

**Inter-Organizational Collaborations for Social Innovation and Social Value Creation:
Towards the Development of New Research Agenda and Theoretical Perspectives**

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Abstract

The intensifying poverty and poorer living conditions, the need for greater social welfare along with ongoing damages to the natural environment in several contexts of the world have proved the increasing importance of social innovation for creating positive social and environmental change. This special issue addresses to the limitations in social innovation literature by providing insights into the role of inter-organizational collaborations in the process, practice and outcome of social innovation. Thus, the papers published in this special issue advance current knowledge and scholarship on different aspects of the social innovation phenomena occurring in inter-organizational contexts. The current paper reviews existing perspectives and studies on social innovation undertaken inter-organizational contexts, develops the future agenda for improving scholarship on social innovation occurring through inter-organizational collaborations, and provides the development of new theoretical ideas by focusing on some key studies in the literature and papers published in this special issue. With a focus on subsistence contexts that are characterized by limiting institutional environments, this paper identifies the types of partnerships that are being formed by social enterprises and individual social entrepreneurs, and how they may facilitate and foster social innovation practice and performance through social value creation.

Keywords: Social Innovation; Inter-Organizational Collaborations; Social Enterprises; Social Change; Social Value Creation.

1. Introduction

Social innovation has an increasing role in the welfare of people all around the globe. The intensifying poverty and poor living conditions, which have been tempered by the effects of the recent pandemic, as well as the increasingly deteriorated natural environment require the need for positive social change. In this sense, social innovation constitutes a powerful solution to address all these social problems occurring across the world. Social innovation concept has been used interchangeably with a range of other concepts such as inclusive innovation, below-the-radar innovation, frugal innovation, and sustainable innovation (Lashitew et al 2020). Social innovation is commonly defined as a process which involves the creation of social innovation outputs (e.g. offerings and solutions) with the purpose of generating social value that addresses societal challenges including social and environmental problems (Phillips et al., 2015; Ramani et al. 2017).

Despite its significance, there have been relatively limited number of studies on social innovation as compared to commercial innovation processes, practices and outcomes particularly in inter-organizational collaboration contexts. Importantly, research on social innovation has been limited in providing insights into multi-level research unearthing the possible interactions or dynamics among micro, meso and/or macro level influences and outcomes. Thus, in an inter-organizational context, focusing on a single level of the innovation system limit the identification of possible cross-level influences of collaborations undertaken between and/or among organizations during the social innovation process. Though interactions between different influences of social innovation at different levels of analysis have been widely agreed to be present (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; van Wijk et al., 2019), the literature has predominantly focused collaboration based influences and outcomes at the organizational or meso level (Voltan and De Fuentes, 2016).

In this context, social entrepreneurs also play a significant role for social innovation practice as they are the type of individuals who set up and grow social enterprises, and engage in systematic and improvised social innovation activities with other individuals and organizations to create social value (Sastre-Castillo et al., 2015). Hence, more research is needed on how individual social entrepreneurs at the micro level may engage in inter-organizational collaborations for social innovation to create social value specifically within subsistence economies, which are often characterised by extensive institutional voids and limited institutional support but strong interpersonal ties and networks (Smith et al., 2016; Turker and Vural, 2017; Venugopal and Viswanathan, 2019; Webb et al., 2010). Similarly, more research is needed about how inter-organizational collaborations for the purpose of social innovation take place by individuals such as returnee entrepreneurs, who hold social ties with international partners (Eng et al., 2020). Investigating these issues would be particularly relevant to social enterprises operating in subsistence contexts with limited resources and support for social innovation. This is because collaborations with international partners from specifically non-subsistence markets can provide these enterprises and associated individual social entrepreneurs with easier access to new resources and capabilities, and help them to gain legitimacy in their domestic markets through stakeholder pressures from global markets.

Against this background, the aim of this special issue has been to collate academic research on social innovation undertaken in inter-organizational collaboration contexts and address to the limitations of social innovation research which has been mostly fragmented and lacked sufficient focus on the role of inter-organizational collaborations in social innovation process and outcome. In this paper, while we review existing perspectives and studies on social innovation undertaken in inter-organizational contexts, we also propose new

research agendas and theoretical ideas by focusing on some key studies in the literature and papers published in this special issue.

2. Social Innovation Research

2.1. Definitions of Social Innovations

Social innovation constitutes a form of innovation with social mission. As opposed to commercial forms of innovations, the primary objective of a social innovation does not include attainment of commercial returns. The commercial benefits of social innovations are rather used as mechanisms to achieve social goals. Accordingly, it can be suggested while the primary objectives of social innovators would relate to the achievement of a social mission, their secondary objectives would involve implementations of commercial plans for the attainment of their primary objectives.

There are various definitions of social innovation from different perspectives. Some definitions of social innovation (e.g. Mulgan et al., 2007) uses the concept as an outcome of an innovation process by indicating that they include new ideas or inventions that are created to address ‘unmet social needs’. Though it is generally agreed that ‘social value creation’ and ‘creation of better futures’ are the ultimate ends of social innovations (Pol and Ville 2009), Cajaiba-Santana (2014) points out that social innovations may not be perceived as beneficial for everyone; i.e. they might be perceived as an enhancing by one group and as deteriorating by another. As such, some other scholars suggest that the focus of social innovations is not on meeting ‘social needs’ but on enabling ‘asset building’ (Adams and Hess 2008; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Neumeier, 2012). Based on this view, social innovations do not necessarily include manifestation of new ideas to solve social problems (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). From a marketing standpoint, meeting ‘current’ or ‘future’ needs of the market would be the main

drive of any innovation practice (Narver et al., 2004). From an innovation perspective, subjective evaluations of different attributes of social innovations by diverse groups of potential adopters within a market or social system constitute important determinants of their perceived benefits even as compared to their objective attributes (e.g. technical or functional merits) (Rogers, 2003). Thus, from marketing and innovation perspectives, social innovation needs to consider meeting current and/or future needs of the beneficiaries and resolving their social problems by creating social value.

One of the earliest definitions of social innovation was provided from an economic perspective by Schumpeter (1934) in his theory of creative destruction. By using a process approach, the author defined social innovation as a socially constructed process emerging through the creative labour of entrepreneurs carrying out new combinations of knowledge to achieve economic growth. From a sociological perspective, social innovation process focuses on achieving new ways of creating and implementing social change through new combinations and configurations of social practices (van der Have and Rubalcaba, 2016). The ability to create social change differentiates social innovation process from commercial innovation processes such as the ones involving the development of technical innovations, which may also be used to address social problems (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). Another sociological perspective emphasizes that social innovation process includes collaborative endeavours to achieve shared goal(s) by certain groups of individuals with a network of aligned interests (Neumeier, 2012). Similarly, social innovation is often defined as any new idea, process, offering or solution created to improve the macro quality of societal life in terms of enhancing the quantities of valuable options that communities of people can choose from (Pol and Ville, 2009). These economic and sociological perspectives focus on the behavioural aspect of the process of social innovation, and perceive social innovator (or

entrepreneur in Schumpeter's (1934) term) as the agent of creating change and producer of social value.

From a more structuralist perspective, social innovation is suggested to be influenced by the external structural context which relates to institutional and social structures (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; van der Have and Rubalcaba, 2016). Cajaiba-Santana (2014) combines the structuralist and agency oriented, sociological perspectives by suggesting that social innovations are contingent on not only the actions of social agents (i.e. social innovators or entrepreneurs) but also the legitimization of such actions in a structural context including socio-structural and institutional systems. More specifically, the author indicates that social innovations are related to the "intended, planned, coordinated, goal oriented, and legitimated actions undertaken by social agents aiming at social change that will emerge in the establishment of new social practices" (pg. 3). Steinfield and Holt (2019) also suggest that structural context including institutional gaps in a marketplace can be both a catalyst and barrier for social innovations. This is because, while it may generate opportunities for addressing to the voids in the market, it can also hamper the innovation diffusion process unless a solution is found (Steinfield and Holt, 2019).

Furthermore, there are some inconsistent views on the definition of social innovations in terms of its relevance to business innovations. For example, Phillips et al. (2019) suggest that by adopting a business approach, social entrepreneurs can create social value for particular communities or groups of stakeholders. Their study is among some of the other studies which attempt to understand the process of social innovation by considering the knowledge transferred from business innovation theory and practice (Rana et al., 2014). Mulgan (2007), however, distinguishes business innovation from social innovation on the basis of its profit maximization motive. Similarly, Pol and Ville (2009) conceptually separate social innovation from business innovation. Though these scholars also recognize potential

overlaps between social and business innovation, they suggest that the creation of pure social innovations requires government intervention. There are some other scholars who indicate that as opposed to business innovation, social innovation often needs to be backed by political recognition, philanthropic compromise or volunteering (Mulgan et al., 2007; Oliveira and Breda-Vazquez, 2012). Dawson and Daniel (2010) also state that business innovation is in the realm of commerce and competition whereas social innovation intends to achieve social beneficence and public good to support people in organisations, communities and society in general. According to the authors, business and social innovations may have direct conflicts of interest, which may undermine socially responsible and environmentally beneficial innovations at the expense of sustaining market domination of more economically rewarding counterparts. In line with these views, Phillips et al. (2019) suggest that at its core, and a critical distinction between business and social innovations is that while the former is “driven by market forces”, the latter includes “socioeconomic and cultural dimension aiming social change to fill gaps in provision that neither the state nor the private sector has been able to identify or to close” (pg. 316). Based on NESTA’s definition, social innovations are also driven to meet unmet human and societal needs, whereas business innovations are market and consumer oriented or driven (Lettice and Parekh, 2010). In addition, Bessant and Tidd (2007) indicate that wealth creation may be part of the social innovation process but it is not an end in itself. Mulgan et al. (2013) assert that in many ways process and organizational innovations come closest to capturing social innovation as compared to other types of business innovations such as product (tangible goods or intangible services) and marketing innovations. Neumeier’s (2012) definition of social innovation particularly separates the concept from tangible product innovations by suggesting that “social innovations are non-material: their material outcomes are solely a supplementary result” (p. 55).

Some other scholars suggest that social innovation includes the development and implementation of new ideas including new products (or services), processes, business models as well as marketing innovations to create social value (Gasparin et al., 2021; Phills et al., 2008; Sanzo-Perez et al., 2015; Siebold, 2021). Herrera (2015) also conceptualizes social innovation as a process that involves combination of corporate social responsibility (CSR) implementation and business innovation. The author's study includes multinationals with a range of non-profit and for-profit stakeholders, which use social innovations to attain competitive advantage while creating social value. Kanungo's (2021) study published in this special issue provides a more encompassing definition of social innovation as a process-outcome-value construct and links it to CSR. The study observes that a stock payment method is preferred over a cash payment method by the acquirer firms of mergers and acquisitions and commercial firms that are undertaking social innovation using CSR activities. The study further observes certain firm-related implications of payment methods. Hence, it can be suggested that, social innovation can be defined as a process or the outcome of such process, which may aim meeting social and commercial objectives to a certain extent, and creation of predominantly a social value.

Foroudi et al.'s (2021) work based on a bibliometric analysis, which is published in this special issue, elaborates the phases of social innovation process which include exploitation of opportunities by seeking and diagnosing the opportunities (by using technology transfer, business formation and problem solving) and application of innovation practices (by using correct resources, products, services, knowledge, technology, market) for creating and providing superior value in economic and social terms as well as environmental sustainability terms. Tabaklar et al.'s (2021) study published in this special issue also examine social innovation process in humanitarian aid context and observe that such a process requires a supply network to gain microfoundations of sensing, seizing and

reconfiguring capabilities. The study identifies microprocesses that involve activities of introducing an intervention to support social innovation, which include phases such as preparing, engaging, strengthening, streamlining, and responding. It is shown that the commonality of the microprocesses concerned is their requirement to have a collaborative approach and integrated action with several other organizations.

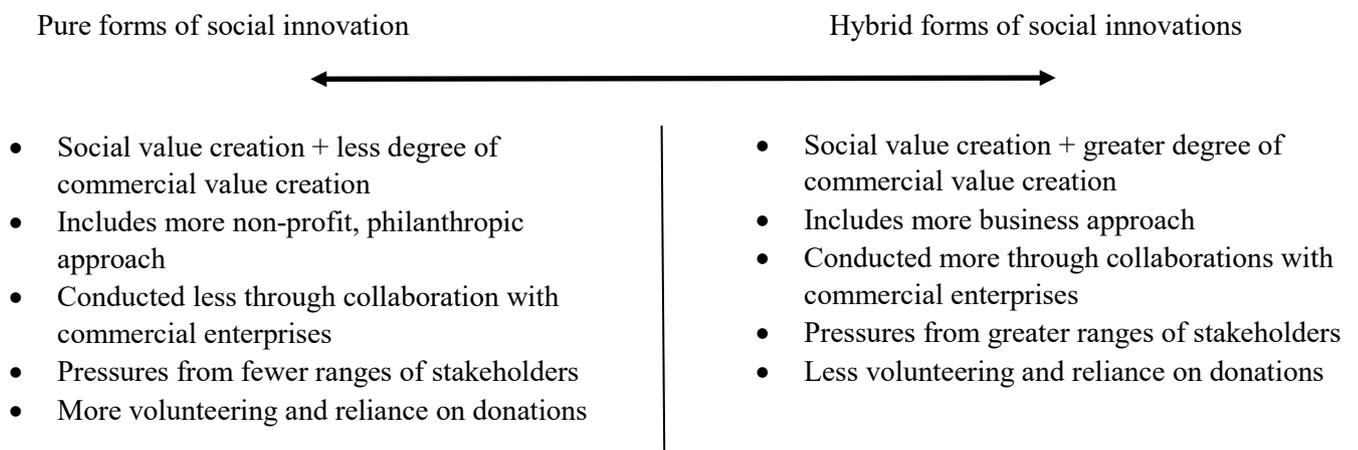
As can be seen from Figure 1, if we conceptualize social innovation as a process on a continuum, pure forms of social innovations would have the primary or ultimate goal of creating social value with least amount of concerns or efforts for commercial returns. These types of social innovations would mostly be developed by social enterprises which rely predominantly on donations. More hybrid forms of social innovations, in contrast, would still aim to primarily create social value but at the same time intend to achieve commercial value through more business innovation related activities and practices. These types of social innovations are more likely to include collaborations between for-profit- and non-profit organizations. Hence, these innovations are more likely to be supported or funded by commercial enterprises along with some other funding opportunities such as donations or government funding initiatives. Indeed, given the hardships of securing resources and sustainable donations, and necessity to rely on non-traditional employment channels, volunteers and unsecure funding sources, most social enterprises have to operate in more hybrid forms and thus are challenged by the duality of using market mechanisms with strategies to create both social and economic values (Phillips et al., 2019). Such partnerships provide value not only to social enterprises but also to commercial businesses. For example, according to Al-Tabbaa et al.'s (2021) study published in this special issue, in business and non-profit partnership, non-profit organizations with greater portfolio size deliver improved economic rent to their business partners and establish more calculative trust in the pre-collaboration stage. Furthermore, the study shows that the ability to create social value is

enhanced when there is a greater portfolio size but only for larger non-profit organizations while the delivery of collaboration options in terms of having a flexible approach in collaborations is negatively related to portfolio size. Crisafulli et al.'s (2020) study published in this special issue also focuses on non-profit and profit partnerships and show such partnerships brand alliance context benefit the collaborating parties through purchase intention of buyers. According to their study, when compared to independent enterprises, alliance launch strategies of non-profits and for-profits result in greater purchase intentions of industrial buyers, who judge social innovations of alliances on the basis of their warmth and competence, and thus demonstrate a preference for the adoption of social innovations introduced by alliances over the ones launched by non-profits only. Specifically, the authors reveal that the advantages of alliance strategies become more prominent when both societal and company related benefits are communicated.

Based on these studies, we can also expect that collaborations or partnerships between or among diverse types of non-profit or for-profit organizations may lead to creation of different kinds and degrees of social value for both collaborating organizations and the beneficiaries (i.e. end users). Particularly, we can expect that in social enterprises targeting pure forms of social innovations with less business oriented mindset, collaborations with commercial businesses may be less likely to create value. Social enterprises applying more business approaches may have greater opportunities to create market value with their commercial counterparts by introducing hybrid forms of social innovations, and by also contributing to both financial and social objectives of their commercial partners. In this sense, there is a need for more empirical evidence on when and under which circumstances, different types of collaborations may contribute to the development of pure and hybrid forms of social innovations which would provide better value for both collaborating organizations and beneficiaries (see Figure 1). Specifically, future research can unearth *how and under*

which circumstances, collaborations between or among different types of social enterprises enable the development and introduction of pure forms of social innovations with better social value for beneficiaries. Similarly, it can explore how social enterprises and commercial organizations need to collaborate to develop and introduce hybrid forms of social innovations with better social and market value to meet the organizational goals of all parties.

Figure 1. Different types of social innovations



2.2. Social Innovation Research in Different Levels of Analysis

The studies on social innovation have been previously critiqued for their focus on influences associated with either agentic behaviors or actions, or socio-structural or institutional systems (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). However, such a focus on these diverse approaches is also contingent on the levels of analysis used in different studies. The social innovation literature has predominantly focused on organizational level issues at the meso level, and is limited in conducting multi-level research examining the interactions or dynamics among micro, meso and/or macro level influences and outcomes. This is important to understand because each level of an innovation system is grounded in a higher level context which can influence the

innovation phenomena at lower levels (Gupta et al., 2007). According to Gupta et al. (2007) “top-down processes or what might be termed ‘contextual influences’ help deepen understanding of innovation phenomena by specifying the nature of these situational influences... they also help ensure that the sources of influence on innovation outcomes are appropriately attributed to correct factors” (pg. 888). In social innovation setting, this implies that studies taking different levels of the innovation system may explain the outcomes of social innovation differently, and therefore may identify diverse range of influences. Indeed, a range of diverse theories have been used to examine social innovation practice examined within and across different levels; e.g. institutional and structuration theories used at macro level of analysis (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Turker and Vural, 2017), and stakeholder, social exchange, social identity, agency and leadership theories are used at the individual (micro) and/or organizational (meso) level of analysis (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Garcia-Lomas and Gabaldon 2021; Herrera, 2015; Petrovskaya and Mirakyan, 2018) (for more information about the theories used in social innovation research, please refer to Foroudi et al.’s (2021) paper published in this special issue).

Studies on social innovation predominantly use a meso level approach by examining the influence of social innovation on organizational performance in terms of ranges of outcomes such as increased revenues and scale of operations. For example, Sanzo-Perez et al.’s (2015) study investigates the development of different kinds of product, process, marketing, and organizational social innovations, and their impact of transformational performance at the organizational level. Similarly, Felicio et al. (2013) examined the role of social entrepreneurship in social value creation and the organizational performance of non-profit social organizations. In inter-organizational context, studies using a meso level approach specifically focus on how organizations (rather than groups of social entrepreneurs) collaborate to jointly develop and introduce social innovations. For example, Phillips et al.’s

(2019) study examine how organizations such as social enterprises use stakeholder relationships to identify opportunities to develop and facilitate social innovation. Based on their secondary case study data, Voltan and De Fuentes (2016) also explore how collaborating partners manage competing logics in the context of intra- and inter-organizational partnerships for scaling social innovation. Yet, these studies offer limited insights into an individual social entrepreneur's or a group of social entrepreneurs' role in social innovation process and practice. An exception to these studies is Eng et al.'s (2020) study which examines how micro or individual level personal relationship related influences of international social entrepreneurs with external stakeholders generate social value creation at the meso or organizational level. Likewise, Rodrigo and Palacios's (2021) research has been among the few studies which identifies the antecedent factors affecting the commitment among individual professionals and managers of projects and initiatives that are part of the ecosystem of digital social innovation. In their study published in this special issue, Gupta et al. (2020) also examine social innovation phenomena through a multi-level approach and observe that the use of new age technologies would enhance the effectiveness of social innovation when it is initiated both at the organizational and governmental level, mostly in a formal set up with a top-down approach, and initiated at individual level by one or more individuals in an informal set up with a bottom-up approach. The authors find that the use of new age technologies driven by a top-down approach and bottom-up approach generates different outcomes.

At the micro or individual level, Seelos and Mair (2005) examine social entrepreneurs with a primarily social mission and desire to make a social contribution with an entrepreneurial talent. Dickel and Eckardt (2021) suggest that social entrepreneurs have intentions associated with the perceived desirability and feasibility to start a social enterprise to alleviate social problems with entrepreneurial means, which in turn is influenced by the

level of empathy, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and social support. Van Wijk et al. (2019) indicate that they are the individuals who are able to identify opportunities where others view problems, and hope and commitment where others give up for resolving social problems. The literature also suggests that besides being rational, social entrepreneurs also develop social innovations to achieve certain positive emotions and address some moral causes (van Wijk et al., 2019). Sastre-Castillo et al. (2015) differentiates social entrepreneurs from commercial entrepreneurs in a range of activities aiming to solve social problems despite their commonalities in terms of leadership, entrepreneurship orientation, personal qualities, work styles and capability to generate and implement innovative ideas. Social entrepreneurs are also distinguished from individuals performing the acts of charity by considering their intentions to develop innovations with long term vision and sustainable social value (Sastre-Castillo et al., 2015; Seelos and Mair, 2005). According to Bacq and Janssen (2011) social innovation emerges through the action of visionary entrepreneurs who are capable to come up with innovative solutions to social problems of their social communities which are not resolved by the local system (c.f. Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). In this sense, personal traits and values, and entrepreneurial tendencies, missions and capabilities of social entrepreneurs have been suggested as main drives for their social innovation engagement (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Sastre-Castillo et al., 2015; Seelos and Mair, 2005). *Although few studies rarely refer to individual level outcomes of social entrepreneurship and associated social innovation practices such as individual empowerment and work satisfaction, existing research on social innovation is limited in providing insights into the specific antecedents and moderating influences of such outcomes, which require exploration in future research* (Garcia-Lomas and Gabaldon 2021; Petrovskaya and Mirakyan, 2018).

The studies focusing on macro level units of analysis are mostly related to institutional or system innovations that are concerned with social movements which aim to

reshape existing social, economic, political and environmental structures to generate new social value and outcomes (Nicholls et al., 2015; Unceta et al., 2020). Thus, in such studies, predominantly institutional theory is used to understand the roles of institutions in producing new ideas, practices and systems, and how they are accepted through legitimacy and diffusion (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). Political, economic, social and legal institutions reproduce rules and norms that can prevent or facilitate social innovation (von Jacobi et al., 2018). Specifically, institutions may include formal mechanisms such as laws and property rights, and informal mechanisms such as social and institutional values, norms and codes of conduct (Venugopal and Viswanathan, 2019). Organizations including governments and private interest groups may have an influential role for social entrepreneurs in institutionalizing social innovation via incentives such as prizes, funds and tax reductions (Pol and Ville, 2008). In this regard, each successful social innovation requires a unique combination of entrepreneurship, supporting institutional systems and mechanisms, and sufficient financing for creating a systems level impact (Mulgan et al., 2013). However, social innovations often fail in subsistence marketplaces because in such markets, incentives for social entrepreneurship and social innovation are often lacking. In these settings, shaping local institutions is required to gain support for social innovation process and practice while changing these institutions pose a significant challenge for social entrepreneurs (Venugopal and Viswanathan, 2019). Raghubanshi et al.'s (2021) study published in this special issue points out the importance of realizing institutional change to enhance inclusive social innovation in subsistence markets. Drawing on a longitudinal inductive study of 9 social enterprises from India, the study shows that certain prominent mechanisms including relational work, inclusion work, and equity work not only promote social innovation but also support creation, inclusive distribution and fair distribution of shared value.

In social innovation research, macro level of analysis has received little attention while it has been relatively widely examined in studies associated with social movements in public policy (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). Though the interactions at the macro level (e.g. structural or institutional) and lower level (e.g. individual, community and organisational) influences have been widely regarded to be present, macro level studies, which predominantly use institutional theory, also lack a persistent explanation of agency (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; van Wijk et al., 2019). According to Cajaiba-Santana (2014) in social innovation, social changes can be enabled through not only actions and interactions of social agents but also creation of new institutions and social systems. Unceta et al. (2020) explains social innovation through a life cycle process with diverse phases ranging from searching and development of solutions to scaling up of social innovations, where the main purpose constitutes addressing to a social problem and then integrating an innovative solution in a new institutional context. The authors indicate that each phase of the process has their own barriers and drivers, which are embedded in barriers and drivers imposed by the institutional context. Koh et al (2014) also conceptualize the barriers to social innovation at four diverse but related levels: the firm, the industry value chain of the firm, public goods associated with the industry, and governmental laws, policies and actions levels. Koh (2017) builds on this view by pointing out the role of those in the institutional ecosystem such as incubators and investors in creating opportunities and providing support for entrepreneurial talent in their efforts to develop and introduce social innovation. The future studies can further explore *how individual social entrepreneurs at the micro level and social enterprises at the meso level can collaborate within innovation ecosystems or networks to develop successful social innovations by enabling the required institutional change at the macro level*. They can also investigate *how individual social entrepreneurs and social enterprises within an innovation*

ecosystem or network can facilitate and support the development of social innovations that are better aligned with the associated institutional context or environment.

2.3. Social Innovation Research in Subsistence and Non-subsistence Contexts

The availability of institutions and institutional support for innovation is a key indication of cross-country differences for successful implementation of social innovation practice (Rao-Nicholson et al., 2017). Entrepreneurs setting up new ventures in subsistence economies are mostly challenged by access to the needed expertise to gain support for growing their enterprises, and thus are often unable to make the required contributions to economic change and development (Smith et al., 2016). Besides, subsistence contexts often suffer from economic poverty and resource constraints while having institutional mechanisms and systems which are often dysfunctional. In other words, in such contexts, modern or western style formal institutional mechanisms and systems are absent, weak or failed due to the institutional voids. Their formal institutions such as constitutions, laws and governmental regulations, and informal institutions such as customs, traditions and religious beliefs are often not independent (Onsongo and Knorrninga, 2016; Turker and Vural, 2017), which may lead to sub-optimal decisions for social innovation policies. Indeed, informal institutions (i.e. normative and cultural-cognitive institutions) have strong dominance in the subsistence contexts while formal, regulative institutions have smaller role despite they often contradict with the former (Rivera-Santos et al., 2012).

The formal institutions can also not be easily introduced or improved in subsistence contexts as they frequently conflict with native belief systems and historical path dependencies (Smith et al., 2016). Turker and Vural (2017) observe that the presence of institutional voids and the lack of adequate institutional support in subsistence contexts lead

to the development of social innovations only at the incremental and institutional level, and to achieve disruptive social innovation, institutional settings should include institutional support which can drive transformational action. This implies that the institutional environments in subsistence contexts are often not supportive of highly innovative social innovation practice that have the potential to create social change and value with distinctive benefits. Nicholls (2010) suggests that social entrepreneurs can address to institutional voids through “new products or services, action that reconfigures markets to create new or greater social value, and action that challenges institutional arrangements at a field level through advocacy and political action” (pg. 247).

Another problematic area for social innovation in subsistence contexts relates to the processes associated with funding decisions, which are often not transparent and objective and may be based on corruption and political inconsistencies (Knife et al., 2014). The cost of corruption is associated with not only reduced economic development and growth (Williams and Martinez-Perez, 2016) but also deficiency in the development and employment of proficient human capital, which is required for the successful implementation of social innovation process and practice. In non-subsistence contexts, the punishment of misbehaviour may not be realized as their regulative institutions are often dependent on the judicial power of the central authority (Rivera-Santos et al., 2012). Thus, it would be necessary to consolidate social institutions to build the culture and capacity against misconducts, and generate support against any collusive activity increasing personal benefits at the expense of societal ones. In subsistence economies, proto-institutions such as entrepreneurship enabling organizations can make social entrepreneurs avoid negative behaviours such as corruption via formal institutional voids and support them to gain legitimacy from the stance of an informal institution (Smith et al., 2016; Webb et al., 2010). However, it is important to note that though the existence of institutional voids may create barriers for social innovation practice,

they may also create innovative opportunities for social entrepreneurs (Torres and Augusto, 2020; Smith et al., 2016). Importantly, the institutional voids in subsistence contexts drive social entrepreneurs to redeploy their resources and become innovative by expanding their stakeholder engagement and involving in strategic partnerships to overcome any capital restraints and resource limitations (Turker and Vural, 2017). For example, based on the interviews with multiple cases and some other supplementary data, De Silva et al.'s (2020) research published in this special issue contributes to the research gap on the role of value co-creation across the pyramid in subsistence markets by showing that social enterprises co-create opportunities to simultaneously generate social and economic value with both the top of the pyramid and bottom of the pyramid partners, or what they refer as Transcending Pyramid Social Enterprises. The authors observe that supply side opportunity co-creation enables fulfilment of institutional voids, and development of relational capital with the partners at the bottom of the pyramid by also meeting their needs. They also find that demand side opportunity co-creation provides market access to the top of the pyramid partners, enhanced awareness of value generated by Transcending Pyramid Social Enterprises, and fulfilment of the needs of the top of the pyramid customers. Nonetheless, it would be worthwhile to explore *how, specifically in subsistence economies, some limiting behaviours to social innovation such as corruption takes place through social entrepreneurship and how it influences the social innovation process in inter-organizational collaboration contexts.* Similarly, future studies can examine *how inter-organizational collaborations can be formed and implemented to overcome barriers and create new opportunities for social innovation within contexts characterized by high levels of institutional voids and limiting behaviors such as collusive acts.*

In non-subsistence contexts, on the other hand, well established institutional infrastructures support social innovation process and practice (Rao-Nicholson et al., 2017).

Indeed, in such contexts, social economy has a considerable proportion of market economy and employment (Spear, 2006), which contributes to the significance of social entrepreneurship and associated social innovation endeavours. Torres and Augusto (2020) observe that in non-subsistence contexts stronger institutions along with higher levels of digital adoption, better education system and more competent governance enable realization of greater societal well-being compared to subsistence contexts. In addition, in non-subsistence economies, the digitalization and globalization of stakeholder engagements have enhanced awareness about opportunities for social improvement in subsistence economies (Zahra et al., 2000; 2008). The role of global and economic policies and governance in the engagement of international social entrepreneurship from non-subsistence contexts, which aim to create positive changes for socially disadvantaged people in subsistence contexts, is also highly important (Zahra et al., 2014). It can be asserted that international social entrepreneurs have to operate in more complex environments with different cultural, social, economic, legal, and governmental institutions and systems (Yang and Wu, 2015). Yet, recent research demonstrates that given their greater power and less dependency on the host country, international social enterprises are challenged less from weak institutions as compared to domestic social enterprises (De Beule, et al., 2020). An exception to this is observed to be the international social enterprises with lower levels of resources, which are able to respond to prevailing social problems when local governments support their business development (Veronica et al., 2020).

Despite the significance of understanding international social entrepreneurship and its role in social innovation, research *investigating how social enterprises from non-subsistence economies internationalize into subsistence economies to address social problems such as poverty, social inequality and environmental problems are limited and can be explored in future research*. Specifically, understanding *the extent to which and how local institutions*

and stakeholder influences within advanced markets may affect the internationalization of social enterprises from the non-subsistence home country contexts into the subsistence host country settings would be valuable. As social enterprises in subsistence contexts do not have as ideal institutional arrangements, systems and infrastructures as in non-subsistence contexts, what has been studied in terms of internationalization of social enterprises and associated social innovation endeavours in advanced markets might not be applicable to emerging or underdeveloped markets (Rao-Nicholson et al., 2017). In relation to this, understanding *how global institutions (including global regulative and cognitive institutions), international human capital and other international stakeholders may support the internationalization and related social innovation practices of social enterprises from and into the subsistence contexts* would contribute to the development of the social innovation literature.

3. Conceptual Development of Social Innovation in Inter-Organizational Contexts

In limited subsistence contexts, the importance of inter-organizational collaboration increases due to the limited institutional support, organizational resources and capabilities for engaging in social innovation practice. Besides the institutional limitations at the national innovation system level, insufficient resources and capabilities at the organizational level also constitute significant barriers for realizing social value creation. Such constraints have increased the role of governments in subsistence economies in enhancing social innovation endeavours with the aim to improve the social welfare (Veronica et al., 2020). Inevitably, the importance of social entrepreneurs as partners and/or contractors in supporting government agencies and some predominant non-governmental organizations to achieve their development agendas is also undeniable (Dees, 2008). According to Rao-Nicholson et al. (2017) and Venugopal and

Viswanathan (2019) forming inter-organizational partnerships in subsistence economies is vital due to the fact that in such contexts increased complexity of social problems necessitates collective resources and capabilities to resolve such problems by multiple stakeholders. The collaborations among stakeholders such as public organizations, private organizations, and governments can not only increase the odds of social innovation success but also the likelihood of improving their trustworthiness and philanthropic image (Jaroliya et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the collaborations of governments with multiple stakeholders can help them to create social value by fulfilling the needs of their citizens when they are unable to do so using their own capacity (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). In particular, in subsistence economies, learning from and innovating with multiple stakeholders can help to more effectively overcome the poverty (Murphy et al 2012). Yet, Rivera-Santos et al. (2012) suggests that in subsistence economies, inter-organizational relationships are more likely to be ruled by informal mechanisms such as normative and cultural-cognitive institutions as opposed to formal mechanisms such as regulatory institutions, and often develop through traditional, intra-group ties within rather than between communities of potential beneficiaries. Such close-knit, intra-group ties with communities can help social entrepreneurs to gain easier access to resources, become more creative and flexible in serving to the targeted communities and achieve more effective auditing of and engagements with beneficiaries (Dees, 2008; Steinfield and Holt, 2019). As such, Babu et al.'s (2020) study published in this special issue, which is based on 44 indepth interviews show that in a subsistence market of Bangladesh, which is characterized by institutional and specifically legal constraints, service innovation ecosystems operate mostly through a culture of informal collaboration. The study builds on existing research on social innovation by providing insights into some major characteristics of service and how they enable value-co-creation through social innovation.

Informal partnerships of social entrepreneurs with organizational stakeholders along with the deficient operation of regulatory institutions, however, often give rise to normalized corruption or bribery practices (Aly et al 2021), which constitute a barrier for social innovation success and thus social value creation. The previous research has observed negative effects of corruption and bribery practices on the commercial performance of small and medium sized enterprises (Zhou and Peng, 2011). In line with these studies, it can be asserted that informality of inter-organizational collaborations and the presence of weak regulatory institutions are likely to result in exploitation of investments pooled for social innovation by a minority of privileged individuals. Venugopal and Viswanathan (2019) observe that in subsistence markets, social entrepreneurs need to enable local communities to generate the required institutional change by collectively creating, maintaining, and transforming aspects of the institutional environment. Against this background we suggest that though inter-organizational collaborations with multiple stakeholders can increase opportunities for creating value through social innovation, in subsistence economies, the benefits of such collaborations can be attained by cooperating with local communities to gain support for social innovation through informal, normative and cultural-cognitive institutions. Thus, in subsistence economies where regulatory institutions are often dysfunctional, the effectiveness of collaborations with organizational stakeholders is contingent on the cooperation with communities of potential beneficiaries to create normative and cultural-cognitive institutional support for social innovation. Consequently, we suggest that:

Proposition 1: As compared to non-subsistence economies, in subsistence economies, the positive influence of collaborations with multiple organizational stakeholders on social innovation success in terms of improved social value creation is likely to increase more when such collaborations are complemented with greater degree of cooperation with potential beneficiaries.

Scholars studying social innovation widely agree that the extent of social problems in subsistence markets create opportunities for social innovation but only at the incremental level given the fact that institutional challenges to obtain support for social innovation and living of communities at subsistence levels mostly generate ordinary, quick and necessity-based solutions rather than solutions with higher levels of innovativeness to address social problems (Steinfeld and Holt, 2019; Turker and Vural, 2017). In this sense, Steinfeld and Holt (2019) state that in subsistence settings social entrepreneurs do not aim to achieve economic growth or come up with innovations but work towards enabling a basic standard of living for communities. On the other hand, from an organizational perspective, Murphy et al. (2012) claims that in subsistence settings, limited resource availability of communities in their daily living necessitate solutions with both social and economic goals or cross-sector partnerships, which include the combination of for-profit and non-profit partners. This view contrasts with Ault's (2016) opinion that donor-based pure social enterprise models may constitute an improved strategy in providing value for the poorest communities in settings like subsistence economies, which include governments with inabilities and/or unwillingness to meet their essential governmental roles for the majority of their citizens. The author suggests that given the challenges of accessing to marginalized people using the commercial models, creating value through more hybrid forms of social entrepreneurship with the support of commercial entrepreneurs aiming for both economic and social goals would work better in contexts with lower levels of fragility such as non-subsistence economies. More specifically, views favouring the need for pure social entrepreneurship in subsistence markets suggest that socially driven enterprises or ventures can better respond to acute needs relating to extreme poverty, extensive institutional voids, fragile environmental resources and widespread marginalized communities (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). Although it can be claimed that in

subsistence markets, limited institutional support for social innovation may require higher levels of economic returns for the sustainability of social enterprises and their operations, greater orientation for achieving economic goals may limit the ability and willingness to focus on resolving deeper and more extensive social problems experienced in such markets.

Vassallo et al.'s (2019) study further specify that quasi-profit hybrid forms of collaborations involving a balanced partnership between not-for-profit and for-profit organizations aiming for both economic and social goals have greater tendency to become more prevalent and achieve greater usage in bottom-of-the-pyramid, subsistence markets. Yet, it also observes that while not-for-profit hybrids which aim greater degree of social value creation over economic returns are more predominant in markets with lower development levels, for-profit hybrids aiming greater degree of economic gains over social value creation are more prevalent in markets with lower social diversity. From the institutional standpoint, it can be suggested that regardless of social diversity and development levels, transparent auditing implemented through formal contracts would not effectively operate in contexts such as subsistence markets which are characterized by normalized collusion acts, and organizations and individual managers engaging in quality-reducing actions to boost profits (Cabral et al., 2010; Quelin et al., 2017). Hence, in such contexts, creating social value is more likely to be ensured by involvements in global social innovation eco-systems, which increase the accountability of social entrepreneurship and associated social innovation practices.

At the national level, Bendickson et al (2020) suggest that knowledge spillovers and transfers within an innovation ecosystem would enable its survival even if there is a major institutional limitation or environmental crisis. According to Surie (2017), innovation ecosystems require involvement of different types of organizations in the process of innovation as well as mechanisms such as the creation of new policies and regulations to

generate demand. Similarly, de Lange (2016) state that innovation ecosystems at the system level may improve their environments because networked entrepreneurs can more easily take advantage of institutional voids by manipulating or shaping their local environments (de Lange, 2016). In this context, it is widely agreed that within innovation eco-systems, interactions among several actors are both affected by institutions and influence the reformation of institutions that constitute markets (Vargo et al., 2015). In line with this view, Venugopal and Viswanathan (2019) observe that in subsistence marketplaces, which have high levels of institutional barriers for generating social value, social agents can succeed by enabling local communities to bring about the required institutional changes for implementing social innovation. Similarly, the study of Mollinger-Sahba et al. (2021), published in this special issue, observe that public good social innovations developed through social impact bonds are affected by market mechanisms, and markets are in return shaped by these innovations. The authors show that such innovations are progressively involved in a process of schisming which relates to the disruption of concerned market norms by combining collective concerns, and for profit concerns and individual gains. They specify how and why schisming process arises, and to what extent economic markets and a concerned society are embedded within one another. Pop et al (2019) also empirically observe that collaborations with different types of organizational stakeholders and customers within a service ecosystem at the lower-level can induce institutional change at the higher-level. Based on these studies, it can be asserted that there is a bilateral influence between the structural context and social innovation practice meaning that structural context can both determine the success of social innovations and be affected by the social innovation practice.

Furthermore, it can be suggested that compared to national innovation ecosystem engagements, global innovation ecosystems involving interactions and collaborations among local and global organizations is likely to have a stronger influence on formal and informal

institutions at both global and local level. Global innovation ecosystems would have a more powerful role in not only influencing national institutional systems, which is particularly vital in subsistence markets with limited institutional support and extensive institutional voids, but also reducing limiting behaviors such as corruption based practices through global stakeholder pressures (OECD, 2018). In addition, global innovation ecosystems can facilitate some other operational problems experienced in the social innovation process particularly in subsistence economies with insufficient infrastructures. For example, fair trade bodies enable coordination of global supply and distribution chains with high degree of complexity (Quelin et al., 2017). Therefore, we propose that:

Proposition 2: As compared to non-subsistence economies, in subsistence economies, global innovation ecosystems play a stronger role in increasing the prospects of social innovation success in terms of improved social value creation.

The subsistence economies or markets are commonly agreed to be characterized by deeply personal, social, and relational environments, in which people and individual relationships hold high value (Viswanathan et al., 2010). For instance, in subsistence markets, when formal laws are absent or limited, entrepreneurs with sufficient social ties within a community can form relational contracts with organizational stakeholders by embedding potential economic transactions in their social network (Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos, 2015). In other words, the strength of such ties help overcome the problems associated with low levels of trust towards institutions and improper implementation of contracts preventing effective organizational operations (Bradley et al., 2012). Indeed, previous research also suggests that in subsistence settings, entrepreneurs' decisions and practices can often be closely related to their embedded family, kinship, friendship and overall community ties

(Toledo-López et al., 2012). More specifically, forming social ties with individuals within communities of subsistence markets would provide opportunities to implement a customer oriented approach to better understand and realize the social needs and problems that need to be addressed through the social innovation practice. Building and maintaining social ties with organizational stakeholders within communities in subsistence markets also gives opportunities to social entrepreneurs for engaging in effective inter-organizational collaborations with compatible interests and goals for social innovation and thus social value creation. At the organizational level, the study conducted by Zhang et al. (2021), which is published in this special issue, examines how inter-organizational control mechanisms in terms of the interplay between formal control and social control associated with green supply chain collaboration affect green product innovation, as a specific type of social innovation. In their study with 239 senior managers from China, authors build on existing studies on social innovation by confirming that informal, social controls based on social ties are necessary for the effectiveness of formal controls based on contracts in endorsing green product innovation, the awareness and adoption of which stimulate better environmental performance and eventual social performance.

Social ties, or in more specific terms political ties, with governmental institutions and supporting agencies can also provide privileged access to valuable and scant resources and opportunities to gain official support for innovation practice and avoid any process related institutional delays (Boso et al., 2013; Shou et al., 2016), particularly in subsistence markets where government controls a wide range of resources and information relating to organizations (Ribiero et al., 2021). These types of ties can also facilitate social innovation practice by enabling acquisition of more economic and operational support from governments through various operational incentives such as the use of land, bank loans and tax benefits (Shou et al., 2016). Furthermore, political ties can help social entrepreneurs to gain political

protection as well as insights into future developments in economy and policy as well as regulations, which would be of value to support their opportunities for searching new resources and reducing risks for future endeavours (Ribiero et al., 2021; Shou et al., 2016). In their empirical study focusing on a subsistence economy, Ribiero et al., (2021) find that while political ties have a significant effect on network resource acquisition, their influence on firm performance is negative but significant. Though their findings on the effect of political ties on the performance of firms is inconsistent with some other studies (e.g. Boso et al., 2013; Jiang et al., 2018), the negative effect of political ties with governments may also be attributed to the fact that building, maintaining and cultivating such ties require significant resources and repay favors (Shou et al., 2016). Yet, since repaying favors based on monetary exchanges are less likely to be seen in the context of social entrepreneurship and associated social innovation endeavours, political ties are envisioned to have positive influence on the social innovation practices of social entrepreneurs. As a result, from an individual social entrepreneur perspective, in subsistence economies, effective implementation of social innovation practice requires not only forming and nurturing social ties with organizations and beneficiaries within the communities but also developing and maintaining political relational ties with governments and associated institutions. Social ties including the political ties are expected to hold relatively less importance for social innovation practice in non-subsistence markets, which are mostly characterised by welfare states holding liberal, welfare partnership and social democratic values, and stronger regulatory institutions protecting organizations and individuals through independent and well functioning judicial systems (Kerlin, 2012).

In subsistence markets, returnee entrepreneurs with previous international experiences would have higher potential for gaining novel insights and capacity to absorb new knowledge from recent innovation practices occurring in global markets as well as ability to transfer relational ties and processes associated with international market engagements to new

institutional contexts (Filatotchev et al., 2008). The interplay of the returnees with local customers (or beneficiaries in social innovation terms) or institutions may help improving organizational capabilities and local ecosystems among domestic organizations (Pruthi, 2014). Since returnee entrepreneurs develop intensive social ties when living abroad, their networks with international stakeholders would facilitate their acquisition of resources to overcome any potential institutional and resource limitations (Li, 2020). Social ties with international stakeholders can also help gain legitimacy of enterprises abroad and support innovation practices and performance of these enterprises (Vershina et al., 2019). Although research focusing on international and returnee social entrepreneurs is limited (Eng et al., 2020), social ties of such individuals with different types of stakeholder organizations from abroad are likely to improve their knowledge and capability for effective implementation of social innovation practice and legitimacy through stakeholder pressures from global actors within particularly the subsistence domestic markets (see Table 1 and Figure 2). Hence, we suggest that:

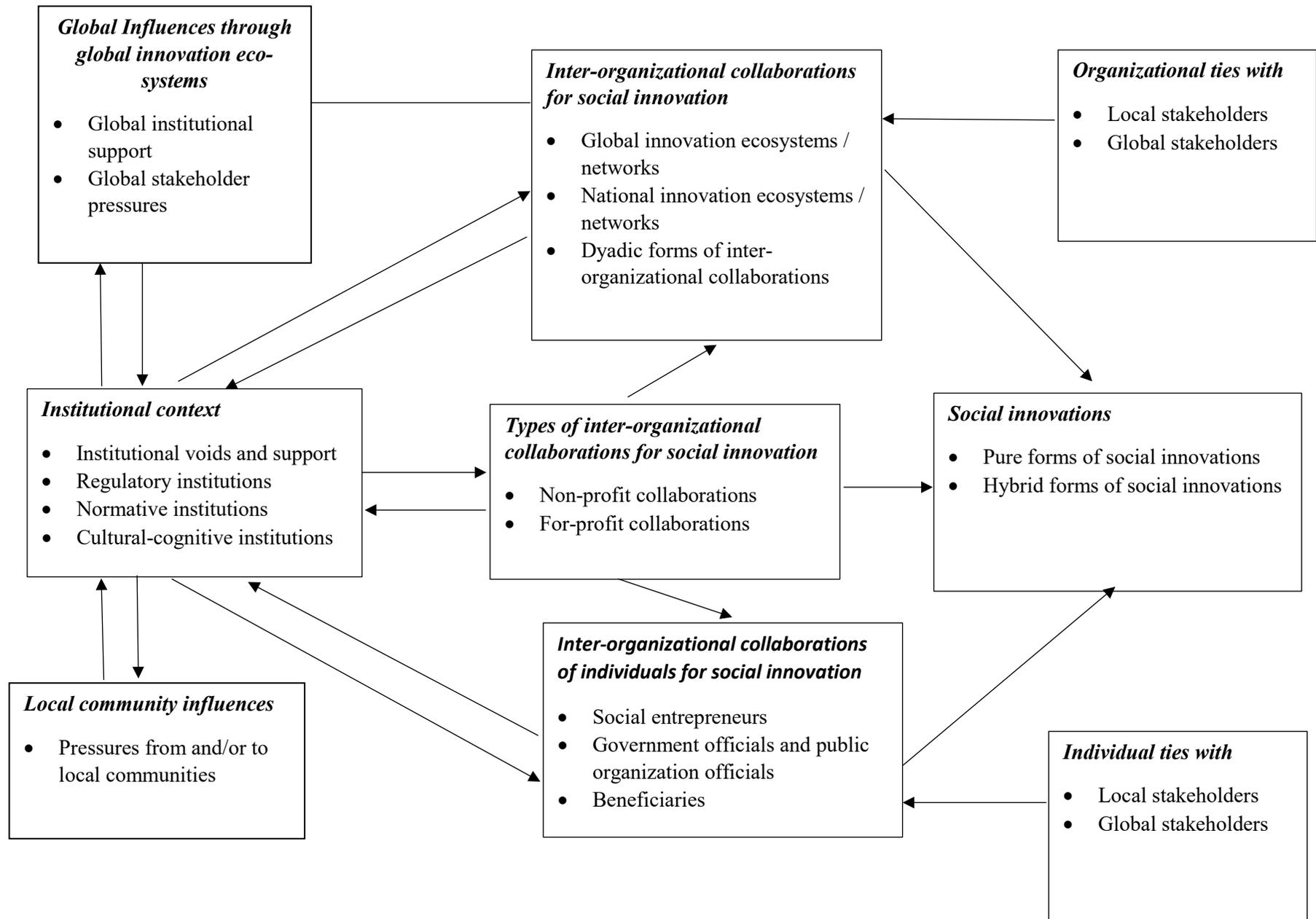
Proposition 3: As compared to non-subsistence economies, in subsistence economies, individual capabilities of social entrepreneurs in developing social ties with (a) organizations and beneficiaries within their communities, (b) local governments, and (c) international stakeholders play a stronger role in increasing the prospects of social innovation success in terms of improved social value creation.

Table 1. The relationship between different institutional systems and degrees of social value creation

	<i>Higher degree of social value creation</i>	<i>Lower degree of social value creation</i>
<i>Weaker institutional</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intra-organizational social innovation practices, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intra-organizational social innovation practices only,

<p><i>systems (subsistence markets)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation with potential beneficiaries within communities, • Inter-organizational social innovation practices (including national innovation eco-system engagements) within communities with a focus on forming, maintaining and nurturing individual social ties, and • Innovating as part of a global innovation eco-system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation with potential beneficiaries who are not within the same community, and • Collaborations with multiple stakeholders without either forming, maintaining and nurturing individual social ties, or being part of a global innovation eco-system
<p><i>Stronger institutional systems (non-subsistence markets)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intra-organizational social innovation practices, • Cooperation with potential beneficiaries within and across communities, • Cooperation with multiple stakeholders within and across communities, and • Innovating as part of a national and global eco-system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intra-organizational social innovation practice only

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework



4. Conclusions

This paper has reviewed existing perspectives and studies on social innovation undertaken in inter-organizational contexts, proposed new research agenda and also provided the development of new theoretical ideas by focusing on some key studies in the literature and papers published in this special issue. While research on the role of inter-organizational collaborations in social innovation to create social value has been limited, the papers published in this special issue have advanced knowledge on different aspects of the social innovation phenomena. In this paper, we have pointed out how institutional context of different countries at the macro level may affect the processes, practices and outcomes of inter-organizational collaborations of social enterprises and individual entrepreneurs at lower levels. We have identified what types of partnerships are formed by social enterprises and individual social entrepreneurs and how they may facilitate social innovation success in terms of improved social value creation. Specifically, we have emphasized the importance of forming greater degree of cooperation with potential beneficiaries and organizations within communities and developing political ties with local governments particularly in subsistence markets or economies, which have relatively higher degree of institutional voids and lower degree of institutional support for social innovation. Finally, we have suggested that due to the institutional limitations of subsistence markets, the legitimacy and resource accessibility and eventually success of social innovation process would enhance when social enterprises operate as part of global innovation ecosystems and individual social entrepreneurs operate through formal and informal social ties with international stakeholders.

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