Eco and responsible tourism and effective community engagement: Learnings and considerations from the social enterprise sector in Vietnam

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION: In the eco and responsible tourism sector, social enterprises (organisations which fund their social mission through market activities) can meaningfully engage with local communities in their pursuit of social impact.

OBJECTIVES: This paper explores the trade-offs social enterprises make to balance market viability and social mission within the eco and responsible tourism context, focusing on how these trade-offs intersect and impact organisational strategies.

METHODS: The research adopts a thematic analysis of data collected from nine social enterprise organisations who partook in semi-structured interviews.

RESULTS: Two intersecting axes of trade-offs are presented: how beneficiaries are included in the development of market outputs, and the second on how its social value is dispersed.

CONCLUSION: A framework is developed to enable self-reflection and evaluation of the trade-offs and risks involved to social mission and market viability.

1. Introduction

Using tourism as a tool of community development and social empowerment has gained legitimacy within development strategies, being seen as a means of encouraging "the reclamation of the human development agenda" whilst leveraging business and entrepreneurial approaches (Mukherjee, 2010, pp.255). Within the sector, social enterprises (organisations which utilises market behaviours to fund their social mission) primarily use tourism as a means of connecting disadvantaged communities and those interested in responsible travel to create both social and financial value (Santos, 2012). However, whilst the sustainability and effectiveness of eco and responsible tourism is a growing area of consideration for both practitioners and academics, studies of social enterprises operating within this sector are

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relatively limited, with focus predominantly on larger organisations (Thananusak and Suriyankietkaew, 2023). Investigatory approaches have applied models and metrics of wider social enterprise success (for example, Alter, 2006); utilised the philosophical tenants of social entrepreneurship to the organisational process (for example, Müller, Vaseková, and Kročil, 2023); or sought to understand how social enterprise action is reflective of the wider social system (for example, Wang, Duan, and Yu, 2016), with deeper understanding of effective mechanisms and processes being developed.

This paper uses a theoretical lens of hybridity to provide a framework that bridges a gap in analysing how social enterprises operating in tourism can evaluate their community engagement and identify the risks to their long-term strategies, through the experiences of organisations operating in a similar environmental context and of similar size (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon, 2014). The arguments advanced in this paper are based on empirical data derived from an in-depth study of the social enterprise ecosystem in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. It specifically investigates community engagement within this context, analysing the dynamics across two critical dimensions: the spectrum of engagement from leverage (where power dynamics are imbalanced) to co-creation (where stakeholders collaborate more equitably), and the distribution of value from concentrated (centralisation of benefits) to dispersed (a broader and more inclusive sharing of value among stakeholders). The paper develops an innovative and original framework that illustrates a two-way model of learning in which tourism organisations and social enterprises can maintain their unique position in the sectors, and positively contribute to sustainable development, whilst straddling market, public, and non-profit hybridity.

2. Literature Review

Social entrepreneurship is an innovative model for solving social problems, that differs from other nonprofit organisations on how it engages with disadvantaged communities, by involving them in the social mission, whilst proactively engaging with market and sustainable business behaviours (Satar and John, 2016). These organisations are hybrid models adopting characteristics of both non-profit and for-profit businesses which can cause tensions in how social missions are managed and resources mobilised (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon, 2014). Often, strategies need to be adopted that require compromise, with the sacrifice of social value to guarantee economic value, or the reduction of profit maximisation to ensure the organisational social mission is delivered (Santos, 2012). This is particularly relevant when social enterprises embark on community engagement. Community engagement is, broadly, the activities conducted by an organisation to ensure collaborative working with the people who would be affected by its

activities, allowing organisations to showcase their social responsibility, improve risk management, and build credibility (Satar, 2016). Within social enterprise, community engagement considers the bottom-up development for innovative and sustainable solutions for social problems, encouraging democratic ownership and beneficiary voice (Sullivan Mort et al., 2003). The degree to which community engagement occurs, however, can differ significantly when the tensions of hybridity emerge, as can the internal influence of beneficiary voice, despite its importance to organisational success (Dacanay, 2004). An example of this can be in finding product efficiencies or seeking out new markets, which requires an element of cultural capital that creates a barrier for disadvantaged communities when engaging them in strategic decision-making (Baron and Ward 2004; Cattell, 2001).

These tensions are reflected in the eco and responsible tourism sector. Tourism can be a driver of sustainable development, integrating the principles of eco and responsible tourism with local community engagement and inclusive growth (Honey, 2008). Social enterprises operating in the sector can focus on preserving cultural heritage and empowering marginalised groups, such as ethnic minorities, through the provision of training and employment opportunities in tourism services (Hoang et al., 2020; Choe and Phi, 2022). For these interventions to be effective processes need to be in place that allows community stakeholders to have a role in decision-making processes, thus ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed, however, the organisation needs to be responsive to the markets and consumer behaviours to ensure market value is appropriately extracted, a tension in hybrid models (Ngo and Creutz, 2022). Further to this, a second group of stakeholders exist in the customers of tourism social enterprises, which in addition to helping preserving biodiversity and cultural heritage through financial contributions, are offered educational opportunities where travellers are introduced to conservation practices, facilitating a deeper connection to the natural world, and embedding sustainable values (Blamey, 2001). In this context, tourism acts not only as a recreational activity, but also as a tool for conservation, which, if appropriately managed, could lead to long-term environmental sustainability. Tourism social enterprises, therefore, need to consider the marketisation of their activities alongside accessibility, quality, and opportunities created, as well as protecting the relationship between consumer, community, and environment.

Hybridity in social enterprises within eco and responsible tourism is a dynamic quality shaped by both external and internal factors, such as customer expectations, beneficiary needs, risk perceptions, and regulatory frameworks (Okuneviciute-Neverauskiene and Pranskeviciute, 2021). Previous research has portrayed social enterprise hybridity as a delicate balance, where mission drift can lead to significant organisational shifts—either towards a profit-driven business model or a more socially focused structure,

akin to a charity, which could ultimately threaten the organisation's survival (Young, 2012). In eco and responsible tourism, social enterprises can maintain this balance by engaging in entrepreneurial activities with a social character, which sets them apart from purely commercial or public entities (Tortia, Degavre and Poledrini, 2020). Social enterprises operating in the eco and responsible tourism sector, therefore, have a wide range of challenges that reflect they hybridity of the organisational model, and the relationship between organisation, consumer, customer, and environment. Dual missions in resource-scarce environments mean the balancing of commercial and social logics, with organisations often needing to trade-off opportunities and challenges, which this paper seeks to formulate within the tourism context (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon, 2014). Social enterprises are required to balance market and social logics, and this is explored through the importation of community voice and the exportation of social value.

3. Methods

This paper analyses the 'lived world' experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Denscombe, 2014) of nine social enterprise participants in Vietnam, spanning diverse sectors such as sustainable employment, work integration, tourism, green energy, and agriculture (Table 1.1).

Table 1. Research Participant Codes and Sectors

Interview Code	Sector
Vietnamese Social Enterprise 1	Micro-Loans
Vietnamese Social Enterprise 2	Work Integration in Arts and Crafts
Vietnamese Social Enterprise 3	Indigenous Goods
Vietnamese Social Enterprise 4	Work Integration in Hospitality
Vietnamese Social Enterprise 5	Tourism
Vietnamese Social Enterprise 6	Green Energy
Vietnamese Social Enterprise 7	Farming
Vietnamese Social Enterprise 8	Tourism
Vietnamese Social Enterprise 9	Education

These sectors reflect the broad range of social and economic challenges addressed by social enterprises in Vietnam, with the insights drawn from stakeholders in these sectors offering a nuanced understanding of community engagement within social enterprise ecosystems. The research for this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating the use of online interviews for data collection. The growing prevalence of online interviews in research (Shapka et al., 2016; Krouwel et al., 2019) is attributed to several advantages, including the ease of transcription, reduced costs and time, and the ability to reach participants in remote locations or those with mobility challenges (Gruber et al., 2008; James and Busher, 2009; Lawrence, 2020; Dodds and Hess, 2020; Sy et al., 2020). Online interviews enabled continuity in research during a period when in-person data collection was significantly constrained.

A purposeful sampling technique (Sandelowski, 1995) was employed to ensure that only individuals actively engaged in social enterprise activities were selected for participation. Invitations to participate were distributed through established networks and partnerships. This broad sampling strategy facilitated data saturation, which is often achieved with sample sizes of 10-20 participants (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007; Mason, 2010). The interview schedules were meticulously designed to explore participants' engagement with the community from leverage to co-creation, and from concentrated to dispersed value. Questions included prompts such as, 'What does your agency prioritise when building relationships with non-governmental partners?', 'How do you view the role of the non-profit sector in contributing to state objectives?', and 'What are the primary goals of your organisation?' Interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes in length and were conducted online to comply with COVID-19 travel restrictions and social distancing protocols.

3.1. Analysis

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analysed by the lead researcher to examine participants' engagement with the community across the dimensions of leverage to co-creation, and from concentrated to dispersed value. Grounded in the framework of critical realism (Authors own, 2022), the analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The data was systematically organised using NVivo 11.4.0 software and analysed following a six-phase process: 'data familiarisation,' 'data coding,' 'theme development,' 'theme review and development,' 'theme refinement and naming,' and 'reporting' (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2020). During the 'data familiarisation' phase, the data was thoroughly reviewed with detailed notes taken to ensure a deep understanding of the content. This phase was critical for the subsequent step of 'data coding,' where sections of the text were highlighted and assigned shorthand labels to capture key ideas and concepts. These labels, or codes, were then examined to identify patterns and relationships, forming the basis of 'theme development.' In the 'theme review and development' phase, the emerging themes were reviewed,

refined, and further developed. This iterative process of refinement led to the identification of key themes, which were finalised in the 'theme refinement and naming' phase. Importantly, the themes emerged inductively from the data itself, rather than being shaped by pre-existing concepts or theoretical frameworks. This allowed for an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, reflecting the lived realities of community engagement in the context of social enterprise. These themes were refined, with three themes identified: Community Engagement, Leverage versus Co-Creation, and Conceptualising Value.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in this research were carefully managed to address issues such as confidentiality and anonymity, voluntary informed consent, data protection, and the safeguarding of participants. An ethical application was submitted to the Universities Research Ethics Committee, reviewing approval for the initial data collection (planned in-person) and subsequent online data collection. Cross-cultural considerations were also central to this research, particularly regarding the "outsider" perspective in research. Reflexivity played a role in acknowledging the researcher's own positionality and the potential biases that could influence the research process. By being aware of how their position affected their interpretation of the data, the researcher was better able to engage with the emergent findings in an unbiased manner (Charmaz, 2014). Establishing this positionality was essential in the analysis and in the development of research tools that balanced equivalence and minimised cultural bias, facilitating productive engagement with the research subject matter (Poortinga, 1989; van de Vijver and Leung, 2014).

4. Findings

4.1. Community Engagement

In eco and responsible tourism, initiatives often align with the goals of social enterprises by focusing on marginalised communities, such as ethnic minorities, to not only provide opportunities but also promote sustainable tourism models that preserve cultural heritage and protect the environment, addressing gaps in state-led development efforts (Honey, 2008; Hoang et al., 2020; Choe and Phi, 2022). Within the research context, each of the social enterprises worked with marginalised groups such as economic migrants or ethnic minorities, recognising them as the groups requiring support.

It was hard to have good employment if you are a minority or an ethnic minority, you weren't treated fairly. You didn't have the opportunities, you weren't going to get a promotion, [and] even if you got a government job you were going to be

at the bottom of the barrel. And so, our business started with helping people, helping give then dignity, real employment, and an opportunity (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 4)

Community engagement is an integral component of successful social enterprise strategies. Ensuring the groups they seek to support are able to influence its operations, not only means that adopted strategies and solutions are context appropriate, but emerging or previously unrecognised problems are identified (Satar, 2019). This is particularly important for social enterprises who are driven by international or institutional stakeholders, who may not have a full picture of the 'lived reality' of those they support. From the perspective of eco and responsible tourism, direct engagement with local communities is critical for the successful implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives. For instance, in the research, a social enterprise in Vietnam emphasised the importance of community involvement to ensure projects had buy-in.

For a village to agree to put in a water system required the collective enthusiasm and engagement of all the villagers. It was the organising piece that was critical to the success because everybody got to attend the meetings, everybody got to see a demonstration. We had dozens of meetings at all different levels. And at the end of the day, there was a community meeting where a vote was held. And then out of that the community appointed the water managers who we then trained, and paid out of the fees that the villagers paid for the water (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 3)

Events such as these allowed social enterprise organisations to encourage community buy-in, mutuality, and the proactive addressing of their social condition and quality of life, with organisational stakeholders finding value in the addressing of human problems (Pierre et al., 2014). Community engagement, however, is not necessarily shaped by the social enterprise organisation, with it being reflective of underlying social norms (Anh vu, 2017). In Vietnam, community engagement was encouraged through mutuality and solidarity.

There's this incredibly strong ethos of Vietnamese helping Vietnamese that permeates the culture, you know, partly driven by the work of the Vietnamese Communist Party to inculcate this idea that, you know, of solidarity and mutual solidarity, [the] austerity eras are remembered by some people fondly as a time when everybody helped everybody else (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 3)

These approaches do not hold a monopoly on social enterprise engagement though, with Vietnamese social enterprises conducting 'fact finding' missions when

required. Within eco and responsible tourism, these fact-finding missions are crucial for understanding community needs and ensuring that tourism initiatives align with local priorities and cultural sensitivities. As Vietnamese social enterprises explained.

> *"We then go to the field and visit the households trying to have an assessment about community needs"* (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 2)

> *"One of the advantages of informal relationships to our organization is that it helps in the development of cultural and social values. Since our group members have common interests, it becomes easy to accomplish goals that they set. Informal relationships offer a sense of belonging, social status, and satisfaction unlike in a formal set up where the relationships are purely work oriented"* (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 8)

This emphasis on engagement and local representation is evident in tourism projects where collaboration with international universities is paired with working relationships with local authorities.

> *"We keep a quite important position in this kind of relationship because we work directly with local authority in immigrant register and permission of running the program"* (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 8)

These differences are reflected in the strategies adopted by social enterprises for community engagement, and how that engagement was used to support the social mission. Community training was offered to help communities to engage and take ownership of the social mission.

> *The whole process for us is really to learn how to be a team, how to think of the farming community, thinking of [social enterprise organisation] as a team member and also thinking of them as our team member, how we can collaborate, [...] for example, we found out that there were a lot of unused space in the village, and we want to maximise those space into mushroom growing in the gardens could be growing the, the vegetable, you know, and for our clients, as well* (Vietnam Social Enterprise 7)

In general, the ways and means social enterprises engage with the community in the research aligns with literature on the topic. Social enterprises identify communities in need, seek to directly engage with identified stakeholders, and attempt to integrate them into the organisational mission (Satar, 2019). Embedding eco and responsible tourism through social enterprises required the integration of local input and leadership to ensure sustainability and community ownership of the outcomes. Solidarity and mutuality are the key focus, attempting to ensure the community can take ownership of the social mission, and this must be figured into tourism strategies, ensuring the community is part of the organisation and has influence within the design of activities.

4.2. Leverage versus Co-Creation

Literature on leverage within the third sector has generally focused on the ways and means organisations supplement their mission by utilising the resources they have access to, for example, political relationships, volunteers, and knowledge (Benit-Gbaffou and Katsura, 2014; Chang, 2018). This can also be examined as the ways and means that social enterprise can help beneficiaries and the community leverage their own skills or resources to contribute to improvements in their own life and overcome both personal and societal barriers, for example, work integration (Hazenberg, Seddon, and Denny, 2014; Leung et al., 2019). In Vietnam, opportunities were identified to leverage the tourist sector to help develop a sustainable ecotourism model for disadvantaged communities, developing their own skills whilst supporting those in need. The goal was to encourage not only sustainable tourist behaviours but to encourage direct engagement with disadvantaged communities.

> *Tourism industry is a super competitive market but since we follow the niche market, it is a bit easier for us to compete. We focus on customers who are aware of their impacts left for local communities and places they visit, who are concerned about social, environmental, and economic impacts of tourism. And normally, they are in a higher end* (Vietnam Social Enterprise 8)

Social enterprise approaches to resolve social problems are generally innovative, with stakeholders being familiar with the dominant societal institutions and being able to leverage knowledge effectively to resolve a problem (Kurtko and Hodgetts, 2004). Within eco and responsible tourism, this innovation is reflected in how social enterprises craft sustainable tourism models that not only protect the environment but also empower marginalised groups. By developing tools and processes internally, these organisations enable beneficiaries to leverage their own innate skills, contributing to their success and fostering inclusion. For example, one Vietnamese social enterprise involved in ecotourism created opportunities for individuals with disabilities to integrate into the organisation.

> *The girls over here, one or two of those are deaf. They're just treated like normal; you work a job, you get involved. You know, if you're cooking, and you're serving, whatever, you're just you're just in the mess of things. And you're treated with dignity and respect and equal opportunity for promotions, we do have to invest a bit more, we're*

wanting all our management and supervisors to have a mandatory number of hours of sign language that the company had also, so that we can communicate with them, not just them trying to figure out how to communicate with us. (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 4)

This commitment to inclusion parallels the values of eco and responsible tourism by empowering local communities, particularly marginalised groups, to foster equitable economic growth and cultural preservation. In embedding eco and responsible tourism, this expertise can be critical for creating sustainable practices that benefit both tourists and local communities. By tapping into local knowledge and collaborating with stakeholders, eco and responsible tourism enterprises can develop innovative strategies that address not only environmental conservation but also social challenges, ensuring that tourism becomes a vehicle for social impact.

The key component of leveraging partners, community members, and stakeholders is to ensure that there is a progressive development of internal relationships, leading toward democratic management. In one social enterprise, it was noted that whilst the skill base of the beneficiaries of creating products was being leveraged, capacity was not being developed that would allow them to contribute to the wider organisational strategy.

Quilts are sophisticated product, it's very technical. There is design involved as well. So, we don't want to let the Vietnamese decide everything about colours of design because it's will not sell right (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 2)

This reflects the tensions within hybrid models. Where the final product is tied deeply to the community, for example, tourist visits, shared meals, and the designing of local hikes, the economic and social value is easy to unite (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon, 2014; Okuneviciute-Neverauskiene and Pranskeviciute, 2021). Social enterprises in the tourism sector, therefore, need to consider how deeply beneficiaries are engaged, and if opportunities are made available to help develop their capacity to influence the organisation to avoid walking down a path of tokenism, particularly when their personal skills are being leveraged to increase market viability. Leverage, therefore, must take into consideration the future role of the beneficiaries and partners within the organisation. This was signalled by social enterprises who built their community values into their social and commercial action from the beginning of their engagement.

So, it was designed from the very beginning as something that they owned, we were there to facilitate them getting this, but the ownership belongs to them. And so even though it was funded with philanthropic capital, you know, they had to pay for every litre of water they used. So, we

wanted to really make sure that people really wanted this before we went forward with the construction or anything else (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 3)

As social enterprises work with beneficiaries, leveraging skills and resources is an integral part of the social mission, it is important to ensure that the leverage of skills is accompanied by deeper engagement and involvement in the organisations, where beneficiaries have their capabilities developed enough to be influential stakeholders. This allows the tensions between creating market and social value to be alleviated if full community engagement is encouraged and capacity is developed. In the tourism sector, social enterprises can develop innovative strategies that address not only environmental conservation but also social challenges, ensuring that tourism is responsible, impactful, and representative of the community. Where this is not achieved there are risks that community involvement can be tokenistic and the social enterprise's mission become more aligned to traditional commercial entrepreneurship, simply leveraging community resources to create market viability.

4.3. Conceptualisation of Value

The impact social enterprises create through their work can be captured through the strengthening of beneficiaries capabilities, the shaping of positive social values, and enhancing community relationships (Teng-Calleja et al., 2023). It is important to understand how these benefits are distributed. In some organisations they may be concentrated within the organisation, for example, work integration programmes seek to develop the capacity of the direct beneficiaries.

It depends on their future career plan, actually, we have students who's major is tourism [...] those kinds of students they work, join, our organisation because they want to have real experience before they [are] actually you know, go out there and get a job (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 5)

When organisations focused on concentrated value, ensuring that the benefits of action were primarily directed internally, they were often responding to the direct and urgent needs of the beneficiaries, offering them sustainable and equitable work, or ensuring they had access to important source of support.

COVID. All the hotels just cut staff, 80% or more of their staff were laid off. [So, we are starting] a kitchen because people are starving and get businesses and different embassies to each contribute something monthly. We bought two tonnes of rice to donate for that city, so they can serve 1000s and 1000s of means from those two

tonnes of rice and others put in different things for the city. [...] There was a summer in the centre of town that people would just go to and get a meal if you're really in that state (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 4)

The goal of these interventions is to ensure that the beneficiaries have both short-term securities, through the provision of basic needs, as well as ensuring that they are 'future proofed' through developing the skills and relationships that they can leverage in the future.

> *They're doing the training, and they're in there doing that. [...] we're doing the safe employment and giving people fair opportunity; a lot of girls get promoted. In fact, two thirds of our staff are female. At the director level, we have multiple females. So that is something that we do well, when we get rated, even when you're using one of the different social enterprise metrics or scoring.* (Vietnam Social Enterprise 4)

A risk to concentrated value, however, is that beneficiaries and stakeholders may rely on the continued engagement with the social enterprise to deliver training and support. If community members do not develop managerial skills, or policy makers feel alienated from the technological mission, the security of the social enterprise may be at risk, with limited profits that can be fed back into the enterprise. Within the area of eco and responsible tourism, this risk is often exacerbated by the reliance on external funding and the relatively low profit margins typical of these ventures. This related not simply to eco and responsible tourism but other sectors, with one Vietnamese social enterprise noting.

> *A small one is coming, very little money is coming from the enterprise profits from the social enterprise. It was just two or 3% of the total budget, not very significant. So, the social enterprise as the main objective to give valuable employment to the to the village woman, it's not really generating much profit.* (Vietnam Social Enterprise 2)

This aligns with broader findings in responsible tourism, where the focus is often on social and environmental impact over financial returns, leaving enterprises vulnerable if they cannot achieve long-term sustainability through capacity-building or diversified revenue streams (Goodwin, 2011). This is reflected in social enterprise literature, with the resilience of the organisation in part tied to its *'slack'* and ensuring that reserve resources are developed from the start to allow for change when required (Young and Choony, 2015). This uncertainty is prevalent in eco and responsible tourism, where fluctuating tourist demand and the need to balance conservation with profit-making can have an impact on financial planning and social mission (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon, 2014; Young, 2012). Without a strong framework within the local community,

social enterprises in eco and responsible tourism risk becoming overly reliant on external expertise and funding, potentially undermining the long-term viability of their mission.

Social enterprises often do not have singule impact areas they seek to address and instead engage in multiple areas and with multiple beneficiaries (Neesen, Voinea, and Dobber, 2021). Organisations within the research noted the importance of building capacity within the beneficiaries so that they could take ownership of the social mission and deliver similar support for future or perspective members of a project.

> *We started by 3 of us but in 2017, one cofounder left because of her personal reason so we just have 2 people left (Trang and I) to run the business. However, fortunately, we have many trusted local guides and local service suppliers. We employed 2 full-time employees, and we have about 20 part-time/ freelance local guides* (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 8)

The dispersing of created value for these organisations led to the development of deeper networks for community members, building their capabilities, and creating the foundations for long-term success. This was often built into the social enterprise from its mission conception, with improvements in beneficiaries lives accompanied by a longer-term objective of ownership and expansion of its created value.

> *It was designed from the very beginning as something that they owned, we were there to facilitate them getting this, but the ownership belongs to them. And so even though it was funded with philanthropic capital, you know, they had to pay for every litre of water they used. [...] We had, you know, dozens, if not hundreds of these water managers all around the country that we would convene, and we would talk to, and we serve as a resource for we put them in touch with each other. So, you know, for that kind of a programme, this was this required a deep engagement with the beneficiaries so that they didn't see themselves as recipients of charity, but as co investors in a big project* (Vietnam Social Enterprise 3)

Those involved in developing long term and self-sustaining support, believed there would be limited engagement with their beneficiaries and partners meaning it was important to ensure that the shared values, tools and processes developed did not deteriorate, which may be difficult as the mission moves further from its place of creation.

> *And being that we have a niche market, Clay catering with a taste more to the foreign or international community, not the local Southeast Asian community. With that taste, it does require*

and with the marketing that goes around it, it does require support from expats, typically, we have been able to find various highly skilled people locals in both countries. However, they're just, you know, they can do 80/85 90% of the job, but there's still a little piece of it that just isn't quite right. If they're left a year or two years, we really noticed that department [would] slide to maybe different expectations or different desires than what we would have and what the direction they want to take it. (Vietnamese Social Enterprise 4)

It was important for social enterprises to understand the value they created, the primary beneficiaries, and the potential risks of mission drift as they become less involved in its production. Where value was concentrated on the beneficiaries, there were risks to promoting ownership and organisational security, with a continued reliance on the social enterprise. Dispersed value encourages the social impact of the organisations to expand, and encourages ownership, however, entrepreneurs noted risks of mission drift and value deterioration.

5. Discussion and Framework

This paper develops a framework that enables stakeholders within the eco and responsible tourism sector to evaluate their organisations, through the experiences of the wider social enterprise sector, taking into consideration of the tensions caused by hybridity. As part of this, it is important to emphasise the dual role of social enterprises as both shapers of the community, and entities sharing in broader social norms, both national and international (Anh vu, 2017). The involved social enterprises promoted solidarity and mutuality throughout their organisation, including beneficiaries in early democratic processes, and ensuring that they could effectively input into the shaping of the social mission. They also responded to market needs and external partnerships, such as working with university students, to leverage cheap and effective labour, or take advantage of emerging market trends (Santos, 2012). Balancing these relationships is difficult, however, and it was noted that organisations within the tourism sector were often forced to trade-off negative effects in one area, for positive impact in another (Jay, 2013). A key trade off witnessed was when communities had their personal skills leveraged to ensure the viability of business model, whilst having limited involvement in broader organisational strategy. This was evident in cases where beneficiaries were considered unable to contribute to how the organisation positioned itself in the marketplace, for example, they may be excluded from designing products or their role was limited to aiding in the creation of 'authentic' experiences for tourists or international buyers, whilst being alienated from the broader organisational decision-making processes. The trade-off placing limitations on beneficiary voice within the organisation in exchange for market viability (Santos, 2012).

The key barrier to introducing deeper involvement of beneficiaries in social enterprises is limited cultural and social capital. Managers and stakeholders with experience working in the international context through education or high-level employment are able to understand globalised processes and contexts, leaving disadvantaged communities to be considered ineffective or unable to contribute to higher-level organisational tasks inherent within tourism (Baron and Ward, 2004; Cattell, 2001). This has been overcome by some organisations, who sought to either co-create walks and hikes or develop new avenues of income through the development of new markets for farmers, as a means of continuing to encourage collaboration, whilst continuing to help them develop broader organisational capacity (Thananusak and Suriyankietkaew, 2023). Thus, it remains essential that social enterprises engaged in the tourism sector maintain deep community participation to ensure negative power dynamics do not become embedded, and opportunities are explored to ensure beneficiaries have a pathway to organisational leadership and co-creation (Okazaki, 2008).

Regarding value, the tourism sector has a large range of potential impact areas: financial security for disadvantaged communities, educational opportunities for tourists, conservation, and opportunities to encourage responsible buying for consumers (Neesen, Voinea, and Dobber, 2021). It is important for organisations involved in tourism to evaluate how these areas engage with one another to understand who benefits from the value created and potential trade-offs. The framework, developed from this research, considers an axis split between 'concentrated value' (where the primary beneficiaries of the organisation are internally located) and 'dispersed value' (where the primary beneficiaries of the organisation are externally located).

Tourism social enterprises engaged in work-integration created concentrated value, offering opportunities for disadvantaged community members in productive and meaningful work which not only encourages organisational mobility, but feelings of dignity and self-worth. The result of this was increased beneficiary voice within the organisations and a celebration of 'positive turnover' (where a member of the team leaves the organisation for a better position elsewhere), though there was a risk of reliance on the social enterprise to continue to create new opportunities, which cannot be guaranteed in resource-scare environments (Young and Kim, 2015). Alternatively, other tourism organisations focused on creating dispersed value, offering opportunities to students to learn language as a tour guide and encouraging responsible consumer practices in the market. These organisations are likely more resilient with a broader range of groups getting value out of the programmes; however, it can result in limited opportunities for those within the organisation, even when they are having their skills and resources leveraged in the marketplace. A middle ground was witnessed with social

enterprises encouraging the beneficiary communities to lead on the dispersal of value themselves, pushing them to engage and train others, with tourist social enterprises expanding their guides, fostering a sense of belonging, and encouraging the promotion of shared values, however, this is reliant on the openness and trust of the involved stakeholders. It is important, therefore, for tourism organisations to reflect on how the value they create is portioned out, and whether their primary social mission is appropriately represented within the partition.

The aim of this paper was to explore how social enterprises engaged with their beneficiaries across an axis of leverage to co-creation and concentrated to dispersed value, developing a framework which would enable self-reflection and self-evaluation. The framework is illustrated in Figure 1.
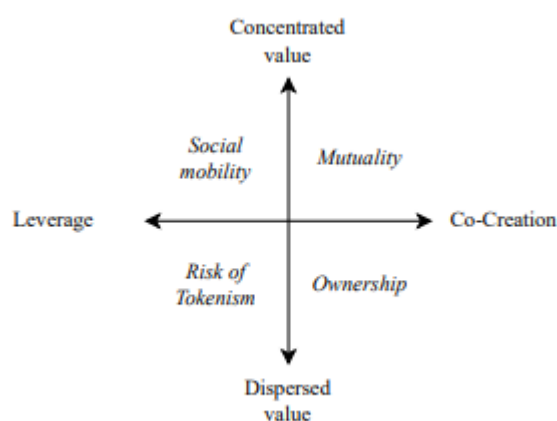

Figure 1. Illustration of the developed framework

Within both axis there are significant trade-offs that need to be considered, with a challenge of hybridity meaning that different aspects of the organisation often end up at odds with one another (Doherty, Laugh, and Lyon, 2014; Okuneviciute-Neverauskiene and Pranskeviciute, 2021; Tortia, Degavre and Poledrini, 2020). Co-creation or marketable products can weaken the market viability of an organisation if products do not reflect market trends or commercially translate to the international market, however, excluding community voices from these processes may lead to tokenistic engagement. Dispersed value can create more viable organisations, with a larger pool of consumers and external support to pull from, though this may limit opportunities for the beneficiaries to develop their own capacity. Concentrated value, on the other hand, may weaken organisations or led to a reliance on the social enterprise to continue to deliver support.

6. Conclusion

As tourism has become increasingly recognised as an effective and legitimate tool for development, it is important that frameworks are developed that help organisational stakeholders assess their impacts, the value they generate, and the effectiveness of the mechanisms used. Self-evaluation and reflection encourage sustainable business practices and ensure that communities engaging with these organisations are supported and represented. The aim of this paper was to develop a framework tailored to take into consideration the uniqueness of eco and responsible tourism organisations, and the way their hybridity affects the value they create and their approaches to community. It notes the wide range of stakeholders these organisations have and the trade-offs they must make to balance organisational viability and meaningful engagement with disadvantaged communities. The framework is intended to provide a reflective tool which can be used as a starting point for organisations to self-evaluate and reflect on the impact of trade-offs, suitable for smaller organisations.

It is important to note, that this framework is reflective of a small number of social enterprise organisations operating within a single case country. This limited sample size could result in an incomplete understanding of the strategies and experiences within the eco and responsible tourism sector. Additionally, focusing on social enterprises within one country may not fully account for the unique contextual and cultural factors that could influence their operations, potentially missing nuances in how these organisations navigate challenges and opportunities. Further research should be conducted to investigate how wider social norms impact these organisations, and the role of political stakeholders.

All data underpinning this publication are openly available from the University of Northampton Research Explorer.

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