Abstract: Two primary reasons affect the performance of social entrepreneurs: the lack of resources and knowledge. Consequently, business incubators offer tangible and intangible resources to support early stages entrepreneurs. Researchers and practitioners have identified advantages and disadvantages of design for social innovation. Nevertheless, there is no conclusive evidence of how these practices can be adopted at an operational level, or in the early stages of social entrepreneurship.

The study context is within a Chilean social organisation called Socialab, which supports social entrepreneurship in early-stage development. This research explores the challenges of nascent social entrepreneurs and the potential application of design in this type of enterprise. The data was collected through exploratory research which includes interviews and immersive observations of social entrepreneurs and mentors within Socialab. Initial findings are given as a result of the analysis of the data collected and the review of the existing literature.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Nascent Entrepreneurship, Business Incubator, Design for Social Innovation, Design

1. Introduction

This paper is part of an ongoing project that aims to explore, critically examine and understand the adoption of design management principles and practices by social entrepreneurs. This article will focus on the understanding of social entrepreneurship practices, the role of incubators and how social entrepreneurs and incubators perceive design. The objective of this focus is to determine whether design can improve or support social entrepreneurial practices. Furthermore, at starting on paying attention to these issues, it is expected to establish first foundations for the adoption of design management by social entrepreneurs.
In recent years, there are multiples concerns about how to address economic growth bearing in mind social issues. Individuals motivated by personal experiences or after recognising social needs, social assets and change (Guclu, Dees, & Anderson, 2002) are developing ideas that seek the generation of social impact. However, due to the lack of resources and knowledge, most of these intentions are very likely to fail (Aldrich & Yang, 2014; Lichtenstein, Carter, Dooley, & Gartner, 2007). Consequently, incubators provide training, physical space, networking, as well as administrative services (Bergek & Norrman, 2008; Bruneel, Ratinho, Clarysse, & Groen, 2012) to reduce the risk to fail of start-ups. Both social entrepreneurs and incubators make an effort to put their capabilities to the service of society.

From a design perspective, academics and practitioners analyse how design contributes to improving social innovations (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Manzini, 2015; Mulgan, 2014). These approaches examine the advantages of design as a practice, discipline and as a way of thinking for social innovation projects. However, the application of design for social innovation has various disadvantages (Mulgan, 2014). Moreover, there is no evidence about the adoption of design by social entrepreneurs through a business incubation process. As a result, this paper analyses the challenges and opportunities for the adoption of design by social entrepreneurs taking into account the incubation model as a way to deliver the required design knowledge.

To contextualise the study, it is examined a Chilean organisation called ‘Socialab’. The organisation has an open innovation platform in which social entrepreneurs submit ideas in response to a particular challenge. The best ideas are selected and supported through an incubation process (Ashoka, 2014).

This paper will discuss the literature review about the key concept to consider for the study such as social and nascent entrepreneurship, the role of incubators and design for social innovation. Secondly, the research method used will be exposed. Thirdly, it will explain relevant findings from the data collection, and an interpretation of those results. Finally, it will provide insights elicited from the ongoing research and then draw initial findings and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Entrepreneurship

Social innovation and social entrepreneurship are subjects of discussion and study for governments, academics and the wider public. In fact, governments have shown interest in social innovation as a way to achieve sustainable economic growth (Urama & Acheampong, 2013). Moreover, scholars are interested in entrepreneurship as a mechanism that converts technical information into tangible products and services, as a way to mitigate spatial and temporal inefficiencies in an economy and as a process that drives significant changes (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). From these perspectives, social entrepreneurs arise as the application of mind-sets, methods, tools, and techniques of traditional or commercial entrepreneurship but with a focus on social and environmental issues (Kickul & Lyons, 2012). Social entrepreneurs are important because they deliver innovative solutions that create meaningful social value, in places where the scope are too narrow for the public sector to conduct legislative transformations or to attract private capital (Martin & Osberg, 2015; Phillips, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008). Therefore, social innovators and entrepreneurs contribute to the re-addressing of economic growth paying particular attention to social matters.
Regarding early stage process, Guclu, Dees & Anderson (2002) illustrate a process of opportunity creation (Figure 1) that has two main steps. First, idea generation explores promising ideas. Second, idea development transforms the ideas into opportunities that create social impact. It is noteworthy to point out that the motivations of nascent entrepreneurs rely on personal experiences or by the recognition of social needs, social assets and change.

Figure 1: The Opportunity Creation Process (Guclu, Dees & Anderson., 2002)

2.2 Challenges of nascent social entrepreneurs

Nascent entrepreneurs are those who start activities to initiate a viable business enterprise (Aldrich, 2001). However, they are likely to fail at early stages. In fact, a study that evaluates the different dynamics of nascent entrepreneurs shows that 78 over 109 entrepreneurs present negative cash flows (Lichtenstein et al., 2007). Moreover, entrepreneurship is considered risky because of the lack of methodology of entrepreneurs (Drucker, 2014). Therefore, it is recommended to encourage nascent entrepreneurs to adopt practices that enable them to reduce the risk of failure in their start-up ventures.

At initial stages, entrepreneurs have to use their experiences and knowledge but also they have to adopt new practices. Aldrich & Yang (2014) argue that formal education is recommended because it allows to entrepreneurs to adopt new processes that enable them to make use of their previous knowledge once the entrepreneurial activities are underway. For the latter, theorists have identified three ways of learning: by doing through direct experience; imitating, copying, and borrowing from others; and experimenting, either intentional or accidental (Aldrich & Yang, 2014).

Alternatively, due to the lack of resources, social entrepreneurs may divert their primary focus on social value creation to the procurement of resources that support their organisations’ growth (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). Thus, it is critical for social entrepreneurs to develop external networks that allow them to leverage the resources required (Austin et al., 2006).

Therefore, it is recommended for entrepreneurs to acquire knowledge and find the ways to learn it or develop by themselves and include it into their working practices. Also, they need to build a network that allows them to leverage external support for their companies.
2.3 The role of incubators

Business incubation is one of the most remarkable models which support the initiatives of entrepreneurs. Incubators provide infrastructure, business support (accelerating learning curve), shared support services and networks (facilitating access to external resources, knowledge and legitimacy) (Bergek & Norrman, 2008; Bruneel et al., 2012). For example, infrastructure providing shared spaces and equipment; business support when developing business and marketing plans, building management teams; shared support services such as administrative services; and networks leveraging external capital (Grimaldi & Grandi, 2005).

2.4 Design for social innovation

Practitioners and scholars are interested in the application of design in social innovation initiatives. The reason is because design offers multiple conditions to move towards more sustainable solutions (Cipolla & Moura, 2012). In fact, design for social innovation corresponds to all the activities that a designer can do to activate and conduct a process of social change bearing in mind the principles of sustainability (Manzini, 2015). There are different approaches about how design contributes to Social Innovation. Mulgan (2014) has illustrated several strengths of design in social innovation projects, such as understanding user experiences, rapid prototyping, visualisation and systematic approach. By the same logic, Manzini (2015) recognises two design disciplines that are relevant to social innovation: service design (to create solutions that consider the interactions involved) and strategic design (to stimulate the partnerships among different stakeholders). A third approach is about how design thinking is adopted to solve social issues (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). These perspectives indicate the different levels of application of design for social innovation. Thus, these levels can be categorised in the same way that the Danish Design Ladder or the Design Management staircase articulates (Best, Kootstra, & Murphy, 2010; Danish National Agency for Enterprise and Housing, 2003). At an operational level, design is applied to achieve a specific task; at the functional level design is used as a process or discipline; and then at a strategic level, design is holistically used for strategic intent.

However, there are several complications when applying design in social initiatives. The first disadvantage is that designers tend to use expensive methods and tools within their projects, most of the time for social organisations. The second is about the compromise of designers at the end of the project. The third concerns to the lack of awareness of the actual conditions or limitations of the project when designing solutions. Last but not least, Mulgan (2014) points out the hesitancy of designers to learn from other practices. Besides, designers and entrepreneurs lack of resources (Kochargaoonkar & Boul, 2014). This issue causes recurrent fear to failure, which is detrimental to the adoption of approaches such as design thinking (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Hence, despite the advantages that design for social innovation has, it is important to bear in mind the disadvantages of its everyday use.

2.5 Research questions

Through undertaking a comprehensive literature review and an explorative qualitative research about the relations of nascent social entrepreneurs with incubators. Subsequently, the research questions offered:

- What happens at early stages of social entrepreneurship?
- How do incubators work with social entrepreneurs?
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- What do entrepreneurs and incubators’ mentors say about design?
- And finally, determine whether design could improve and support their day-to-day practices

3. Methods

A qualitative approach was chosen to examine the relations between social entrepreneurship and design both in theory and practice. For this stage of the research, an exploratory approach was conducted to understand what is happening in the field of research and to define the inquiries about it (Gray, 2014). Moreover, a qualitative approach allows the researchers the establishment of how the issues of research happen in the context in a conceptual, empirical fashion (McKeever, Jack, & Anderson, 2015). Firstly, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken to formulate the research questions. This theoretical approach enabled the researchers to understand what is already known in the area. Furthermore, it enabled to recognise the theories applied in the field, to identify the main contributors to the research topic and so forth (Boyle & Schimierbach, 2015; Bryman, 2012).

Subsequently, ethnographic research was conducted in order to understand the actual situation of the Chilean context from the practice. The aims of this exploratory research are to elicit answers to the research questions and to determine the potential contributions to the area of study.

3.1 Context: Chilean Social Organisations

Incubators have emerged all over the world as a tool for promoting the development and growth of firms (Bergek & Norrman, 2008). In Chile, there are 18 business incubators along the country supported by the Government (Corfo, 2016), some of them are ranked among the best incubators in Latin America (UBI Global, 2016). As consequence of the rise of these initiatives, a large number of people are starting new businesses, not only focused on profit maximisation but also focused on the creation of social impact. In fact, the concept of social entrepreneurship is well known by the general Chilean public (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2016), which has also been promoted by local incubators with a social focus.

Socialab is one of the most successful Chilean organisations that assists social entrepreneurs. Its purpose is to expand and provide the visibility of the concept of social innovation through an online open innovation platform. In it, the organisation, in collaboration with external supporters, launches social challenges competitions that invite the public to initiate discussions and ideas about how they can be solved. The winners of the competitions are called to work at the co-working space (Figure 2) within Socialab. In that space, they interact with other social innovators and receive mentorship from experts that equipped them with the leadership and teamwork necessary to succeed in their ventures (Ashoka, 2014). In that stage, the organisation works as an incubator of ideas, transforming ordinary people into nascent social entrepreneurs.
Figure 2: Co-working spaces at Socialab
3.2 Data collection

The ethnographic approach follows the concept of *habitus*. This concept was developed by Bourdieu and applied by Wacquant (Bourdieu, 1990; Wacquant, 2004, 2011), which considers the ethnographic journey as the *topic* but also as the *tool* of investigation (Wacquant, 2011). Accordingly, observation notes, semi-structured interviews and participant observations were used to describe what social entrepreneurs and mentors are doing or saying, as well as recognising how Socialab ‘works’ (Gray, 2014).

A member of the research team, who used to live in the place of the research, conducted informal interviews and participant observations. This person was chosen as field researcher because he could play both roles as a participant (insider) and as an external observer (outsider). As a participant, he was able to establish instant rapport because of his experiences and concerns were somehow common to the ones that local actors have. Conversely, his experience as a researcher allowed him to address the fieldwork to the objectives established through the research.

The methods were chosen to understand the context of entrepreneurship, in other words, ‘when’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ entrepreneurship happens and ‘who’ becomes involved (Welter, 2011). Both methods were designed in a flexible, iterative and continuous manner rather than to follow and execute a plan (Flick, 2008). In practice, the researcher actively engaged with the organisation in taking part of discussions and meetings as well as in informal social events such as after office gatherings. In this way, the researcher could play the roles of participant and observer, because the conversations were natural, unplanned, happenchance and spontaneous, but also purposeful (McKeever et al., 2015) in respect to the objectives of the research.

The researcher conducted the field research during three months. Within this period, he assisted at least three days per week to Socialab, where social entrepreneurs and the organisation’s employees worked. The primary source of data was the narrative of nascent and advanced social entrepreneurship as well as conversations and interviews with the staff of Socialab. The tone of these interactions were open enabling participants to express themselves in a natural manner, putting their perspectives when talking about their issues. With the data collected, it was possible to draw the preliminary findings shown in Table 1.

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Table 1) was used as a method to conduct the data analysis from the field research. The thematic analysis method allows to identify, examine and report themes (patterns) within the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this purpose, it is necessary to utilise themes that capture relevant information in respect to the research questions (Gray, 2014). Subsequently, the collected and analysed data was triangulated with the literature reviewed. Thus, it was possible to connect the findings of the literature with the findings of the fieldwork.
| Type of Participant                  | Raw data                                                                 | Themes                                      | Tool Used                          | N*  |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Nascent Social Entrepreneurs       | In the beginning, we had no idea about what being an entrepreneur meant   | Lack of knowledge about entrepreneurship     | - Informal interviews               | 4   |
|                                     | We just had an idea, but we didn’t know how to model it                  |                                               | - Participant observations          |     |
|                                     | Without the support of this organisation, we wouldn’t be able to make it | Support of incubators                       | - Online resources                  |     |
|                                     | Design is necessary to develop a good user experience                      | Design as user-centred approach             |                                     |     |
| Advanced Social Entrepreneurs      | When we started, we didn’t know what meant being an entrepreneur          | Lack of knowledge about entrepreneurship     | - In-depth interview                | 2   |
|                                     | At the beginning, and like most of the entrepreneurs, we thought that we  |                                               |                                     |     |
|                                     | didn’t need external support, but we were wrong. Always it’s necessary    |                                               |                                     |     |
|                                     | to have someone who knows better about your industry, your market, who    |                                              |                                     |     |
|                                     | has experience in this, because one doesn’t have the answers for everything, |                                               |                                     |     |
|                                     | and it is important to recognise that you need help from someone that     |                                              |                                     |     |
|                                     | supports you with knowledge and experience, that is key.                  |                                              |                                     |     |
|                                     | Design for us is essential; our banner is to develop technology as easy   | Design as a core                            |                                     |     |
|                                     | to use as a pencil and paper.                                             |                                              |                                     |     |
|                                     | The development of a good brand image it gives the sense of professionalism,| Design as a brand image                    |                                     |     |
|                                     | that is something imperative, that the user feels that is dealing with    |                                              |                                     |     |
|                                     | something real and not fake.                                              |                                              |                                     |     |
|                                     | One of the biggest issues of other companies is that they don’t have the  | Design as user-centred approach             |                                     |     |
|                                     | user as a centre of the problem. Many companies see the problem as the    |                                              |                                     |     |
|                                     | centre, and at the end, the users run away from them                      |                                              |                                     |     |
|                                     | Design helps to reduce entry barriers for clients                         |                                              |                                     |     |
| Type of Participant | Raw data                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Themes                                                                                      | Tool Used                                                                 | N* |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Staff/ Mentors      | Most of the entrepreneurs we receive are engineers; they don’t know about the value that design has.                                                                                                    | Entrepreneurs do not know about the value of design                                           | - Informal interviews - In-depth interviews - Participant observations       | 3   |
|                     | We have received entrepreneurs that are very open to listening and very keen to accept that their projects are going to change. However, we also received entrepreneurs that were just making mistakes they recognise that they have to listen. | Internalising external support is necessary for entrepreneurs                                 |                                                                              |     |
|                     | One of the projects that grew up most was using design intensively.                                                                                                                                       | Design helps to growth                                                                       |                                                                              |     |
|                     | I’ve been working (designer) with one entrepreneurship, and since that they have done well.                                                                                                            | Design helps to performance better                                                           |                                                                              |     |
|                     | There are many entrepreneurship, many people with ideas, although most of them are redundant.                                                                                                          | There is much entrepreneurship                                                               |                                                                              |     |
|                     | Many entrepreneurship starts doing something before to understand the business, and with an infinite ignorance about similar projects.                                                               | Lack of knowledge about entrepreneurship                                                       |                                                                              |     |
4. Initial Findings

Through the exploration and identification of the relevant themes in the Chilean entrepreneurial environment, particularly in the context regarding social entrepreneurs and mentors of Socialab, this research shows what is emerging in this entrepreneurial context and whether social entrepreneurs could effectively absorb design practices and methodologies.

4.1 Social entrepreneurs lack entrepreneurial knowledge

Table 1 illustrates the three groups of participants agree that social entrepreneurs at the nascent stage lack of entrepreneurial skills. This condition arises from the transformation of an individual has a personal motivation of the willingness to create social change (Dees, 1998). In practice, there are a substantial number of people who are seeking to improve the social conditions within their communities starting from raw ideas but without the necessary experience to create, develop and lead a new venture. The latter could be interpreted as both an opportunity but also as a problem. The opportunity is that many people are trying to undertake the challenges that neither private nor public organisations are addressing (Martin & Osberg, 2015). The problem is the way to deliver practical training for these people. This training should provide them with the adequate resources to ensure that their initiatives achieve the creation of social impact.

4.2 External support is necessary for social entrepreneurs

As the literature illustrates, nascent entrepreneurs suffer from a lack of resources and knowledge when starting a new enterprise initiative (Austin et al., 2006; Dees, 1998; Kochargaonkar & Boult, 2014). For these reasons, the model of the business incubator is important for social entrepreneurs because it helps to leverage external resources and to acquire the knowledge necessary for their companies. Both nascent and advanced social entrepreneurs of Socialab admit the importance of the organisation in early stages. The significance is because they provide support for leveraging financial resources, giving access to networks, providing physical space for working on the initiatives and facilitating the entrepreneurial process through mentorships in entrepreneurship (Ashoka, 2014). Nevertheless, the mentors of Socialab point out that not always social entrepreneurs follow their recommendations. They add that nascent entrepreneur need to consider the recommendations of external sources to take real advantage of the incubation process. Furthermore, the staff of Socialab recognise that all those who follow the process accurately have a wider variety of options to move forward in their initiatives.

4.3 The different ways that design practices aid social entrepreneurs

Advanced social entrepreneurs, as well as mentors, recognise the contribution of design in social organisations. Firstly, companies can develop product and services that are suitable for the customers or users from the user centred approach. In this way, social entrepreneurs can develop solutions that truly cover user needs rather than allocate time and resources in overdeveloped solutions that in practice are hard to use for the customers. Moreover, design helps social entrepreneurs to establish a robust image of the company, which allows them, for example, to leverage more resources and build confidence in their stakeholders. Last but not least, mentors have
found a useful application of design tools that enable the social entrepreneur to take strategical decisions about their businesses, for example when defining their mission through story-telling. Even though these findings were taken from practice, there are others from the theory that could be included such as visualisation, prototyping and systemic approach (Mulgan, 2014).

4.4 Interpretation of findings: Design skills can be delivered through incubation process

Nonetheless, it is worth to discuss how these institutions could conduct a design absorption process. Firstly, social entrepreneurs often do not have enough resources (Austin et al., 2006) which means that there is an immediate need to take as much advantage as possible of any resource they have (Lettice & Parekh, 2010). As a consequence, it is important to notice that it is unlikely that the entrepreneurs have sufficient resources to hire experienced designers or consultancies that lead an absorptive process of design capabilities. On the other hand, the training offered by the incubators could consider design practices to increase the awareness of the potential use of design in their entrepreneurial ventures.

To this end, it is recommended to offer a model that could be readily adopted by social entrepreneurs, mainly by those with a non-design background. It is expected that social entrepreneurs increase the awareness of design with the purpose to promote the adoption of design skills in their organisations (Nunes, 2015). For this purpose, the ladder / staircase models are recommended to visualise the level of adoption by social entrepreneurs. Moreover, an early adoption of design could contribute to reducing costs and times of future the implementations of design projects, commonly considered expensive (Brazier, 2004).

It is recommended a model that can be adapted and modified to the process of entrepreneurship defined by the incubator. In this way, it will be possible to adjust the design absorption to an incubation process framework in which the entrepreneur will be in a far superior position to benefit from learning by doing (Aldrich & Yang, 2014).

5. Conclusions

The literature reviewed and the data collected illustrates the challenges of nascent social entrepreneurs. These problems can be classified as a lack of knowledge about entrepreneurship and the scarcity of resources when initiating a venture. Alternatively, the model of business incubation is important because it permits the social entrepreneurs to be trained in entrepreneurship, and also gives them proper resources, infrastructure and networking for their ventures. In fact, that the model of business incubation emerges as a valuable asset for nascent entrepreneurs.

From a design perspective, several studies analyse the advantages of design for social innovation projects (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Cipolla & Moura, 2012; Manzini, 2015; Mulgan, 2014). Additionally, practitioners and entrepreneurs with knowledge about this field identify the benefits that design gives to the organisations. Nonetheless, in practice, it could not be found a formal design training social entrepreneurs. This point shows a gap between the academia and practice. It is therefore suggested to move from the analysis of the design tools and practices for social innovation to the adoption of them by those who are going to use them.

Consequently, it is proposed to consider the incubation process as a way to provide design training that enables social entrepreneurs to improve the performance of their businesses. The reason for
using this channel is due to entrepreneurs can adopt new knowledge from the practice of starting a new business within the incubation process. Further studies will enable to model a framework that connects the real challenges and resources of early stages entrepreneurship and the suggested applications of design for social innovation. The framework will need to consider the different levels of design maturity as well the social entrepreneurial process. The framework will assist researchers to contextualise the previous findings of academic theory with the practical journey of social entrepreneurs.
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