model, including its 2009 network-centric revision, emphasizes experiential learning and outsidership (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977, 2009). Born Global/INV theory (Oviatt and McDougall, 2005), on the other hand, focuses on rapid internationalization through unique resources and networks; neither fully accounts for the cultural and institutional complexities inherent to ISE. However, neither fully accounts for mission hybridity and the cultural dynamism work required when social value propositions travel across institutional contexts (Doherty *et al.*, 2014). We extend these logics by showing that international scaling in ISE hinges on (1) cultural fit work with local meaning systems, (2) bridge-tie mobilization that carries culturally embedded practices across borders, and (3) multi-level legitimacy alignment with transnational, national, and local governance regimes. These reframings complement evidence on institutional configuration, showing that joint regulatory, cognitive, and normative arrangements condition SE activity while making the pathways and decision nodes explicit for ISE.

Moreover, the contemporary theoretical debate on cultural adaptation is enriched by the work of Mair and Martí (2006) and Bruton *et al.* (2010), who contend that globalization may lead to homogenization but also offers new opportunities for social entrepreneurs to leverage resources across borders. The challenge, therefore, lies not just in expanding a venture but in ensuring that such expansion respects the local cultural and institutional landscape. The literature would benefit from more critical analysis of how various internationalization models apply to SE in practice, particularly in hybrid institutional environments where both market-oriented and social objectives must coexist.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research design and approach

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive case study design, which is suitable for uncovering the socially constructed meanings through which international social entrepreneurs navigate cultural complexity. Interpretivism prioritizes the understanding of context-dependent, subjective experiences and aligns with theorizing about how culture influences entrepreneurial decision-making, rather than testing predefined hypotheses (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Gioia *et al.*, 2013). A single-case design was employed because the focal venture offers a theoretically revealing case (Yin, 2018) and operates across multiple institutional environments, making it well-suited to tracing the dimensions of cultural adaptation, network diffusion, and governance alignment identified in our framework.

#### 3.2 Case selection and company profile

The study focuses on a single in-depth case, here anonymized as *Company Alpha*, selected because it provides a theoretically rich example of a mature European enterprise that has embedded sustainability and SE principles in its international expansion. The company operates in the *sustainable renewable-energy and circular bioeconomy sectors*, producing environmentally responsible growing media and soil solutions for professional horticulture and urban landscaping.

*Company Alpha* was founded in 1940 and entered its first international market in 2000. As of 2023, it serves customers in more than one hundred countries and maintains production and

distribution facilities across Europe and Asia. The firm’s vision emphasizes creating “a greener and more sustainable future through responsible growing,” positioning cultural adaptation and long-term stakeholder partnerships at the core of its international strategy. In 2023, the company reported approximately USD 565 million in operating revenue and USD 487 million in net sales.

The research data are presented in Table 1, which provides key information on the case firms and the methods used for primary data collection. This table presents relevant business metrics, interview details, and secondary data sources used in the study.

The case was selected through theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989,2007) because it satisfies three conditions relevant to the study’s research aims: *first*, a long-term record of cross-cultural operations, *second*, an explicit social-environmental mission integrated with commercial objectives, and *third*, publicly available secondary data that enable triangulation with interview evidence. This combination allows analytical generalization (Yin, 2018) to the dimensions of cultural adaptation and governance alignment identified in our framework.

### 3.3 Data collection

Data were obtained through two rounds of semi-structured interviews with the company’s chief executive officer (CEO) and extensive secondary documentation. Both interviews were fully transcribed and coded. Secondary materials, including the company’s website, annual sustainability reports, and media articles, were used to triangulate the primary data.

**Table 1.** Information about the case firms

Category	Metric/Item	Value/Notes	Source/Notes
Company overview	Headquarters and footprint	Operates in Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Estonia, and Spain; exports to 100+ countries	Global scale; useful for market-reach discussion
	Recent turnover	~ €300 million figure quoted for the business	Indicates company size
	Employee count	Around 600 people are employed across the central regions	Useful for organizational scale
	Core customer segments	Professional growers, retail and consumers, landscapers, raw-material customers	Helps map business model
	Strategy focus	Grow beyond Europe + home markets; improve operational efficiency; offer digital solutions	Strategic themes for interview/discussion
Business metrics	Production re-organization	Moved Central European production (Germany) to the Netherlands to cut fixed costs	Practical example of operational improvement
	Digital transformation	Introduced product information management automation (PIM) across ~6,700 SKUs in 16 languages	Illustrates digital/operational metric
	Sustainability targets	Carbon intensity cut 50% by 2030; carbon neutrality by 2050	Long-term environmental metrics
Secondary Data Sources	Strategy and business overview	Company strategy page	Website overview
	Sustainability roadmap and progress	Sustainability metrics and roadmap (emissions, circularity)	Sustainability section
	Production/operations news	Article on production centralisation to Netherlands	Operational change data

The interviews explored the CEO's reflections on cultural adaptation, international decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and the firm's governance model.

Table 2 provides additional background information on the interviewees and the secondary data sources utilized. This table highlights the interview timeline, the format used, and the number of transcribed pages for each session.

The semi-structured format ensured consistency across core themes while allowing emergent issues to be probed in depth. Table 3 presents the *interview guide* used in both rounds.

The guide served as a flexible structure rather than a rigid questionnaire. Follow-up prompts were used to clarify examples and obtain concrete narratives. Each session was recorded with the participant's consent, and notes were taken contemporaneously to capture contextual cues and nonverbal emphasis.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The analysis of the empirical material followed an *inductive, iterative approach consistent with the principles of grounded theory* and thematic interpretation (Gioia et al., 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2006). All interview transcripts and secondary documents were first transcribed and imported into NVivo 12 for systematic organization. The process began with an intensive familiarization period, during which I read each transcript repeatedly to capture both the manifest content of statements and the latent meanings embedded in the CEO's reflections. Initial analytic memos were used to record emerging insights, potential patterns, and reflexive observations about the researchers' own assumptions, thereby enhancing interpretive transparency.

From this foundation, *first-order coding* proceeded inductively, staying close to the participants' language to preserve their meanings and experiential nuance. Codes such as "bridging national mindsets," "local trust building," and "translating sustainability narratives" captured specific practices and perceptions. During this stage, we actively moved between data and existing conceptual lenses on SE and cross-cultural management to develop *second-order categories* that expressed broader conceptual linkages. This abductive movement allowed empirical evidence to both inform and challenge prior assumptions drawn from the literature (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). As patterns stabilized, the analysis shifted toward identifying overarching *aggregate dimensions* that linked the second-order categories into a coherent theoretical structure. The evolving coding framework was continuously refined through discussion among the research team to ensure analytic coherence and theoretical parsimony. To enhance credibility and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), interpretations were cross-checked against secondary sources such as sustainability reports and website statements, thereby corroborating the interview evidence.

### 3.5 Data structure

Figure 2 in the paper articulates key theoretical dimensions of SE, organized into second-order themes and first-order categories. These categories summarize factors that influence SE from cultural, institutional, and behavioral perspectives.

The first dimension, cultural adaptation, underscores how cultural values shape social entrepreneurial activities, with local contexts influencing implementation and success. Autio et al. (2013) note that cultural values significantly shape entrepreneurial behavior, aligning with Granovetter's (1985) theory of embeddedness in economic action, which posits that societal context profoundly shapes business decisions. The second dimension, Institutional Influence, examines the roles of formal institutions (e.g. legal frameworks) and informal institutions (e.g. cultural norms) in shaping entrepreneurial activities. Institutional theory explains how formal laws and informal customs guide economic interactions. Social entrepreneurs navigate complex institutional frameworks, balancing local and global governance systems (Scott, 2008). Global governance structures influence the strategic direction and sustainability of social enterprises (Bruton et al., 2010).

**Table 2.** Interviewees' background and additional secondary data sources

Case	Interview no.	Date of interview	Role of interviewee	Duration	Interview format	Period discussed	Transcribed pages (1.5 spacing)	Secondary data sources	Notes/Description
Company Alpha	1	26 April 2021	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	58 min	Microsoft Teams (online video call)	Discussion covered firm operations and strategy evolution from 2019 to 2021	20 pages	Company website, public reports	The first interview focused on Alpha's digital transformation during the early phase of the pandemic. The CEO provided insights into leadership decisions, market challenges, and internal adaptation processes
Company Alpha	2	27 April 2022	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	52 min	Zoom (online video call)	Discussion covered developments from 2021 to 2022	22 pages	Company website, annual updates, industry publications	The follow-up interview explored Alpha's post-pandemic recovery strategy, leadership reflection, and ongoing organizational learning. Secondary sources were used to cross-check strategic milestones and reported outcomes

**Table 3.** Semi-structured interview guide

Theme	Illustrative questions
Cultural adaptation and values	How do cultural differences influence your company's international operations? What practices have helped align corporate values with local cultures?
International decision-making	How are strategic international decisions made? To what extent do cultural considerations shape these decisions?
Stakeholder engagement and networks	How do you build and sustain relationships with local partners, suppliers, and communities? Have cultural factors affected trust or collaboration?
Sustainability and governance	How is the company's social-environmental mission governed across countries? What challenges arise when translating sustainability goals into local practice?
Learning and adaptation	What lessons has the company learned from operating in diverse cultural contexts? How have these lessons influenced future strategies?

The third dimension, behavioral Models, focuses on the cognitive and motivational aspects of opportunity recognition in the social entrepreneurial process. Kirzner's (1973) theory of entrepreneurial alertness highlights the ability to recognize and act on opportunities, driven by cognitive and motivational factors shaped by personal and cultural influences (Venkataraman, 1997). Additional dimensions include Cultural Learning and Network Influence, emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural learning and social networks. Entrepreneurs in global environments must adapt strategies through cultural learning (Hofstede, 1984). Social networks play a key role in knowledge sharing and collaboration, as Granovetter's (1985) theory of weak ties suggests. Lastly, the integration of regulatory frameworks and norms provides the institutional and cultural foundation for understanding systemic support and normative expectations. Meyer and Rowan's (1977) theory of institutional isomorphism stresses the importance of aligning with both regulatory and normative expectations for organizational success.

This theoretical framework integrates cultural, institutional, and behavioral perspectives, thereby contributing to broader academic discussions of institutional theory, cultural embeddedness, and entrepreneurial behavior across diverse cultural and institutional contexts. By employing both primary and secondary data sources, the research validated the information obtained from interviews and ensured a comprehensive understanding of the case. This method also strengthened the analysis by incorporating multiple perspectives, contributing to a more robust interpretation of the cultural dynamics at play in global SE. These studies suggest that the dynamics of ISE emerge and evolve across diverse cultural contexts, shaped by themes including cultural adaptation, institutional innovations, global governance, social opportunities, behavioral theories, social networks, cultural values, and cross-cultural learning (Figure 3).

This proposition asserts that cultural acclimatization is a fundamental element affecting the trajectory of ISE. It emphasizes the importance of understanding, respecting, and adapting to diverse cultural environments for the success and longevity of ISE efforts. The theory pushes for more in-depth investigations into how cultural adjustment influences strategies, efficacy, and the enduring impacts of global SE campaigns.

The subsequent proposition asserts that social groups serve as active instigators, instrumental in disseminating and adapting practices of ISE across diverse cultural contexts. It highlights how people and organizations are interconnected through social networks, underscoring their capacity to facilitate the exchange of ideas, skills, and innovative practices. The proposition calls for a deeper analysis of how social networks facilitate the global spread and effective adaptation of SE, thereby driving positive impacts across diverse cultural contexts.

SE is advanced by official regulatory (government dynamism), informal cognitive (postmaterialist cultural principles), and informal normative institutions, with support from

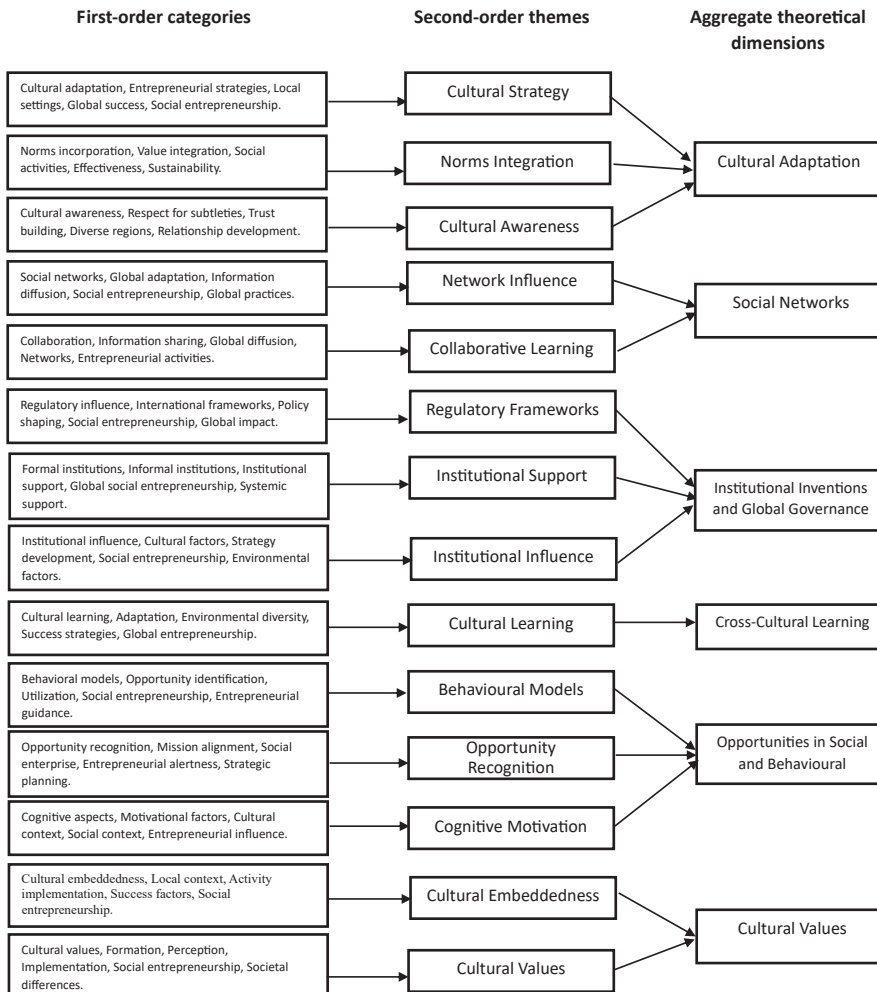
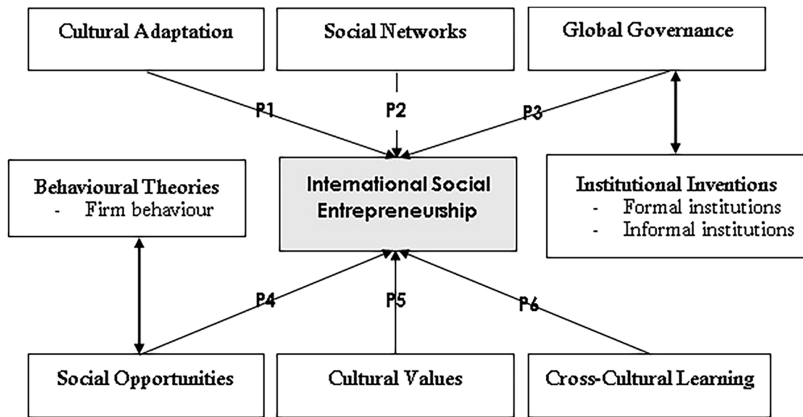


Figure 2. Data structure

both official and unofficial institutions. [Shane and Venkataraman \(2000\)](#) formulate a conceptual structure of entrepreneurship that clarifies phenomena and predicts outcomes that were previously unclarified or unanticipated in other fields. ISE expands the scope of international entrepreneurship to impact global sustainable well-being, drawing on mixed-value and international governance perspectives. SE builds on international entrepreneurship to promote global sustainable well-being, with a focus on mixed value and international governance ([Zahra et al., 2013](#)). Independent thinking, assertiveness, and an aversion to ambiguity among critical decision-makers significantly influence firms' entrepreneurial orientation, which is further enhanced by favorable perceptions of government regulations. Decision-makers' individualism, assertiveness, and uncertainty avoidance positively influence firms' entrepreneurial drive, and these effects are magnified when they perceive government regulations favorably ([Chew et al., 2022](#)).

Entrepreneurial awareness and motivation, along with societal, organizational, institutional, and market settings, shape the landscape of SE opportunities and resistance.



**Figure 3.** Thematic framework on the dynamics of ISE

These elements interact and evolve within the entrepreneur's environment, molding the nature of ISE (Newth and Woods, 2014). It is also evident that cultural backdrops and the firm's behavioral theory heavily influence the trajectory of ISE and the discovery of social opportunities (Zahra *et al.*, 2008). The expansion of SE is fuelled by factors such as addressing social issues and creating social wealth. Presenting a situated dynamics framework enables us to examine the effects of values, schemas, and norms on cultural diversity within ISE (Leung and Morris, 2015). An individual's perception of social enterprise also substantially impacts their potential in ISE. This perception is shaped by personal, sociological, and environmental factors (Tukamushaba *et al.*, 2011).

Moreover, cultural values significantly alter entrepreneurial processes by modulating the impact of economic conditions on SE across borders (Jaén *et al.*, 2017). Countries displaying particular cultural tendencies tend to foster a robust entrepreneurial attitude, thus increasing the potential for entrepreneurship and global competitiveness. Environments with certain cultural predispositions are more likely to foster self-directed, risk-taking, innovative entrepreneurs (Lee and Peterson, 2000). Dimitratos and Plakoyiannaki (2003) identified six interconnected dimensions of international entrepreneurial culture: market orientation, learning orientation, proclivity for innovation, risk attitude, networking orientation, and motivation. Undeniably, cultural knowledge within ISE is dynamic, social, practical, and local (Weisinger and Salipante, 2000).

Ultimately, this proposition suggests that success in global SE requires a rigorous emphasis on cross-cultural understanding and adaptation. Entrepreneurs operating in diverse cultural contexts must actively engage in knowledge, value, and practice exchanges to navigate the international landscape successfully. This proposition advocates developing strategies and frameworks that emphasize efficient cross-cultural collaboration, fostering an environment in which social entrepreneurs can leverage diverse viewpoints to develop sustainable, resonant solutions.

Following up, we analyze each thematic component in accordance with our proposed framework. We aim to identify and clarify the links between existing literature and suitable case studies.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Cultural adaptation

Cultural adaptation is pivotal in shaping the contours of global SE, establishing the interface between efforts to solve global social problems. Therefore, strong importance is attached to the fact that effective and sustainable SE necessitates a clear understanding, respect, and

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adaptation within unique cultural settings. The *first dimension*, cultural adaptation, refers to Company Alpha's ongoing effort to align its sustainability mission with local social norms, environmental priorities, and work practices in its host markets. Rather than treating culture as an external constraint, the company reinterprets its organizational values through local meaning systems. As the CEO noted,

When we entered Asia, we realized our sustainability message had to speak to local traditions of community farming and resource sharing. We did not just translate words, we translated intent.

This extended ISE adaptation is primarily influenced by the call for cultural integration, which holds that cultural differences can affect the identification of social problems, the development of plans, and communication with local stakeholders in a specific area (Canestrino *et al.*, 2020). Cultural integration is not superficial; it involves deep learning and the integration of a particular society's norms and values into social entrepreneurial activities. During a conversation with the CEO of a sustainable, renewable energy company, the following words highlight the importance of cultural integration in shaping the patterns of SE across borders.

Our knowledge of different cultural settings has been central to our success. More than just adapting what we offer, it is about really grasping what our target users' usual habits and values are all about. This realization has availed us the opportunity to strategize and design according to the given local setting and with which our target users can identify.

The sentiments reflect the paper's findings: the need for more intensive research into the subtle ways in which cultural adaptation influences the strategies, effects, and longevity of international social entrepreneurial ventures. The CEO explained further:

The underlying principle of our work is culture tweaking. We are not just entering a new market; we are trying to understand different cultural contexts and adapt our plans so that they fit local communities.

The CEO repeatedly emphasizes the strategic importance of cultural adaptation in addressing the challenges of ISE, thereby ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of initiatives across diverse cultural contexts. The paper also emphasizes that entrepreneurs should go beyond skin-deep changes and delve into the deeper levels of cultural dynamics. From the case analyzed in detail alongside the theory, we can develop our conceptual understanding.

Superficial changes are not enough. True cultural accommodation requires deep understanding of the historical, social, and economic forces at play in a community. Such variability requires the humility to learn and grow and the realization that the ultimate success of social entrepreneurship depends on successful cultural incorporation.

Cultural adaptability is also crucial for international social entrepreneurs, as it impacts strategy, effectiveness, and long-term change. The results from the SE case firm contribute to the scholarly debate on the need for long-term cultural adaptation, in-depth knowledge of diverse cultural contexts, and sensitivity to drive successful and sustainable activities. Such a holistic approach to cultural adaptation is crucial for entrepreneurs seeking to make a meaningful impact globally.

*P1.* Cultural adaptation is a pivotal factor influencing the dynamics of international social entrepreneurship.

#### *4.2 Role of social networks*

Social networks have been identified as dynamic drivers that significantly shape the spread and evolution of ISE practices across diverse cultural contexts. The crucial organic intermingling of people and organizations through social networks is, therefore, capable of

ensuring the smooth transfer of ideas, knowledge, and innovative practices across geographical and cultural boundaries. The *second dimension*, network-embedded diffusion, captures how cultural knowledge and sustainable practices were transmitted across organizational and geographical boundaries through relational networks. Company Alpha relied on both formal alliances and informal relationships to learn from and disseminate culturally informed practices. The CEO described this as

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learning sideways, not top-down. Each country office becomes a source of innovation that others can borrow from.

Academics in this field further emphasize the importance of understanding and leveraging these networks to facilitate the global dissemination of SE ventures (Ghauri *et al.*, 2014; Dufays and Huybrechts, 2014). Social networks also perform critical functions, such as disseminating and adapting ISE practices across diverse cultural contexts. This perspective emphasizes the role of social relationships, collaboration, and knowledge exchange within these networks in facilitating the global spread and adaptation of social entrepreneurial practices. Relevant literature supporting this perspective will be cited to build the argument, and quotes from the CEO of the sample organization will also be included.

Social networking is a vehicle for spreading best practices in SE that transcends cultural boundaries. This underscores that such networks serve as conduits for information, resources, and support, facilitating the dissemination of effective models and strategies. Leadbeater (1997) agrees, further stating that social networks interconnect the actors of a SE ecosystem. Social venturing begins when one individual mobilizes others toward a common social goal through their social network. In the following phrases, during a conversation with a CEO of a sustainable renewable energy business, it can be seen how far social networks do work to help shape and adapt international social entrepreneurial activity:

Our involvement in global social networks has made a significant difference to the distribution of our activities. Not only what we do, but how we do it and learn from and work with others in the field.

Social networks are the means to cross-fertilizing cultures. They tell us about the local conditions, and they make us change our plans and give us an arena to construct influential partners with local people across the world.

This statement from the CEO offers insight into the strategic role of social networks in the dissemination and adoption of SE within the international community. This aligns with the paper's perspective, which calls for further exploration into how social networks facilitate the diffusion of SE initiatives across borders and ensure their adequate accommodation. This view situates the dynamic nature of social networks within context and underscores the indispensability of both online and face-to-face relationships in the internationalization of SE. The role of social networks as living actors in the diffusion and adoption of ISE practices cannot be underestimated. The interview results contribute to this growing academic discussion, which focuses on the practical implications of using social networks to disseminate information about initiatives internationally. This study calls for further research to uncover the subtle dimensions through which social networks can be leveraged to enhance efficiency and achieve positive outcomes in SE across different cultural settings.

P2. Social networks catalyze the diffusion and adaptation of international social entrepreneurship practices across diverse cultural contexts.

#### 4.3 Institutional inventions and global governance

SE is a complex phenomenon, shaped by formal regulatory institutions, informal cognitive influences, and informal normative institutions, whose support may come from both formal and informal sources. Shane and Venkataraman (2000) have shaped the early understanding of entrepreneurship and provided insights that are more valuable than prevailing ideologies in

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other areas. Their conceptual framework simplifies understanding and predicts novel outcomes, providing a basis for understanding the complexities of SE. Global SE is expanding, seeking systemic impacts that contribute to global sustainable well-being. In this case, it is essential to harmonize the integrative perspectives of blended value and global standards (Zahra *et al.*, 2013). This perspective emphasizes the development of social and economic values in international social entrepreneurial activities, and governance structures of this nature help strengthen the overall effort. The *third dimension*, governance alignment, concerns how Company Alpha integrated local adaptation and network learning within a coherent organizational governance framework. The company balanced decentralized autonomy with shared sustainability standards, ensuring that local initiatives remained aligned with the corporate mission. The CEO explained,

We operate like a federation: every region adapts our sustainability goals to its context, but we all report through the same accountability lens.

The interaction between institutional innovations and global governance frameworks primarily shapes the dimensions of ISE. This view focuses on the complex relationship between formal environments and international regulatory frameworks, and on how their combination shapes the stage for the occurrence of international social entrepreneurial acts. To better understand this assertion, it is important to consult relevant scientific literature and to cite empirical evidence from a hypothetical discussion with the CEO of a SE case organization. Additionally, self-reliance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance among top management exert a strong influence on the organization's business orientation. Chew *et al.* (2022) emphasize that these cultural factors are critical in determining whether an organization is prepared to engage in entrepreneurial activity. Furthermore, positive attitudes towards government policies amplify the influence of these cultural factors on business orientation. During our discussion with the CEO of the case company, the importance of institutional and cultural components was highlighted. The CEO stated:

Understanding the global ecosystem requires a reflexive understanding of institutional inventions and international governance frameworks. Our initiatives are in sync with international layouts to ensure legitimacy and influence.

Institutional support and worldwide regulatory frameworks are like the wind beneath our wings. They provide the necessary support for our efforts, yet demand that we learn the fine art of their dynamics to influence diverse domains.

The CEO's statements emphasize the interaction between institutional constructions and international governance systems, with a focus on the strategic choices of social entrepreneurs in response to the complexities of the international institutional environment. The interplay among formal regulatory bodies, informal cognitive institutions, unwritten normative rules, and cultural factors shapes the landscape of SE. The theoretical frameworks by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) and Zahra *et al.* (2013) are of great value, and the interview with a real case firm highlights their current applicability. Such an interdisciplinary approach is essential in understanding and advancing SE as a field in sustainable global welfare.

P3. The interplay between institutional inventions and global governance structures plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of international social entrepreneurship.

#### 4.4 Opportunities in social and behavioral theories

Many factors, including entrepreneurial vision, willingness, and the broader contexts of the organization, society, institutions, and markets, influence the complexities of the opportunities and resistance to SE. Newth and Woods (2014) support this proposition, stating that the emergence and resistance to SE are deeply rooted in the cognitive and motivational aspects of

the entrepreneur and in the ecological factors within which one operates. The *fourth dimension*, social and behavioral theory, is primarily guided by the identification and use of social opportunities for global social entrepreneurial activities. As the CEO said:

Our strategy has a solid base in entrepreneurial behavioral theories; we proactively scout social prospects that coincide with our mission and, in the endeavor to inform our strategic choices, use theoretical models.

This argues that theoretical model-informed entrepreneurship behavior plays a central role in shaping the path of global social entrepreneurial activities. The purpose of this study is to synthesize relevant scholarly literature and empirical evidence from the case of a CEO to clarify this postulation.

In a culturally diverse setting, ISE is significantly influenced by the key attributes of social opportunities and by principles grounded in behavioral theory. [Zahra et al. \(2008\)](#) state that SE opportunities are emerging globally at a rapid pace, owing to increased attention to solving social problems, building social capital, and shaping firm behavior. Human attitudes toward social ventures significantly influence individuals' propensity to pursue ISE. Personal, sociological, and ecological factors collectively shape individuals' perspectives and approaches to social enterprise initiatives, ultimately determining whether these initiatives succeed in ISE, as detailed by [Tukamushaba et al. \(2011\)](#). Indeed, the importance of understanding and guiding these dynamics is underscored by empirical studies on behavioral theories in SE. The CEO's statements above emphasize the intentional use of behavioral theories to shape the entrepreneur's path within the case firm. They emphasize the role of theoretical models in strategic decision-making for identifying and exploiting social opportunities within the global SE environment. Entrepreneurial alertness, motivation, and environmental factors contribute significantly to the global scale of SE. The interview outlines the practical importance of considering these factors in actual SE activity.

P4. The identification and exploitation of social opportunities, guided by behavioral theories, are fundamental drivers in the emergence and evolution of international social entrepreneurship.

#### 4.5 Cultural values

ISE is deeply intertwined with cultural values, which greatly dictate its formation and implementation. This idea underscores the importance of understanding the sociocultural context in which global social entrepreneurial activities occur. It is crucial to consider academic studies and related empirical evidence to assess this proposition. [Triandis \(1989\)](#) and [Schwartz \(1994\)](#) state that cultural values cover the collective beliefs, customary practices, and actions that distinguish a specific social set. In SE, societal and cultural values can shape how individuals perceive societal problems, influence the intent behind entrepreneurial actions, and inform approaches to addressing societal hurdles. The *fifth dimension*, cultural values regarding SE, is particularly evident in global settings, where diverse cultural backgrounds can lead to different interpretations of societal issues and diverse resolutions. The CEO explained,

For us, cultural sensitivity is beyond being a trendy term; it is a standard to live by. We modify our strategies to fit each area's cultural peculiarities, ensuring our social entrepreneurship initiatives are applicable in context.

Analyzing cultural values in the context of global SE aligns with the theory of cultural embeddedness proposed by [Zahra et al. \(2009\)](#). This viewpoint emphasizes the influence of cultural context on entrepreneurial practices, arguing that discerning cultural values is crucial for understanding the workings of SE. Thus, the formation and implementation of global SE depend heavily on the cultural values of the regions in which these activities occur. To examine the relationship between cultural values and global SE more closely, a qualitative interview with the CEO of a reference company can provide invaluable insights.

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According to [Canestrino et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Jaén et al. \(2017\)](#), discussions with key stakeholders provide comprehensive data that enable an understanding of the interactions between cultural values and entrepreneurial techniques. In the CEO's interview, the following statements underline the importance of cultural values:

How we address societal issues is intrinsically tied to the communities we work with's cultural framework. Knowing local rules and values is vital to our achievements.

These quotations highlight the CEO's acknowledgment of the significant influence of cultural values in shaping and implementing the company's global SE. By incorporating this qualitative evidence, the analysis expands the empirical foundation for the proposition and highlights the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of cultural values in ISE.

P5. Cultural values significantly shape the conceptualization and expression of international social entrepreneurship.

#### 4.6 Cross-cultural learning

The *fifth dimension* of cross-cultural learning holds that practical global SE relies heavily on entrepreneurs' ability to interact and adapt across diverse cultural landscapes. The importance of cultural awareness and flexibility is underscored in this declaration, particularly when undertaking social entrepreneurial endeavors on a global scale. The discussion would draw on academic literature and relevant empirical data to clarify this proposition. As the CEO said that,

Our path in global social entrepreneurship is an unending learning journey. We face distinct challenges in every cultural setting, and our success is attributed to our dedication to acknowledging and respecting local traditions.

An international entrepreneurial venture requires an understanding of and the ability to navigate diverse cultural contexts ([Zahra et al., 2014](#)). They emphasize the importance of cross-cultural education as a crucial component of thriving international entrepreneurship, particularly in SE, where cultural nuances can significantly affect the effectiveness of initiatives. Similarly, [Jaén et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Pathak and Muralidharan \(2020\)](#) argue that international entrepreneurship is a dynamic process in which opportunities are identified and leveraged across national boundaries. They propose that, to be effective, entrepreneurs operating at an international level must demonstrate cross-cultural capabilities to adjust their strategies to diverse cultural environments. Empirical research deepens our understanding of cross-cultural learning in ISE. Here is what the CEO of a sustainable renewable energy enterprise has to say about the significance of cross-cultural learning and adaptation:

Being adaptable is more than a strategic decision; it is necessary for survival in our sector. We have realized that authentic involvement with various cultures forms the basis of meaningful social entrepreneurship on an international level.

These comments from the CEO emphasize the practical importance of cross-cultural learning and adaptability for ISE to thrive in the hypothetical business context. The repeated learning and adaptation cycles are crucial to the success of entrepreneurial ventures in diverse cultural settings. The argument that successful global SE requires cross-cultural learning and adaptability aligns with the existing literature on international entrepreneurship. The practical relevance of cross-cultural proficiencies for achieving success in ISE is further supported by insights from the CEO's interview in this case study.

P6. Successful international social entrepreneurship involves cross-cultural learning and adaptation as entrepreneurs navigate diverse cultural contexts.

#### 4.7 Multidimensional model

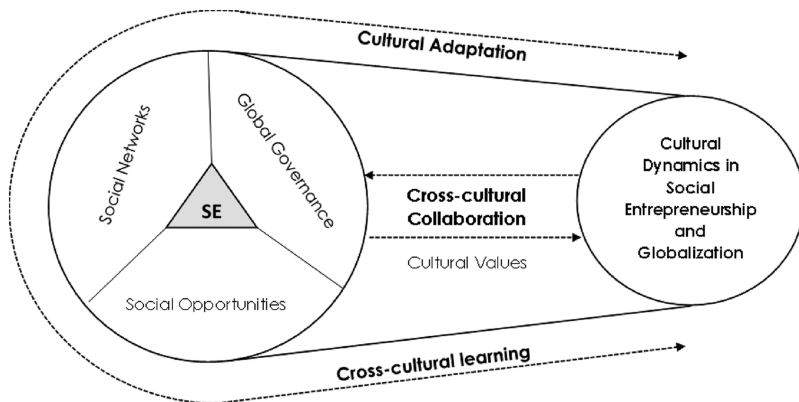
An in-depth exploration of relevant literature and case studies illuminates the profound implications of three key themes: social networks, global governance, and social opportunities. These themes play a vital role in molding the cultural essence of SE endeavors, thus inducing a transformative effect on cross-cultural coordination (Figure 4).

Firstly, the social network theme is a pillar in the global spread of SE. Social networks, both local and international, serve as channels for disseminating, shaping, and modifying cultural values within SE initiatives. The complex matrix of personal connections within social networks produces a forum for swapping cultural perspectives and customs. Local social networks act as breeding grounds for SE ventures, fostering ideas rooted in specific cultural environments. On the other hand, global social networks facilitate the dissemination of these culturally imprinted projects on a broader scale. At the heart of these vast networks, social entrepreneurs not only disseminate their native cultural characteristics but also open themselves to diverse cultural stimuli, fostering a setting conducive to cross-cultural cooperation.

Secondly, global governance plays a crucial role in shaping the global scope of SE. The shifting landscape of global governance structures, encompassing regulatory frameworks, international institutions, and joint ventures, has a profound impact on the cultural dimensions of SE. Regulatory frameworks, for example, play a central role in determining the degree to which SE endeavors can cross cultural divides. Moreover, international institutions and joint ventures establish norms and protocols that can either support or hinder the cross-cultural exchange of SE methods. The effect of global governance on SE is not solely restrictive; it also offers social entrepreneurs' paths to navigate diverse cultural landscapes. By engaging with and adapting to changing global governance configurations, social entrepreneurs can strategically position themselves to tap into cultural synergies and overcome potential obstacles, thereby expanding the global reach of their projects.

Finally, the third theme, social opportunities, emerges as a driving force that accelerates the global scope of SE. Social opportunities are defined as the identification and use of socially relevant demands and issues that serve as springboards for cross-cultural collaboration within SE's domain. These opportunities typically arise from the convergence of cultural contexts and require a nuanced understanding of local dynamics. Tapping into these cultural subtleties, social entrepreneurs capitalize on these opportunities to address societal challenges in ways that resonate with diverse cultural communities. This dimension accelerates the integration of local cultures into global SE practices and stimulates reciprocity by tailoring globally sourced solutions to local contexts.

The mutual relationship between recognized themes and the cultural principles associated with social enterprise extends beyond mere dispersion, incorporating a stimulating drive for



**Figure 4.** Multidimensional model on Cultural Dynamics in SE and Globalization

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cross-cultural cooperation. Fuelled by a dedication to societal change, social innovators become representatives of their cultures, transcending geographical boundaries to share their local traditions with the world. This act of cultural exchange is not a one-way process. Instead, it symbolizes a dynamic relationship between the local and the global, fostering a two-way exchange that benefits social entrepreneurs and the societies with which they interact.

In addition, this cross-cultural collaboration in social enterprise initiatives fosters significant learning for these social innovators. As they navigate diverse cultural contexts, social entrepreneurs gain insight into how to adapt to international cultural norms. This adaptive learning extends beyond surface-level cultural manifestations to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural subtleties that shape various communities. The entrepreneurs become skilled at navigating the challenges of cultural diversity in their quest for global impact, thereby cultivating heightened cultural acumen that breaks down barriers within their immediate cultural environment.

## 5. Research implications and future directions

### 5.1 Managerial implications

The managerial implications of this study are significant for stakeholders, including practitioners, policymakers, and social entrepreneurs, who are involved in global activities. Recognizing the challenges of generalizing outcomes across diverse cultural contexts underscores the need for context-specific models to advance and implement SE ventures. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of context in entrepreneurial activities (Jones and Coviello, 2005). Practitioners can benefit from developing a deeper understanding of the cultural values specific to their operational regions, as evidenced by studies examining the role of culture in international business (Hofstede, 2001). Policymakers should critically assess potential biases arising from reliance on Western cultural frameworks and emphasize the need for cultural sensitivity in policy formulation. This highlights the importance of adopting an indigenous perspective in policy design to accommodate cultural diversity (Wang and Shi, 2014).

Social entrepreneurs are encouraged to prioritize continuous learning and adaptation to effectively navigate cultural nuances, consistent with the concept of dynamic capabilities in entrepreneurship (Teece *et al.*, 1997). Furthermore, the emphasis on longitudinal research points to the need for sustained efforts and resources to evaluate and improve ISE initiatives over time (Davidsson and Wiklund, 1997). Lastly, understanding the interactions among cultural, economic, and political factors underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by social entrepreneurs across diverse cultural contexts (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

### 5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this study offer several actionable insights for social entrepreneurs, managers, and policymakers engaged in ISE and sustainability transitions. Each of the three mechanisms identified, *cultural adaptation*, *network-embedded diffusion*, and *governance alignment*, translates into distinct managerial practices that can enhance the success and legitimacy of socially oriented ventures operating across diverse institutional contexts.

First, the mechanism of deep cultural adaptation highlights the importance of contextual empathy, which enables organizations to understand and integrate local values, norms, and community expectations into their operational models. Practitioners can operationalize this approach by conducting cultural sensemaking workshops prior to market entry, co-designing products or services with community stakeholders, and investing in local cultural brokers or “boundary spanners.” For policymakers and ecosystem builders, this finding suggests that training programs and incubators should include modules on cultural competence and intercultural leadership as core entrepreneurial skills.

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*Second*, the mechanism of network-embedded diffusion points to the strategic use of relational networks as vehicles for knowledge sharing and cross-cultural learning. Social ventures should intentionally cultivate horizontal learning structures, for example, peer-to-peer learning circles among international subsidiaries or cross-country communities of practice. Policymakers could facilitate such learning through transnational clusters or partnerships that connect local social enterprises with global sustainability initiatives. These relational infrastructures help ensure that successful cultural adaptations in one context become transferable insights in other contexts.

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### 5.3 Future directions

The study also opens several avenues for further research. Future studies could expand the analytical framework proposed here by testing or refining the three identified dimensions in multi-case comparative designs or quantitative extensions. For instance, researchers could examine how variations in institutional distance, cultural tightness–looseness (Gelfand *et al.*, 2011), or governance decentralization affect the strength and sequence of the observed dimensions. A cross-sectoral comparison, e.g. between environmental, educational, and health-focused social enterprises, could reveal whether cultural adaptation differs across social mission types.

Another promising line of inquiry involves exploring the *microfoundations* of cultural adaptation and diffusion, particularly the role of individual-level cultural intelligence, boundary-spanning behaviors, and leadership cognition in enabling organizational learning. Longitudinal or ethnographic research could capture how these micro-level processes evolve as organizations internationalize.

Finally, further studies could investigate policy-level enablers of governance alignment, such as national impact measurement standards, hybrid legal forms, and cross-border certification schemes, that influence how social ventures institutionalize their sustainability goals. Emerging research emphasizes the potential of artificial intelligence to enhance scenario analysis and strategic foresight, offering validated frameworks for navigating uncertainty in global and culturally diverse environments (Bessa and Barbosa, 2025). Incorporating such AI-driven approaches could enable future scholars to model complex cross-cultural interactions and institutional contingencies in ISE with greater analytical precision.

By interpreting the three dimensions into both practice- and research-oriented pathways, this study helps bridge the persistent gap between conceptual insights into culture and the operational realities of global SE. The results thus provide a robust platform for advancing a research agenda that is empirically grounded, theoretically integrative, and socially impactful.

### 5.4 Limitation

This study has a few limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. First, the research is based on a single, in-depth case study of a mature European social enterprise, which enables rich theory building but limits statistical generalizability. As with most qualitative case research, the goal is analytical rather than population-level generalization, and the proposed dimensions should therefore be understood as theoretically transferable rather than universally representative (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2018). Second, while the longitudinal engagement with CEO-level informants provides privileged access to strategic decision-making and governance dynamics, it may underrepresent frontline or community-level interpretations of cultural adaptation. Future research could incorporate multi-actor perspectives to capture how cultural meaning is negotiated across organizational hierarchies (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). Third, the study focuses primarily on formal internationalization contexts with relatively stable institutional environments. As a result, the dynamics identified here may manifest differently in fragile states or informal economies characterized by extreme institutional voids (Mair and Martí, 2009; Stephan *et al.*, 2015). Finally, although the study conceptualizes culture as a dynamic, multidimensional process, it does not quantitatively measure cultural distance or change over

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time. Combining process-oriented qualitative approaches with longitudinal or mixed-method designs would allow future studies to test boundary conditions and assess the relative strength of cultural dimensions across contexts (Welter, 2011; Saebi *et al.*, 2019).

## 6. Conclusions

The proposed study helps us understand the dynamics of ISE across different cultural backgrounds. The study utilizes a multidimensional framework that draws on factors identified in the academic literature, including cultural adjustment, institutional innovations, global administration, social opportunities, behavioral theories, social connections, and cultural values. By examining the interplay of these factors, the study reveals the intricacies that shape the understanding and advancement of ISE. This study makes a theoretical contribution by examining the impact of cultural adaptation on ISE. Building on scholars such as Triandis (1989) and Schwartz (1994), the research integrates these perspectives to explain how cultural values shape the goals, strategies, and outcomes of SE across diverse cultural contexts. It adds valuable insight by assessing how entrepreneurs navigate cultural nuances. Additionally, it draws on the cultural adaptation literature to examine how social entrepreneurs engage in cross-cultural learning and adjustment, providing insights into the strategies they employ to overcome challenges and capitalize on opportunities across diverse cultural settings.

Behavioral theories, such as those presented by Cossette (2014), provide a framework for examining how cognitive biases and heuristics influence the decision-making of social entrepreneurs. The study applies these theories to explore how social entrepreneurs identify and leverage opportunities in culturally diverse environments. Furthermore, Granovetter's (1973) social network theory guides the exploration of how social networks facilitate knowledge transfer and collaboration among social entrepreneurs across different cultures. By integrating culturally grounded perspectives from Canestrino *et al.* (2020), the study offers tailored insights into how to shape SE goals, methods, and outcomes across diverse cultural environments. In sum, this research's theoretical contribution lies in its seamless amalgamation of diverse factors and theoretical models to clarify the complex dynamics of ISE. The blend of insights from immigrant entrepreneurship, institutional theory, behavioral economics, social network theory, and cultural dimensions deepens our understanding of the global manifestations and evolutionary trajectory of SE.

While this study advances our understanding of the dynamics of ISE, particularly its cross-cultural adaptation, it also has significant limitations. First, applying these findings universally is challenging due to the natural diversity of cultural settings, and the results should be used cautiously. Further research is needed to investigate how entrepreneurs adjust their strategies to accommodate cultural differences. Exclusive reliance on Western cultural frameworks can lead to bias that overlooks critical elements in non-Western settings (Chua *et al.*, 2009). Future research should strive for a broader, more nuanced understanding of cultural beliefs from diverse perspectives to provide a more comprehensive picture of cultural adjustments (Bird and Osland, 2006).

Long-term studies could enhance our understanding of how cultural adaptation affects the sustainability and success of ISE ventures (Zahra *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, studies examining how cultural factors intersect with economic and political contexts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities social entrepreneurs face across diverse cultural environments (Mair and Marti, 2009).

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