

Social entrepreneurship drivers in Ecuador

Social
entrepreneurship
drivers in
Ecuador

Impulsores del emprendimiento social en Ecuador

Fatores que impulsionam o empreendedorismo social no Equador

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Received 27 March 2023
Revised 19 September 2023
15 February 2024
3 April 2024
Accepted 11 April 2024

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to identify the key factors that drive social entrepreneurship (SE) among Ecuadorian social entrepreneurs.

Design/methodology/approach – The study was developed following a qualitative and exploratory research design based on the identification of social entrepreneurs through the nonprobabilistic sequential sampling technique, giving a total of fifteen social entrepreneurs who were given a structured interview that was later analyzed in the ATLAS.TI software for the identification, analysis and categorization of drivers.

Findings – The results will identify eight drivers for SE, including social exclusion, public support, sources of employment, economic income, family support, environmental awareness and fair trade, as standards and values. Overall, the findings help to improve the understanding of the factors that determine the creation and development of social enterprises in the country.

Research limitations/implications – Deepen and increase the literature on SE in Latin America. Contribute to reducing the knowledge gap on the topic.

Originality/value – Taken together, the results provide empirical evidence and help to better understand the factors that determine the creation and development of social enterprises in the country.

Keywords Entrepreneurship, Factors, Drivers, Social entrepreneurs

Paper type Research paper



Funding: This article is the result of the ELANET project, funded by the European Union through the Erasmus Call. It was also supported by the Vicerrectorado de Investigación de la Universidad de Cuenca, Ecuador.

Management Research: Journal of
the Iberoamerican Academy of
Management
© Emerald Publishing Limited
1536-5433
DOI 10.1108/MRJAM-03-2023-1399

Resumen

Propósito – Identificar los factores clave que impulsan el emprendimiento social en emprendedores sociales ecuatorianos.

Metodología – El estudio se desarrolló siguiendo un diseño de investigación cualitativo y exploratorio basado en la identificación de emprendedores sociales a través de la técnica de muestreo secuencial no probabilístico, obteniendo un total de quince emprendedores sociales a quienes se les realizó una entrevista estructurada que posteriormente fue analizada en el software ATLAS.TI para la identificación, análisis y categorización de impulsores.

Resultados – Los resultados identificarán ocho impulsores del empresariado social, entre los que se encuentran la exclusión social, el apoyo público, las fuentes de empleo, los ingresos económicos, el apoyo familiar, la conciencia medioambiental y el comercio justo, como normas y valores. En general, los resultados ayudan a mejorar la comprensión de los factores que determinan la creación y el desarrollo de empresas sociales en el país.

Originalidad – En conjunto, los resultados aportan evidencia empírica y ayudan a comprender mejor los factores que determinan la creación y desarrollo de empresas sociales en el país.

Implicaciones de la investigación – Profundizar e incrementar la literatura sobre Emprendimiento Social en América Latina. Contribuir a reducir la brecha de conocimiento sobre el tema.

Palabras clave Emprendimiento, factores, impulsores, emprendedores sociales

Tipo de artículo Trabajo de investigación

Resumo

Objetivo – Identificar os principais fatores que impulsionam o empreendedorismo social nos empreendedores sociais equatorianos.

Metodologia – O estudo foi desenvolvido de acordo com um projeto de pesquisa qualitativo e exploratório baseado na identificação de empreendedores sociais por meio da técnica de amostragem sequencial não probabilística, totalizando quinze empreendedores sociais que foram submetidos a uma entrevista estruturada, posteriormente analisada no software ATLAS.TI para identificação, análise e categorização dos fatores determinantes.

Conclusões – Os resultados identificarão oito motivadores do empreendedorismo social, incluindo exclusão social, apoio público, fontes de emprego, renda econômica, apoio familiar, consciência ambiental e comércio justo, como padrões e valores. Em geral, os resultados ajudam a melhorar a compreensão dos fatores que determinam a criação e o desenvolvimento de empresas sociais no país.

Originalidade – Em conjunto, os resultados fornecem evidências empíricas e ajudam a entender melhor os fatores que determinam a criação e o desenvolvimento de empresas sociais no país.

Implicações para a pesquisa – Aprofundar e aumentar a literatura sobre empreendedorismo social na América Latina. Contribuir para reduzir a lacuna de conhecimento sobre o tema.

Palavras-chave Empreendedorismo, fatores, motivadores, empreendedores sociais

Tipo de papel Trabalho de pesquisa

Introduction

The literature corresponding to social entrepreneurship (SE) is booming (Akter *et al.*, 2019), and in recent years, its research has received a great deal of attention and recognition from the public sector, academia and the public (Bacq and Janssen, 2011; Short *et al.*, 2009). SE comprises a set of actions and processes that lead to the creation and strengthening of social value by individuals, groups of citizens and organizations (Pacut, 2020). In this sense, some authors point out that SE focuses on the creation and realization of businesses from innovative opportunities that address complex social problems in voluntary, community and public organizations through the use of underutilized social resources (Ashoka, 2020; Shaw and de Bruin, 2013).

It is evident that within society, it is considered that the creation of this type of entrepreneurship is fundamental because it allows the achievement of a more just economic system, where ethics and economics go hand in hand (Bouby, 2015). For them, researchers in the field have been interested in the study of four fundamental areas, which include, first, the definition of SE; second, the comparison of SE with other organizational forms; third, the study of the entrepreneurial process through the evaluation of social impact and emerging opportunities; and finally, the study and research of the factors that determine the development of SE (Ferri, 2014).

For the purposes of the article, the fourth research area will be addressed, considering that the literature suggests diverse and complex factors that can influence the creation of SE, among which autonomy and competitive aggressiveness (Lumpkin *et al.*, 2011), creativity and emotions (Erro-Garcés, 2019), personality, cognition and human capital (Kruse *et al.*, 2020), innovation (Abazi-Alili *et al.*, 2016), basic infrastructures, public administrations, exploitable resources and entrepreneurial culture (Uribe and Bonilla, 2013), fair trade (Khanapuri and Khandelwal, 2011), as well as unemployment and social exclusion (Mora and Martínez, 2018). These can be an essential part of the achievement of these initiatives.

Despite the existence of some studies, it has not yet been deciphered what really motivates social entrepreneurs to start and maintain this type of initiative and not to choose to create another type of venture. Some of the previous research has been approached only from a theoretical and conceptual point of view, so the few case studies developed are not completely clear. As far as Ecuador is concerned, there is still no formal regulatory framework for SEs. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to contribute to the literature on SE by answering the following research question: what factors lead people to create a social enterprise? This question will be answered by categorizing the drivers through a qualitative research methodology using ATLAS.TI software. The research design will be exploratory, depending on access to information.

The thesis will be developed as follows: first, a literature review section is presented, where the conceptual and theoretical aspects of the work are developed; then, the methodology is detailed, followed by a results and discussion section; and finally, conclusions and recommendations are presented.

Literature review

The substantial differences in the economic, social and political development processes of Europe and Latin America make the role of the Welfare State utterly opposite in the two regions, so much so that in Europe, it is a fundamental benefactor because it provides efficient social and economic services to its inhabitants. However, in Latin America, the Welfare State is perceived as vulnerable and marked by social inequity, poverty and a lack of essential services (Gamble, 2018). Therefore, the Welfare State in the case of the Latin American region faces several challenges that call into question its reason to exist and question its functioning because it is not generating the desired results from a social, economic and environmental point of view. The global entrepreneurship monitor report developed by Bartesaghi *et al.* (2017) mentioned that even though Latin America and the Caribbean, in recent years, showed signs of positive social and economic change, the level of growth in the region was affected by adverse external factors, so it was necessary to establish strategies that promoted inclusive and sustainable development through the formulation of policies that focused on generating a suitable environment in which entrepreneurs could emerge, innovate and maintain themselves in competitive environments.

Considering the above, it is important to highlight that for several years, SE has been a topic of special attention and global interest addressed by politicians, companies, academics and individuals in general (Sekliuckiene and Kisielius, 2015) due to its high capacity to generate a state of social welfare by driving change and creating social value through innovative approaches that generate benefits through the clustering of value chains that allow improving the economic situation of social actors through the generation of employment that operates when the market and public companies do not (Schöning, 2013). Macke *et al.* (2018) mentioned that this study area was fragmented and still at an early stage. Several authors point out that SE is a commercial and market-focused business model that enables the innovative resolution of persistent and complex social problems (Spear, 2006; Dorado, 2006). Moya *et al.* (2015) pointed out that this type of market initiative was carried out by considering three specific axes: an innovative initiative to solve a social problem, a social objective and a sustainable business model. On the other hand, authors such as Defourny and Nyssens (2008) defined SE as the process in which individuals with specific characteristics, under the name of social entrepreneurs, create and develop organizations designated as *companies* or *social enterprises*.

According to Huybrechts and Nicholls (2012), SE has become a fashionable construct due to the dissemination of success stories in various areas, which has increased the debate about this category in spaces such as academia, commercial markets and in the generation of policies. Incorporating this construct is essential in creating markets and niches, especially with fair trade and a solid social component (Battilana and Dorado, 2010). For some authors, this is a problem, as the analysis of this category is subject to subjective interpretations and measurements so that each case of SE will be unique and have differentiating features (Nicholls, 2010). This type of characteristic is unusual in business but is more common in other social science areas that analyze social issues.

SE is an innovative way of combining business methods and elements of non-profit organizations to create social value for the organization (Dees and Anderson, 2006). In addition, among the main problems entrepreneurs try to solve are illiteracy, substance abuse dependence, environmental pollution and socioeconomic issues in communication, among others (Sullivan, 2007). It should be noted that despite having a vital social component, SE is not the same as charity because, although there is a benevolent attitude toward helping others, social entrepreneurs are still people interested in their business (Roberts and Woods, 2005).

Among the characteristics of SE is the continuous search for solutions to social problems, in which the social entrepreneur seeks opportunities to solve these difficulties through ventures (Guzman and Trujillo, 2008). Another characteristic of SE is constructing, evaluating and pursuing opportunities to achieve transformational social change. For Austin *et al.* (2006), one of the critical elements for understanding this characteristic is the construction of opportunity by generating ideas to address specific social needs. The second element corresponds to the activities developed by a social entrepreneur, which can be carried out in different sectors, allowing them to coexist with commercial ventures and, at the same time, generate ventures that have social value. For Kruse *et al.* (2020), the main characteristic to keep in mind about SE is the challenge to achieve business objectives while, at the same time, completing the social mission for which the venture was created. The combination of the economic and social components often generates additional risk. Social entrepreneurs may be more prone to business failure, so balancing meeting business and social goals is often challenging (McCaffrey, 2017).

The way to distinguish entrepreneurs from regular social entrepreneurs. According to Rajdeep (2016), the criteria of selection refer to the predominance of a social mission,

constant innovation and how the income that finances the venture is obtained. The main objective of SE is the creation of a social value that also includes the result of an economic value that allows the financial independence of the venture. [Moreira and Urriolagoitia \(2011\)](#) emphasized that the benefits of a social venture are not of a temporary nature, because the effort in creating these businesses is focused on long-term sustainability. Therefore, their impact is reflected in systemic changes that lead to a complete social transformation. To achieve this, there must be a visible impact on the quality of life of those affected. This is the importance of innovation because it will help to solve the problems that may arise during the implementation of the social enterprise and, at the same time, achieve a balance that will allow the business and social mission to continue over time ([Dees and Anderson, 2006](#), as cited in [Moreira and Urriolagoitia, 2011](#)).

In addition, SE is closely related to sustainable development, so for [Mora and Martínez \(2018\)](#), four fundamental types of sustainability must be considered for SE to exist: environmental, economic, social and political-institutional.

Being a widely discussed topic at present, the theory of SE, as mentioned above, is based on case studies in which different perspectives are immersed ([Macke et al., 2018](#); [Pacut, 2020](#)), so a single conceptual framework that captures the characteristics of SE has not yet been created. Therefore, there is a latent need to generate a systematic knowledge and vision of the subject, considering that its conceptualization is a challenge facing the current literature ([Abazi-Alili et al., 2016](#)).

This has led to some scientific research, as is the case of the studies proposed by several institutions that argue that the term social entrepreneur is used to refer to creative and risk-taking individuals who provide innovative solutions by creating enterprises with social purposes that address pressing problems affecting their locality by making use of untapped resources ([Ashoka, 2020](#); [European Commission, 2013](#)). Greg Dees, known as one of the precursors of the academic definition of SE, considered social entrepreneurs to be responsible beings who, by creating public value, provide new opportunities through innovation and adaptation, acting with courage and taking advantage of resources that are not necessarily under their domain ([Bornstein and Davis, 2010](#)). The scientific evidence on the subject addresses the importance of SE from the point of view of both the economies of the countries involved and the institutional environment, which highlights the need to generate favorable environments for the promotion of SE, as well as institutional actors that provide support for this type of initiative to be developed in an appropriate ecosystem ([García Alonso et al., 2020](#); [Surie and Groen, 2017](#); [Zamora-Boza, 2018](#)).

The components of SE correspond to sociality, innovation and market orientation. These elements are usually characteristic of various types of organizations ([Nicholls and Cho, 2006](#)).

Social entrepreneurship drivers

[Lumpkin et al. \(2011\)](#) suggested four antecedents – drive/motivation, opportunity identification, access to resources/financing and multiple stakeholders – unique to SE, concluding that autonomy and competitive aggressiveness are dimensions that impact more on social ventures. [Meza et al. \(2016\)](#) pointed out that the study of the factors that drive SE is necessary because it will provide a clear orientation to the actors involved in social enterprises, because it will allow them to know the greater or lesser influence of factors of the external and internal environment that positively affect their management. Their knowledge will support the formation of more efficient and sustainable social and organizational structures over time while benefiting public policymakers by providing them with information that allows them to create regulatory frameworks that regulate and encourage these practices.

According to [Mora and Martínez \(2018\)](#), SE is closely related to the development of the local environment, so it must have an integral character. However, it is often influenced by external and adverse effects from economic crises, among them unemployment and social exclusion; hence the challenge of generating mechanisms to solve these problems and strengthen the local system.

In the case of Europe, several researchers study the drivers of SE, such as the analysis developed by [Erro-Garcés \(2019\)](#), who proposes that creativity and emotions drive this type of activity. Within the key findings, he highlights that emotions, daily challenges and the role of these business projects' teams are fundamental to creating successful social initiatives that minimize youth unemployment. Another study developed in Norway reveals that at least 5.1% of the population participates in a social venture at some stage. Human capital and institutional factors are variable and promote this emerging SE ([Åmo, 2014](#)). [Abazi-Alili et al. \(2016\)](#) published research in the European context, in which they propose that SE is affected by the sociodemographic characteristics of the population and innovation is directly related to SE activities. Their research concludes that innovation is strongly associated with SE, so far as products and services whose main characteristic is innovation will be part of them. At the same time, it is inferred that men with a job and higher educational levels will be more likely to participate in SE.

In addition, [Khanapuri and Khandelwal \(2011\)](#) proposed fair trade as a beneficial initiative that promises to improve the livelihoods of marginalized farmers. The authors argue that the adoption of fair trade contributes to sustainable development by improving trading conditions and safeguarding the rights of marginalized producers and workers. To achieve integral development at the national level, various models and agencies have been implemented. SE has gained great importance in this regard. Therefore, SE and fair trade are closely related.

Similarly, a study called *What Motivates Social Entrepreneurs*, shows through a meta-analysis the predictors of the intention to establish a social venture and offers empirical evidence that concludes that there are certain factors at the individual, social and economic level that drive the creation of social ventures, such as personality, cognition, human capital, certain subjective norms and the financial stage of a country, which are directly related to the intention of social ventures ([Kruse et al., 2020](#)). [Estrin et al. \(2016\)](#) dedicated their study to knowing the relationship between different forms of human capital and the creation of both social and business ventures through a series of hypotheses that are tested and from which it is deduced that people who have completed higher education are more likely to create social ventures, claiming in particular that women with third-level studies are more attracted to develop or be part of social ventures. It is also evident that human capital positively affects the creation of social enterprises. They highlight the importance of entrepreneurial skills development programs, emphasizing the fulfillment of social objectives.

Regarding Latin America, some studies have been conducted on the existing literature on SE, seeking only a clear definition of SE ([Ibáñez, 2022](#); [Vera Ruiz et al., 2020](#)).

Likewise, it is essential to consider that the proliferation of global crises (climate change, inequality and poverty) also drives social actors to demand primary conditions that mainly guarantee an optimal standard of living ([Bornstein, 2005](#)). Another driver influencing the increase in SE is the new forms of global connectivity that have allowed citizens to connect and respond to the social needs of communities ([Murray et al., 2010](#)). Besides, the State's role is critical, as new public management models and the creation of "quasi-markets" have led to an increase in the creation of social enterprises. However, they have also led to competition between organizations to attract resources from the government ([Bode et al., 2011](#)). A final element driving SE is the proliferation of non-profit organizations and other civil society organizations. Due to the economic crisis, different social organizations have

had to support the needs of society (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2012). This has caused civil society organizations to seek new ways to obtain funding, either through alliances with the state or with business sectors; as a result, in the case of successful social entrepreneurs, they have managed to achieve a level of independence from the state and business sectors, but in other cases, this has not been possible (Dart, 2004). Uribe and Bonilla (2013) proposed four primary factors that have been considered for SE: basic infrastructure, public administration, exploitable resources and entrepreneurial culture.

Regarding Ecuador, Scarlato (2013), in his article *Social Enterprise, Capabilities and Development Paradigms: Lessons from Ecuador*, suggests that in Ecuador, the development of the social and solidarity economy, which includes social enterprises, can bear fruit, as it is an important alternative for the development of capabilities through innovative initiatives that address social problems, taking into account the environmental component, as well as the involvement of indigenous communities in development initiatives and collaborations to strengthen migrants and their communities in their country of origin.

Feijó Cuenca *et al.* (2020) argued that entrepreneurship in Ecuador is widely accepted and has a significant impact because, in addition to the financial and business aspects of entrepreneurship, the human being plays a fundamental role in this activity. The research argues that aspects such as the personal dimension, culture, ideology and values that guide their behavior in contemporary society, are essential drivers that enrich the Ecuadorian entrepreneurial landscape. Therefore, a focus on the humanistic level is imperative because it allows the creation of more relevant projects and concepts that reflect identity and social values and have a significant impact on the community. Likewise, the global entrepreneurship monitor, through its report for Ecuador developed by Lasio *et al.* (2020), highlights that two-thirds of Ecuadorian adults consider entrepreneurship as a good life option, motivated by factors such as job scarcity with 82.7%, followed by making a difference with 52.7%, accumulating wealth with 36.5% and finally motivated by a family tradition with 35.7%.

Finally, Table 1 summarizes some of the postulates and research results of various authors regarding the factors that drive SE.

Methodology

Taking into account that the main objective is to identify the key factors that drive SE, the study will be developed following a qualitative and exploratory research design because, as Bulmer (1979) stated, this allows the researcher to make a connection between the

Authors	Drivers
Khanapuri and Khandelwal (2011)	Fairtrade
Lumpkin <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Autonomy and competitive aggression
Uribe and Bonilla (2013)	Basic infrastructure, public administrations, exploitable resources and entrepreneurial culture
Åmo (2014)	Human capital and institutional factors
Abazi-Alili <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Innovation
Mora and Martínez. (2018)	Unemployment and social exclusion
Erro-Garcés (2019)	Creativity and emotions
Kruse <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Personality, cognition and human capital
Feijó Cuenca <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Personal dimension, culture, ideology and values
Lasio <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Lack of jobs, making a difference, accumulating wealth and family tradition

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table 1.
Social
entrepreneurship
drivers

observation of reality and the formation of concepts, starting from the identification of social entrepreneurs using the nonprobabilistic sequential sampling technique, also called accidental sampling, which allows selecting randomly those cases that are available to participate until completing the sample (Otzen and Manterola, 2017). Hence, each member of the research group identified through social networks, public catalogs and websites SE initiatives that are underway and agreed to participate, giving a total of fifteen social entrepreneurs who are part of the units of analysis, which are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 shows a diversity of social enterprises in terms of focus and age of establishment. Most of the ventures were established in the last decade, indicating recent growth in this sector.

Social entrepreneur (SE)	Social entrepreneurship name	Establishment Year	Social entrepreneurship type
SE1	Tejemujeres	1992	Inclusive social entrepreneurship for people in vulnerable conditions (Del Cerro, 2016)
SE2	Ecologicasec	2020	Personal social entrepreneurship from a social initiative and triple bottom line (Pareja, 2013)
SE3	Orígenes emprendedores ecuatorianos	2021	Social entrepreneurship for people in vulnerable conditions and social action (Del Cerro, 2016)
SE4	Kashil organic	2020	Inclusive social entrepreneurship and for people in vulnerable conditions (Del Cerro, 2016)
SE5	Asopepa	2013	Social inclusive entrepreneurship (Del Cerro, 2016)
SE6	Bioseb organics	2012	Social entrepreneurship triple bottom line (Pareja, 2013)
SE7	Noos papel semilla	2019	Social entrepreneurship triple bottom line and inclusive (Del Cerro, 2016; Pareja, 2013)
SE8	Asociación de productores agroecologicos del aguarongo mushuk pakarina	2005	Inclusive social entrepreneurship of social action and triple bottom line (Del Cerro, 2016; Pareja, 2013)
SE9	Asociación sumak kawsay	2015	Social entrepreneurship for people in vulnerable conditions (Del Cerro, 2016)
SE10	Madera plástica Barahona	2006	Social entrepreneurship triple bottom line (Pareja, 2013)
SE11	Paca shop	2019	Social entrepreneurship triple bottom line (Del Cerro, 2016; Pareja, 2013)
SE12	Pal'uso	2012	Triple bottom line social entrepreneurship (Pareja, 2013)
SE13	Cabalgatas El boquerón	2022	Social entrepreneurship of products or services (Del Cerro, 2016)
SE14	Atelier avanzar	2009	Inclusive social entrepreneurship and for people in vulnerable conditions (Del Cerro, 2016)
SE15	CONS cosmética consiente	2020	Personal social entrepreneurship from a Social Initiative and triple bottom line (Pareja, 2013)

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table 2. Profiles of social entrepreneurs interviewed and sample characteristics

		Social entrepreneurship drivers in Ecuador
Dimensions	Queries	
Introductory	How was your social enterprise born, and what do you do?	
Social	What social factors motivated you to create and stay within your social entrepreneurship and why?	
Institutional	What factors in the institutional environment do you consider prompted you to create and stay within your social entrepreneurship?	
Economic	What economic factors motivated you to create and maintain your social entrepreneurship and why?	
Family	What family factors motivated you to create and stay within your social entrepreneurship and why?	
Cultural	What cultural factors motivated you to create and stay within your social entrepreneurship and why?	

Table 3. Data collection questions: interview

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on research by (Erro-Garcés, 2019; Akter *et al.*, 2019; Pacut, 2020)

The above ventures show diverse approaches, including social inclusion, social action and environmental sustainability, with some specifically targeting vulnerable populations. For example, Tejemujeres and Orígenes Emprendedores Ecuatorianos focus on social inclusion for people in vulnerable conditions, while Noos Papel Semilla and Asociación de Productores Agroecológicos del Aguarongo Mushuk Pakarina have a focus on the triple bottom line and social inclusion. This diversity suggests a growing interest in addressing social and environmental issues through innovative and sustainable business models, aligned with global trends toward corporate social responsibility and positive impact.

The research instrument used for data collection was a structured interview, as it is a valuable technique to obtain a reliable source of data because it has a helpful structure and a specific purpose, i.e. it will allow having a clear notion and understanding of what drives people to change themselves as social entrepreneurs and to know the reason why they do. Therefore, it consisted of six questions, starting with an opening question to determine the main activity of this social enterprise. The subsequent ones e focused on the social, institutional, economic, family and cultural factors that drove social entrepreneurs to start social enterprises and to stay in them. Thus, the questions are detailed in Table 3.

Subsequently, categories of analysis are established that will be useful to carry out the process of interpretation of the information, and its codification, which were selected taking into account the bibliographic review carried out and the results of studies developed at the international level, as shown in Table 4.

Finally, for the analysis of results, the methodology of Gioia *et al.* (2013) will be applied, which will allow us to obtain a data structure matrix, taking into account in a structured way the aggregated drivers. This data structure not only allows us to configure the data in a sensible visual aid, but also provides a graphical representation of the progress from raw data to terms and themes when performing the analyses (Pratt, 2008; Tracy, 2010).

Results

Based on the methodology used, the analysis of the empirical data was developed, considering the research question to be answered: what factors drive people to start a social enterprise?

Factors that drive the development of social enterprises

According to the observations obtained from the interviews developed, the analysis of the interviews showed a diversity of factors that move and drive the development of social ventures, so that the cross-sectional analysis of the interviews gave a total of 13

Table 4.
Operationalization of
analysis categories

Conceptualization	Definition	Dimensions	Codification	Technique
Fairtrade	System that seeks more significant equity in international trade through commercial relations based on dialogue, transparency and respect. (World Fair Trade Organization, 2022)	Comercio justo (fairtrade)	CJ	Structured interview
Human capital	Characteristics of human beings that increase the possibility of production through their skills, knowledge and efforts. (Sen, 1998)	Capital humano (human capital)	CH	
Social exclusion	Characteristics of human beings that increase the possibility of production through their skills, knowledge and efforts (Jiménez et al., 2009)	Unemployment	DESMPL	
Environmental awareness	Sanchez and lafunte (2010) define environmental awareness as specific psychological factors related to an individual's propensity to engage in pro-environmental behavior	Conciencia ambiental (Environmental awareness)	CONSAMB	
Innovation	The process by which an idea, invention or recognition of a need leads to the development and commercial help of a helpful product, technology or service (Gee, 1981)	Nivel de innovación (level of innovation)	INN	
Productive government expenditure	State expenditure allows an increase in general investment, encouraging investment (Mota, 2009)	Apoyo público (level of support)	AP	
External financing	"It occurs whenever managers must raise funds from overseas investors or lenders". (Zvi and Merton, 1999 , p. 399)	Herramientas financieras (financial tools)	HF	
Family support	Solidarity, communication, trust, coexistence and support among family members, including parents, siblings, partners and children. (Pontes et al., 2012)	Apoyo de los miembros de la familia (support from family members)	AMF	
Trust	"Subjective belief about the validity of one's thoughts or judgments". (Luttrell et al., 2013 , p. 319)	Nivel de confianza (confidence level)	NCONF	
Source: Authors' own elaboration				

factors that motivate the decision of individuals to engage in social ventures. Therefore, Table 5 summarizes the most frequent opinions expressed literally by the social entrepreneurs, taking into account the main factor that motivates this response and Table 6 shows the less frequent opinions together with the driving force that motivates them, as shown below.

Social
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Factor	Statement of interviewees
Fairtrade	Justice for those who produce and consume Fair trade among stakeholders To market cocoa at a more equitable price Buying from real need
Employment sources	That producers feel confident that they have a market Open job vacancies Providing job openings Job creation Generate employment Generate something through tourism
Social exclusion	Inclusive employment opportunities Access for women The level of abandonment in which entrepreneurs live Support for women as an unprotected sector Job opportunities for vulnerable population Support for women who are still a vulnerable population Sources of employment to excluded population
Environmental awareness	Return to more sustainable production Encourage a more conscious purchasing style We contribute to the environment through a more organic agriculture Create an environmentally conscious company Raise awareness and promote a sustainable fashion culture
Government support	Alliances with public and private institutions Support from the Maquita Foundation, private institutions and the municipal Parish council Support from the municipality in workshops Support from the public sector to ensure that these ventures are sustained Institutions have worked together with other actors to support entrepreneurs Intervention of the autonomous decentralized Parish Government
Financial income	Create an environment of empowerment among peers so that they can support themselves financially To have economic income Opportunity for a growing demand Receive financial remuneration Personal economic growth
Family support	Our parents helped us to invest Family support Financial support from our family Teamwork and working as a family Help us with my sister Family support
Standards and values	My mission is service Values I had, such as veganism

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from interviews developed

Table 5.
Identification of
common factors in
the interviewees'
statements

Table 6.
Identification of less
common factors in
the interviewees’
statements

Factor	Statement of interviewees
Innovation	Create something new
Quality of life	Propose something new in a very technical way Improve the quality of life of cocoa producers Improve the quality of life of their families
Family legacy	The legacy left to our children Leaving a legacy for our children
Entrepreneurial culture	I come from a family of entrepreneurs Come from a family of entrepreneurs My mother motivated me to follow in her footsteps I come from an entrepreneurial family
Traditions	Maintaining the tradition of an activity that is very much our own To preserve the culture of cocoa cultivation that identifies us
Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on data from interviews developed	

Fairtrade

The results of the analysis of the interviews place fair trade as a driver of SE because several interviewees considered that their enterprises, unlike traditional enterprises, focus on creating value for each of the people who are immersed in their value chain by providing them with services and activities that allow them to receive a fair price for the different activities they perform, taking advantage of opportunities and generating social change by creating justice in a certain way between producer and consumer.

Employment sources

Another factor that could be identified from the line-by-line analysis in ATLAS.TI was the source of employment, because several interviewees mentioned they felt the need to undertake it. However, to generate employment opportunities in their communities because there are people with the necessary skills and abilities to produce certain products or provide specific services, and it is feasible to create a market for them to offer their products and thus generate income and improve their quality of life, they also mentioned that it was necessary to provide sources of employment that generate sustainable development within the sectors in which they live.

Social exclusion

Several of the interviews show that social entrepreneurs choose to involve in their initiatives people who are generally excluded from society and, therefore, from the labor market, thus giving them the possibility of generating resources for themselves and their families.

Environmental awareness

The interviewees also emphasized that they created their ventures with the environment in mind, which allowed them to solve society’s problems in an eco-friendly way because they considered that they could not stop pollution. However, they could contribute with their SE initiatives to create consumption and environmental awareness.

Government support

The factor related to public support was identified as a driving force in several of the interviewees’ statements because most of the social entrepreneurs highlighted that certain

institutional factors have motivated them to create this type of entrepreneurship, commenting that several of them have had the support of national government organizations, such as support from decentralized autonomous governments who are responsible for providing training or financial support in some instances to promote their social enterprises. Therefore, public support is a representative factor when creating social enterprises.

Family support

The driving factor of SE also included family support, because numerous interviewees considered that, both in the creation and in the progress of their SE, their family was always involved, as they were the ones who supported many of them financially to start their initiative and emotionally throughout it.

Family legacy

An essential factor for creating social enterprises is the family legacy, as several interviewees mentioned that the activities, they are involved in are part of family traditions. In contrast, others consider they are leaving a legacy for their children and family.

Entrepreneurial culture

Another driver of the commitment to the creation of social enterprises was the entrepreneurial culture, as social entrepreneurs saw reflected in their families a culture in which the generation of entrepreneurship prevailed and not the need to work in a dependent relationship, which motivated them and allowed them to launch their initiatives.

Economic income

Likewise, it was very evident in the statements of the interviewees that part of the impulse to carry out this type of entrepreneurship was the economic income they obtain for the different services or products they offer in the market, because, as previously argued, SE, like other types of entrepreneurship, is focused on the market and obtaining profits through innovative approaches, addressing social problems. Therefore, it is evident that it is a driving force.

Standards and values

Regarding the factors identified as norms and values, this was evidenced in some of the social entrepreneurs' statements, in which they mentioned that they are driven by their sense of service and support to people in their community, canton, and parish to carry out their initiatives, as well as specific values founded throughout their lives, which have allowed them to create their entrepreneurship based on these values.

In addition, the results of the interview analysis allowed us to identify eight main and most common factors that are evidenced as drivers for which social entrepreneurs decide to get involved in this type of initiative, summarized in [Table 7](#).

Finally, the following data structure matrix ([Figure 1](#)) presents each of the identified SE drivers.

Discussion

The results of the above empirical evidence help us understand the behavior and thinking of social entrepreneurs when they get involved and participate in this type of entrepreneurship, because they face immutable challenges and adverse contexts due to the constant social problems that arise. Hence, it is necessary to analyze the results obtained, considering that the literature review was vital to having an initial starting point and answering the research question.

Influencing factors	Frequency of declarations	Specifications
Social exclusion	7	• <i>The level of neglect in which entrepreneurs are living</i> • <i>Access for all women</i> • <i>To create sources of employment for people who are generally unemployed</i> • <i>Inclusive employment opportunities</i>
Government support	7	• <i>Alliances with some public and private institutions</i> • <i>Support from the municipality</i> • <i>Training through the parish autonomous decentralized government</i>
Employment sources	6	• <i>Job openings be made available</i> • <i>Generating employment and having a better personal lifestyle</i>
Economical income	6	• <i>Receiving financial remuneration for what we do is fantastic</i> • <i>Personal economic growth</i>
Family support	6	• <i>Financial support from our family</i> • <i>Teamwork</i> • <i>Sister' help</i>
Environmental awareness	5	• <i>The need to produce, but not to pollute so much</i> • <i>Healthier products</i> • <i>Raising public awareness by promoting a new culture</i>
Fairtrade	4	• <i>To be paid fairly</i> • <i>Justice for those who produce and also for those who consume</i>
Standards and values	3	• <i>Let people feel courageous</i> • <i>I will always be service-oriented</i> • <i>Assisting others</i>
Source: Authors' own elaboration		

Table 7.
Factors driving
social
entrepreneurship

The results support the statement exposed by [Mora and Martínez \(2018\)](#), who consider that SE is influenced by external harmful effects such as unemployment and social exclusion, because several social entrepreneurs considered that there is a certain level of abandonment among groups of society, due to the lack of sources of employment. Therefore, that is a factor that motivates them to include within their initiatives people such as homemakers, unemployed university students, small producers and entrepreneurs as this is a characteristic component of funding their businesses.

On the other hand, the article shows that access to financing is a factor that does not drive the creation of social ventures and instead has become an obstacle for SEs ([Rajdeep, 2016](#))

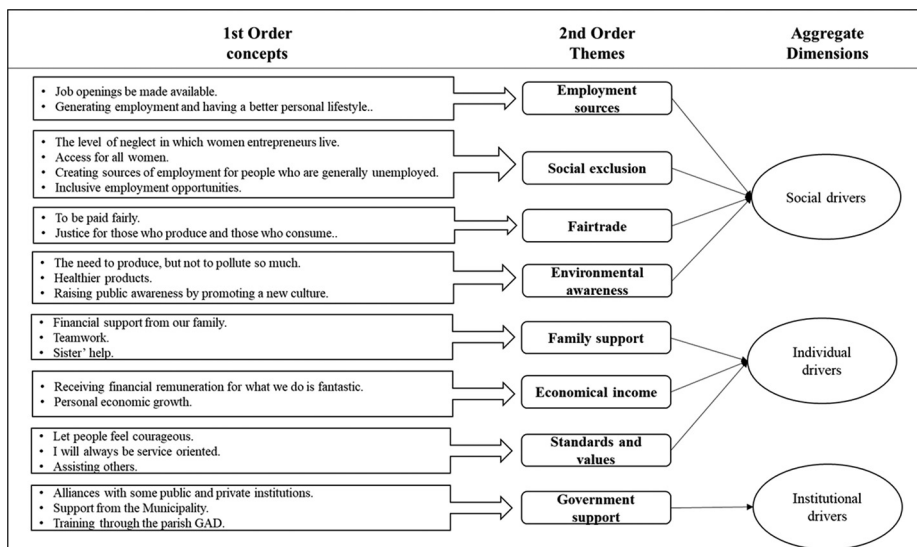


Figure 1.
Social entrepreneurship drivers' data structure matrix

Source: Authors' own work

because most considered that to start their ventures, they opted to request financing from their relatives, because they considered that applying for external financing is very difficult taking into account that their business models at the beginning were weak and contemplating the associated risks, in contrast to the literature review, in which latent drivers are seen as institutional factors where access to financing by financial institutions is implicit and also, autonomy and competitive aggressiveness, factors that were not found within this article (Ámo, 2014; Lumpkin *et al.*, 2011).

Furthermore, regarding the evidence proposed by Uribe and Bonilla (2013), who state that basic infrastructures, public administrations, exploitable resources and entrepreneurial culture are drivers of SE, the evidence from the statements only showed that in a certain way, public administrations, such as municipal and parish decentralized autonomous governments, are institutions that drive social entrepreneurs to found and stay within their ventures as they provide support and backing to this type of business, while the other drivers could not be identified within the paper. However, some literature suggests that private organizations and citizens often assume the role of resource providers not covered by the government when government support is absent. This phenomenon highlights the complex relationship between the public sector and other social actors in promoting SE. Government support should be treated in a special way because, although it has been highlighted in the article as a driver, it may not always be the case due to variations in government and SE support structures across countries.

Also, the results suggest that more subjective factors, as is the case of the driver norms and values, are implicit in SE because, in the statements, the interviewees considered that more than the desire to fulfill the business objectives, they were governed by their hearts and helping people. This finding is present in several articles that consider that factors such as creativity and emotions, as well as personality and cognition, are distinguishing factors of SE (Erro-Garcés, 2019; Kruse *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the results are similar to those presented by Feijó Cuenca *et al.* (2020) in their article Social factors driving

entrepreneurship: a humanist approach to innovative business models, in which they suggest that in addition to the financial, business or political component, in a SE, the social entrepreneur has his own traits, i.e. intrinsic qualities such as personal dimension, culture, ideology and values that guide his behavior, which are fundamental when developing SE. Similarly, the results are conclusive with [Rivera-Santos et al. \(2015\)](#), who suggest that there are internal factors, in addition to external factors, such as self-esteem, perseverance, attitude and intentions to create an enterprise, that implicitly drive people to engage in SE.

Similarly, it is perceived that the results of [Åmo \(2014\)](#), which highlights that human capital and institutional factors are factors that drive and explain the dynamics of SE, are consistent with the results of the article because several social entrepreneurs stated that they receive support from public entities, which are responsible for assisting such ventures, through support or training that will allow them to stay in the market, in terms of institutional factors. On the other hand, human capital was not a factor that could be evidenced because, although most of the interviewees' statements pointed out that they have the help of skilled and capable people in their enterprises, this factor could not be measured to have a better appreciation of it within the study.

Regarding the fair-trade driver, the results proposed by [Khanapuri and Khandelwal \(2011\)](#) were supported by the respondents' motivation to engage in SE. They are aware of fair-trade structures that provide price stability, which is a significant advantage of this approach. It offers producers a safeguard against market volatility.

Finally, in addition to the factors presented in the literature review, the article identified other driving factors such as fair trade, environmental awareness, sources of employment, economic income and family support, which are the additional contributions of the study to the literature on SE.

The results of this research provide important insights into SE and its relationship to unemployment, social exclusion and other factors that influence its development. Social entrepreneurs face persistent challenges, but they are also motivated by their desire to make a positive impact on society and solve long-standing social problems. Likewise, these results can be used by public authorities and other stakeholders to design programs and projects that support SE, promote job creation and social inclusion and facilitate access to funding and resources to increase their reach and sustainability.

Conclusions and recommendations

SE has become more critical in recent years, having a great reception by society and for Ecuadorians, it is related to several factors that drive it. First, it is a business model that allows for addressing pressing problems in society by creating value through innovative approaches ([Schöning, 2013](#)). On the other hand, it should be noted that despite having a vital social component, SE is not the same as a charity because, although there is a benevolent attitude to help others, social entrepreneurs are still people interested in their business ([Roberts and Woods, 2005](#)).

In addition, recognizing that the welfare state in the region is not favorable and that there is an intensification and appearance of new social problems (job insecurity, social exclusion and environmental problems), there is an increase in social enterprises to address them. Therefore, there is a latent need to continue researching and analyzing this area because it plays a vital role in the economy and society ([Pacut, 2020](#)).

This research aimed to identify the key factors that drive SE among Ecuadorian social entrepreneurs. Through a qualitative methodology and structured interviews, empirical evidence was obtained to identify, code and analyze the driving factors and those factors that the entrepreneurs considered obstacles to their SE. Thus, the study verified through analysis that the drive of social entrepreneurs to be SE participants was due to several

reasons. In summary, eight driving factors were identified: social exclusion, public support, sources of employment, economic income, family support, environmental awareness, norms and values and fair trade, taking into account that they were the most frequent in the statements of the interviewees and highlighting that more factors were also identified that were not considered as usual drivers.

On the other hand, factors such as access to financing were identified. Although proposed in the literature review, empirical evidence showed that social entrepreneurs consider this factor an obstacle to entrepreneurship. Therefore, the research findings have theoretical as well as practical implications. The study's main contribution is the contribution of literature to SE research, through which factors such as fair trade, environmental awareness, sources of employment, economic income and family support were identified as drivers that have not been identified in other studies.

The results of the analysis have significant implications, both theoretically and practically. The empirical analysis improves the understanding of participation in SE by investigating the various factors that influence entrepreneurs' activity in this field. It highlights that participation in SE must be assessed holistically, considering multiple factors that affect it. In addition, the traditional notion of a social entrepreneur, originally defined as one who establishes enterprises for social purposes rather than personal profit, is expanded by recognizing the influence of other aspects such as economic income.

Second, the research results show aggregate dimensions of the social, individual and institutional drivers involved in the formation of social enterprises. In addition, the results are relevant for public policymakers, as they should provide effective solutions that support the creation and development of social enterprises, underscoring the importance of both the substance of regulation and its proper implementation.

Accordingly, the findings are valuable for public agencies and decision-makers, who should take the necessary measures to strengthen the environment for SE to support its creation and development, allowing the design of valuable solutions that promote SE activities in the country. In this context, public administrators should create regulations that regulate this type of entrepreneurship, favoring the Welfare State of the country and promoting its creation.

The analysis presented in the study is valuable in providing an overview of the factors that foster this important form of entrepreneurship. For a more holistic and meaningful understanding of this phenomenon, future research could address the relationship between the findings of this study and the formulation of public policies aimed at supporting SE. Similarly, it is crucial to consider how education and teaching practices can incorporate the entrepreneurial mindset in students, thus fostering a culture of innovation and sustainability in social value. In addition, it is necessary to investigate how SE can be translated into tangible improvements in the quality of life of citizens and how it can generate positive changes in public perceptions and attitudes toward social and environmental issues. Also, the study phenomenon can be extended by analyzing the drivers with a quantitative approach to confirm the results obtained.

Finally, it is essential to mention that the research has methodological limitations because there are no databases of social enterprises that would allow us to broaden the analysis of the empirical evidence. Therefore, its generalization was not possible. In addition, because this is a qualitative research, important cases could be left out that could imply new drivers, as well as possible biases in the participants' responses and limitations in the number of interviewees, which could affect the representativeness of the findings.

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