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# **Social Entrepreneurship Organisations and Collaboration: Taking Stock and Looking Forward**

## **Purpose**

The aim of this systematic literature review (SLR) is to map out the current state of the research on collaboration in the context of social entrepreneurship organisations (SEOs), synthesise this line of research, and advance a research agenda.

## **Design/methodology/approach**

A SLR of 40 scientific articles found in the Scopus and Web of Science databases built the foundation for an analysis of the state-of-the-art of the research addressing the interplay of SEOs and collaboration. This area of research has been very recent since the selected articles have been published since 2005, more than half of which have appeared since 2017.

## **Findings**

The findings suggest that collaboration is increasingly perceived as a crucial entrepreneurial activity and process for SEOs. The results indicate that collaboration is a vibrant and rapidly growing line of research which spans different fields of study, contexts, varied theoretical perspectives, and multiple units of analysis. Furthermore, a total of five key research themes are identified pertaining to collaboration in the context of SEOs, such as motivations and strategies of collaboration, its antecedents, the interplay of institutional logics and tensions arising in collaboration, the impact of collaboration on the mission of SEOs, and collaborative processes and practices.

## **Originality/value**

To lend structure to this fragmented field of inquiry, this study systematically reviews and synthesises research on collaboration in the context of SEOs. In doing so, the study reveals that this line of research is under-researched, offering a significant scope for further scrutiny.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship organisations; collaboration; systematic literature review

## **Introduction**

Social entrepreneurship organisations (SEOs) are organisations that engage in social entrepreneurship by adopting entrepreneurial and/or innovative behaviour to achieve public benefit (Kimmitt and Muñoz, 2018; Lewis *et al.*, 2021). A promising yet understudied aspect of SEOs is *collaboration* (Barinaga, 2020; Bojica *et al.*, 2018; de Bruin *et al.*, 2017; Quélin *et al.*,

2017). Research suggests that collaboration is a shared feature of SEOs across contexts (Mair, 2020), a critical entrepreneurial activity and resourcing practice (de Bruin *et al.*, 2017; Dwivedi and Weerawardena, 2018; Huybrechts *et al.*, 2017; Kimmitt and Muñoz, 2018). Empirical evidence goes further and suggests that many SEOs are collaborative in nature (Mair, 2020), holding a ‘collaborative mentality’ (Tasavori *et al.*, 2018), which results in collaborative, as opposed to competitive, behaviour towards other organisations (Arenas *et al.*, 2020; Kickul and Lyons, 2020).

Three main arguments drive the increasing interest. First, in the case of SEOs, collaboration is particularly relevant, since they face ongoing and more salient resourcing challenges due to their social mission, which often drives them to forsake healthier margins (Bojica *et al.*, 2018; Lewis *et al.*, 2021; Zahra *et al.*, 2014). Essentially, collaboration with other entities may represent an important resource practice for SEOs (de Bruin *et al.*, 2017; McDermott *et al.*, 2018). Second, in response to the complex nature of social problems and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals which require collaborative efforts, new forms of entrepreneurial collaborations, including SEOs have begun to emerge (Bacq and Lumpkin, 2021; de Bruin *et al.*, 2017; Günzel-Jensen *et al.*, 2020; Intindola *et al.*, 2019; Weber *et al.*, 2017). Third, considering SEOs’ capacity to reduce the burden on social welfare systems, governments and policymakers have added incentives to spur SEO collaborations. Therefore, this article provides an interdisciplinary review of studies dealing with SEOs and collaboration at the interorganizational level, where collaboration is conceptualised as a voluntary process which helps other organisational partners to achieve common goals or one or more of their private goals (Castañer and Oliveira, 2020).

Despite significant progress in the field of SEO collaboration, two important limitations persist. First, our knowledge about how, why, and when SEO collaboration occurs remains fragmented

(de Bruin *et al.*, 2017). The interdisciplinary nature of this concept is one of the primary causes of this fragmentation. Second, there is a tendency to start anew in every study, often driven by a lack of systematisation and categorisation. Therefore, there is a risk of field stagnation and poor robustness. This also makes it difficult to take stock of what we know about the interplay between SEOs and collaboration and to identify future research opportunities.

Thus, this article provides a systematic literature review (SLR) of the current state of research on collaboration in the context of SEOs to alleviate the aforementioned gaps and limitations. Following established practices (Jesson *et al.*, 2011), this study systematically reviews and synthesises 40 peer-reviewed articles found in journals listed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Specifically, this article addresses the following questions: (i) What is the state-of-the-art of research on collaboration in the context of SEOs? (ii) What are the emerging themes of interest in SEO research? (iii) What are the implications for future research suggested by the findings? To address these questions, this study aims to: (1) map out the interdisciplinary literature on SEO collaboration, using the analysis to appraise the key research themes, and (2) outline suggestions for where future scholarship in this domain might be directed by identifying important research questions for further scrutiny.

By systematically reviewing the literature on collaboration in the context of SEOs, the review makes a number of contributions to the field. First, by taking stock of the current literature, the progress of the field over the period (2005-2021) is mapped out, general trends are discussed. Furthermore, the various theories, conceptual perspectives, research contexts, and methodological trends are also discussed. Second, some structure is brought to the fragmented literature by identifying the five key research themes which have been inductively developed from the literature: motivations and strategies of collaboration, its antecedents, the interplay of institutional logic and

tensions arising in collaboration, the impact of collaboration on the mission of SEOs, and collaborative processes and practices. Third, considering the identified themes, this study delineates potential research avenues and relevant research questions that are worthy of further investigation. Accordingly, the review contributes to the further development of this field by developing an agenda for future research based on the thematic analysis of the extant literature.

The next section discusses the foundations of SEOs and collaboration to motivate and establish the boundaries of the review, which is followed by a summary of the methodology. Then a synthesis of key trends, contexts, theories, and methodologies is provided. The article then summarises the results of five key themes. And finally, the conclusions and directions for future research are presented in the last section.

### **Setting the scene: Foundations of SEOs and collaboration**

#### ***SEOs***

Social entrepreneurship and SEOs have blossomed in recent decades. This study understands social entrepreneurship as the process of launching a hybrid organisational form that creates social value (the social side) through market-based activities (the entrepreneurial side). Furthermore, the creation of new ventures or managing existing organisations in an innovative manner differentiates social entrepreneurship from other forms of prosocial or change-driven activities (Saebi *et al.*, 2019). Accordingly, SEOs represent the organisational forms in which the activity of social entrepreneurship manifests itself (Chell *et al.*, 2010; Mair *et al.*, 2012; Meyskens *et al.*, 2010).

In line with previous research (Bojica *et al.*, 2018; Douglas, 2010; Margiono *et al.*, 2018) and given the abovementioned aspects of social entrepreneurship as entrepreneurial activity, this study concurs with the understanding of SEOs as an umbrella term for diverse forms of organisations that pursue prosocial objectives by leveraging market-based activities. Following Douglas *et al.*

(2018), this conceptualisation accounts for a broad range of organisations, including social enterprises (Bull *et al.*, 2018; McMullen, 2018), social ventures (or social *entrepreneurial* ventures) (Günzel-Jensen *et al.*, 2020; Katre and Salipante, 2013), community enterprises (Hertel *et al.*, 2019, 2021; Vestrum, 2014), cooperatives and social businesses (Gold *et al.*, 2020). While the definition is broad, each of these SEO forms has some distinguishing features and will vary depending on context (for extended reviews see Defourny and Nyssens, 2017; Douglas *et al.*, 2018). Importantly, this review excludes the term ‘social purpose organisations’ (Kullak *et al.*, 2021; Weerawardena *et al.*, 2021) as they include traditional non-profit and nongovernmental organisations that rely exclusively on public funding and philanthropy, which lie outside this review’s scope. The focus on economic activity is important to differentiate SEOs from purely social movements, non-profit and nongovernmental organisations, charitable organisations, and philanthropic initiatives.

### ***SEO collaboration***

Recently, a new and important research stream has emerged that emphasises the role of collaboration in the context of SEOs and underscores their collaboration-oriented behaviour (Bojica *et al.*, 2018; de Bruin *et al.*, 2017; Mair, 2020; Pret and Carter, 2017). Although collaboration is the focus of interest in many related fields of study, the literature on SEO collaboration recently began exploring an important aspect of the social entrepreneurial process – the role that collaboration plays in social value creation, resourcing, and the development of SEOs. In challenging the ‘heroic’ stance of social entrepreneurs leading SEOs, much of social entrepreneurship is collaborative (Montgomery *et al.*, 2012), meaning that SEOs demonstrate their collaborative behaviour by tapping into relationships and linking with diverse actors within and across sectors (Chell *et al.*, 2020; de Bruin *et al.*, 2017; Heinze *et al.*, 2016; Tasavori *et al.*, 2018). These collaborations may take many forms, ranging from relatively informal to co-creation

collaborations and contractual partnerships. Such collaborations enable SEOs to accomplish their prosocial objectives across numerous levels to achieve social change (Montgomery *et al.*, 2012).

The emergent literature has shown that collaboration is a widespread resourcing practice among SEOs, whether they act in hostile contexts marked by scarcity of resources or in more generous and resourceful ones (Barraket *et al.*, 2019; Chell *et al.*, 2010; Renko, 2013; Zahra *et al.*, 2009). As SEOs face more severe resourcing constraints compared to their conventional counterparts, collaboration is regarded as an important factor in their success, allowing SEOs to access resources from diverse partner relationships and develop effective resource strategies (Choi, 2005; Lehner, 2014). Unlike for-profit organisations, SEOs do not seek resources to gain a competitive advantage or develop competitive barriers (Arenas *et al.*, 2020). Instead, they ‘view their markets as ripe for friendships that they can use to improve social value creation, increase the number of customers they reach, lower cost of inputs, and turn competitors into collaborators’ (Tasavori *et al.*, 2018, p. 338). Research has also demonstrated that SEOs tend to engage in external networks or collaborative bricolage, involving the utilisation of resources from external partners and co-creating a joint initiative (Kwong *et al.*, 2017; Tasavori *et al.*, 2018). This research area highlights the ability to engage in collaborative behaviour as an important feature of SEOs across different contexts (Mair, 2020).

Focusing on the literature exploring collaboration in the context of SEOs, several important streams of literature are emerging. First, a prominent stream in this literature builds on the fields of interorganizational collaboration in examining cross-sector partnerships (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; Rey-García *et al.*, 2019; Savarase *et al.*, 2020; Weidner *et al.*, 2019) and social alliances (Liu *et al.*, 2018; Sakarya *et al.*, 2012). It involves hybrid SEOs, which are guided by multiple forms of institutional logics. These partnerships are not limited to the mutual pursuit of

economic benefits but serve the purpose of creating social value. Second, recognising the socially embedded nature of entrepreneurial activity (Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever *et al.*, 2014), the second stream of literature demonstrates SEOs' engagement with diverse organisations and actors in their communities to develop collaborative local solutions and pursue collaborative social innovation for sustainable growth, thereby creating social value (de Bruin *et al.*, 2017; Heinze *et al.*, 2016; Jenner and Oprescu, 2016; Pret and Carter, 2017; Vannebo and Grande, 2018). SEOs are thus viewed as being embedded in the community and as using networks as a means of facilitating collaborative activities both within the sector and externally via the public sector, businesses, corporations, and communities (Jenner and Oprescu, 2016). However, studies conducted from this perspective were less frequent. Third, an emerging line of research, drawing on the fields of strategic management and entrepreneurship, shows that social enterprises might also engage in cooptation practices – simultaneous cooperation and competition behaviours – with other social enterprises within the same industry (Arenas *et al.*, 2020) or different types of organisations across sectors (Herbst, 2018). This nascent research demonstrates that cooptation behaviour plays a significant role in achieving SEOs' social and commercial objectives.

Research has taken an inconsistent approach to conceptualising collaboration in the context of SEOs, yet it remains an important aspect of the social entrepreneurial process. Collaboration is often left undefined or emphasising the sharing of goals, activities, information, resources, joint development of goods or services, and common goals. The definition of collaboration used in this article builds on the recent study of Castañer and Oliveira (2020), who leveraged conceptual clarifications about collaboration, coordination, and cooperation among organisations. For the purpose and focus of this study, collaboration, therefore, refers to a voluntary process of helping other organisational partners to achieve common goals or one or more of their private goals. This



definition emphasises the processual nature of collaborative activity, attitude (i.e., willingness to collaborate), relational type of behaviour and commitment, and outcome.

Although the important role of collaboration in the context of SEOs might seem apparent, research spans different fields of research, contexts, varied theoretical perspectives, and multiple units of analysis. Our understanding of what is happening at the organisational level between SEOs and other organisations and actors within and across sectors is still limited.

### **Method: A systematic literature review**

The SLR methodology has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Pittaway *et al.*, 2014). An SLR, which is well-established in entrepreneurship and management research, was conducted to map the emerging yet already diverse research on collaboration in the context of SEOs (Henry and Foss, 2015; Korsgaard, 2013; Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Lattacher and Wdowiak, 2020; Pittaway *et al.*, 2014). An SLR is a review of an existing body of literature on the topic that follows a transparent and reproducible methodology for searching, assessing its quality, and synthesising it, with a high level of objectivity (Kraus *et al.*, 2020). This method allows in-depth analysis of each study considered, identifying research gaps, and outlining future theoretical and/or methodological research directions. Following the guidelines of Short (2009) and Tranfield *et al.* (2003), which are well grounded in entrepreneurship research, this study performed the steps outlined in Figure 1. SLR was deemed necessary to consolidate literature that spans different fields of study and journals to collate the scattered findings, identify key themes, and synthesise emerging yet already diverse research areas (Snyder, 2019). This approach is systematic, rigorous, and transparent (Denyer and Tranfield, 2008; Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003; Wang and Chugh, 2014) to ensure synthesis and consistent results.

Insert Figure 1 here

### *Data collection*

In compiling the sample, the search was undertaken using two bibliographical database services, Scopus and Web of Science, which are among the largest multidisciplinary sources in the social sciences to make the search more comprehensive. Following a systematic review procedure and setting the inclusion criteria, first, the Scopus database was searched for journal articles published from 2005 to 2021 (inclusive) containing the keywords "social entrepr\*", "social enterpr\*", "social venture\*", "co-operative\*", "community enterprise\*", "social business\*" in combination with any of the terms "collaboration\*", "cooperation\*", "interorganizational", "networking", "partnership\*" in the titles, abstracts or keywords, as is common in similar research in the field (Lattacher and Wdowiak, 2020). The search terms were divided into two thematic search strings based on the concepts used in the RQs: concepts commonly used in scholarly literature to describe SEOs and concepts used to describe collaboration. To reduce the number and diversity of identified records, the search query was limited to three subject areas: social sciences; business, management and accounting; and multidisciplinary.

To ensure the highest quality and scholarly standards, only peer-reviewed articles published in journals were subject to review (Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Pret and Cogan, 2019), therefore excluding books, book chapters, and other non-refereed publications, since the review process enhances quality control, which validates the knowledge produced (Saebi *et al.*, 2019). Following recent reviews in entrepreneurship research (Pret and Cogan, 2019; Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021), the search was limited to articles published in ranked journals according to the Chartered Association of Business Schools Journal Guide (2021) (ABS) to identify a robust sample. This initial search in the Scopus database rendered 742 articles, of which 205 were published in ABS-ranked journals.

To ensure that the initial search in Scopus did not omit relevant texts (Bramer *et al.*, 2017), the search was run through the Web of Science database using the same search strings but without limitations in terms of subject areas. This second search yielded 541 articles, of which 128 were published in ABS-ranked journals. The iterative data search was completed on 10 June 2021 which marked the cut-off date for data collection and resulted in an initial sample of 333 articles published in ABS-ranked journals.

Several different exclusion criteria were developed to ensure a systematic and reliable approach. The following exclusion criteria were set: 1) research focus: SEO collaboration was not central to the article as the purpose; 2) an article only tenuously linked to collaboration in the context of SEOs; 3) an article focuses on organisations that do not leverage market-based activities (depending on philanthropy and/or government subsidy); and 4) access: an article is not accessible. For example, articles focusing on non-profit organisations which do not engage in trading activities or peer collaboration in cooperatives were excluded from the sample. Scrutinising against the exclusion criteria and reading the abstracts of these publications, 29 articles from Scopus and 24 from Web of Science were found to be relevant. After eliminating 21 duplicates, the remaining 32 articles were reviewed in full. During this process and through citation tracking, eight additional articles were included, as all articles specifically discussed collaboration in the context of SEOs, leading to a final sample of 40 articles. For example, Huybrechts and Nicholls' study (2013) did not appear in the databases, although their study was explicitly linked to collaboration in the context of SEOs.

This sample size is adequate for a systematic review, and several prior studies have used a similar number of articles (Chavoushi *et al.*, 2020; Fraser *et al.*, 2018; Lattacher and Wdowiak, 2020; Pret and Cogan, 2019). Furthermore, the small sample size is strength because it enables critical

engagement with each study through the unpacking of themes (Hueso *et al.*, 2020; Korsgaard, 2013).

The articles in Appendix 1 (Table I) were analysed following two main rounds of coding: (1) descriptive categorisation of articles and (2) identification of higher-order themes. First, to sort the articles and map descriptive patterns, the articles were coded based on the predefined thematic codes commonly used in literature reviews, such as name(s) of authors, year of publication, journal title, theoretical perspective(s), methodological approach(es), geographical context of the study and organisational form. The articles were also sorted according to their type (conceptual or empirical). This initial coding was used to develop an Appendix 1, which provides an overview of the sample. At the second stage of analysis, the articles were coded using an ‘open coding’ approach (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Pret and Cogan, 2019) to identify key themes based on frequency. A thematic analysis facilitated the grouping of the examined studies into themes depending on their central focus of inquiry. Themes were therefore inductively derived from a holistic understanding of each article through an iterative process of reading and re-visiting the selected articles in order to ensure a higher degree of reliability. As a result of this iterative process, five key themes were identified. Among the articles examined, it became apparent that several studies’ central focus and contribution permeated across multiple themes.

The results are presented in the following sections. First, descriptive analyses and general trends in the literature are reported. Second, to answer the second research question, the five key themes generated through thematic analysis are discussed and reported in the second part of the analysis of the results. Finally, a research agenda is developed and key areas for future research are identified.

## **Discussion of findings: Descriptive analysis of the literature**

### *Publication distribution*

The distribution of articles on collaboration in the context of SEOs across 21 journals is shown in Figure 2. The published journals span fields including entrepreneurship and small business management, public administration, non-profit management, economics, organisation studies, and sustainability. Figure 2 shows that 30 articles were published in entrepreneurship and business journals, 18 of which were evenly distributed across three journals: *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* (n = 6), *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* (n = 6), and *Journal of Business Ethics* (n = 6). The first (conceptual) article on collaboration between community enterprises and corporations appeared in 2005 in the *Journal of Business Ethics* (i.e. Tracey *et al.*, 2005). Since then, the number of articles has consistently increased (see Figure 3). There has been a recent upsurge, as 55% of articles (n=22) in the sample were published between 2017 and 2021, thereby highlighting the scholarly interest in the area. Within the entrepreneurship field of study, the 2017 Special Issue 'The collaborative dynamic in social entrepreneurship', edited by de Bruin *et al.* (2017) in *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* played an important role in advancing research in this area, as four of the articles in the analysis are from this issue.

Insert Figure 2 here

Insert Figure 3 here

In terms of methodological orientation, as set out in Appendix 1, most of the selected studies (n = 33) were empirical, while conceptual articles (n = 6) and special issue overview articles (n = 2) contributed about 17% of the total sample. This further supports that the interplay of SEOs and collaboration is an emerging and multidisciplinary area of research scattered across a number of disciplines and journals.

### *Research contexts*

It is widely recognised that our understanding of entrepreneurship cannot be divorced from multiple contexts and social structures in which SEOs are embedded (Berglund *et al.*, 2012; Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever *et al.*, 2014; Stirzaker *et al.*, 2021). The review sample shows heterogeneity in contextual orientation (see Appendix 1). Considering geographical context, the review sample covers 14 countries in five different regions, as shown in Appendix 1. Some countries have received more attention than others. The UK ( $n = 13$ ) has been the most frequent contextual setting for academic scrutiny, with 33 % of articles; however, four articles focused on social enterprise-corporate collaboration (Di Domenico *et al.*, 2009; Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; Savarese *et al.*, 2020; Tracey *et al.*, 2005), while the other four seminal articles focused on the relationships between SEOs and the public sector to secure public sector contracts for the provision of local public services (Chapman *et al.*, 2007; Muñoz, 2009; Muñoz and Tinsley, 2008; Simmons, 2008). While most of the research on collaboration in the context of SEOs has focused on European countries ( $n = 23$ ), Oceania ( $n = 4$ ), and America ( $n = 4$ ), the focus on developing countries remains limited, with three articles featuring empirical data from Korea, Mexico, and Bangladesh (Choi, 2015; Gold *et al.*, 2020; Intindola *et al.*, 2019). Surprisingly, no studies have been identified from the rapidly growing social entrepreneurship literature emerging from India or South America. Additionally, most of the articles had a single geographical location, but some examined two ( $n = 2$ ), three ( $n = 1$ ), and more than three countries ( $n = 1$ ). This indicates a need for further research that crosses national boundaries.

The results highlight the uneven geographical coverage of existing research on collaboration in the context of SEOs across developed and developing countries. As only three studies explore SEO collaboration in developing countries, there is a clear need for more research into a broader range

of contexts and geographic areas, such as SEO collaboration at the bottom of the pyramid (BoP) context of the Global South (Gold *et al.*, 2020). Future studies could also compare the collaboration of SEOs in the UK – a setting with the highest rates of SEOs – with the findings in other settings and/or cultures.

Moreover, the role of spatial context (urban vs. rural) (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018) appears to be underrepresented in the sample with one study (Pret and Carter, 2017), which focuses on the collaborative activities of craft entrepreneurs in rural communities. Thus, future studies could pay more attention to the spatial context, as collaboration might play out in different ways in rural and urban contexts. In terms of organisational forms under umbrella of SEOs, the social enterprise sector has proven the most popular, while only a few studies have examined the collaborative activities of other organisational forms such as social ventures (Barinaga, 2017; Meyskens *et al.*, 2010), indigenous health co-operatives (Barth *et al.*, 2015) and conversion foundations (Heinze *et al.*, 2016). It is suggested, as Baringa (2020) correctly stated, that there is a need for further research to contextualise diverse types of collaboration through which SEOs organise for social change and how various contexts influence the likelihood of forming collaborations. Owing to contextual differences, the types of collaboration, entrepreneurial practices, strategies, and real-life behaviours of social entrepreneurs may vary greatly across contexts.

Furthermore, although research has examined SEO collaboration across different locations and sectors (e.g. fair trade, social service sector, healthcare, energy, craft), comparative studies exploring the collaborative aspects of SEOs operating in different sectors and industries would be very insightful. Such comparative studies could potentially reveal the differences in challenges and opportunities for collaboration of SEOs within a given sector. There is also a need to understand the effects of multiple contextual influences on collaborative practices, processes, and

outcomes (de Bruin *et al.*, 2017). Hence, future research could not only go beyond the most studied geographical contexts and sectors with which SEOs are affiliated, but also consider the multiple contextual influences on collaboration, such as historical, cultural, temporal, sectoral, political, governmental, and many others (Barinaga, 2020; Shepherd *et al.*, 2019; Welter and Baker, 2021).

### *Theoretical frameworks*

In addition to the trends demonstrated above, the analysis provides important insights into the use of theory and methods. This review highlights the diversity of theoretical perspectives from various disciplines, such as strategic management, sociology, public administration, and entrepreneurship, that are used to provide valuable insights into the nature, outcomes and challenges of collaboration in the context of SEOs. In mapping the landscape of the theories used, 34 studies reported the use of theory. Theories such as institutional theory and the resource-based view of the firm (RBV) are most commonly used to study the nature of collaboration in the context of SEOs. The most common approach proved to be institutional theory (n = 9) (e.g. Gillett *et al.*, 2016; Huybrechts *et al.*, 2017; Mitzinneck and Besharov, 2018; Weidner *et al.*, 2019), in particular, the institutional logic perspective (e.g. Barth *et al.*, 2015; Gillett *et al.*, 2019), organisational legitimacy (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; Weidner *et al.*, 2019) and a new institutionalist perspective (Barraket and Loosemore, 2018). As this suggests, SEOs are organisations that combine two (or more) institutional logics, and collaboration with external organisations might shape the configuration of logics and influence potential inter-logic tensions experienced by SEOs (Gillett *et al.*, 2019; Savarese *et al.*, 2020) that can lead to mission drift (Barinaga, 2020).

The second most frequently used theoretical framework is RBV (n = 5). When applied in the context of SEO collaboration, studies drawing insights from RBV (e.g. Choi, 2015; Gold *et al.*, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2018) have focused on what types of partners provide particular types of resources



to SEOs (Choi, 2015) and how synergy-sensitive resources manifest in collaborations (Gold *et al.*, 2020). Overall, using RBV, previous research suggests that better collaboration performance and competitive advantage can be achieved through collaboration management routines by unlocking, reconfiguring, and institutionalising resources that exist in partner relationships (Liu *et al.*, 2016; Rey-García *et al.*, 2019). Although this line of research drawing on RBV has been helpful in providing valuable insights into different aspects of SEO collaboration, this stream of research has a number of limitations. For example, these studies rarely observe SEO collaborations as they unfold in real-time and thereby offer a static and limited view. Further, previous research, which follows lines of reasoning from RBV and resource dependency theory, provides a static conceptualisation of the resources that are ‘out there’, waiting to be identified and acquired by social entrepreneurs over time, without explaining how resources gain their value (Keating *et al.*, 2014). This assumes SEOs know which kind of partners and resources they will need and which outcomes might emerge from them (Elfring *et al.*, 2021). However, recent studies indeed have shown that ‘resources emerge as they are engaged with, in real time and over time, and as a consequence of and impetus to entrepreneurs’ ongoing resourcing efforts’ (Keating *et al.*, 2014, p. 2; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2021).

By prolonging this line of thought, very little insight exists to advance our understanding of the entrepreneurial resourcing process in SEOs through collaboration. In particular, what remains especially largely unaddressed is the entrepreneurial practices that facilitate the enactment of resources through collaboration with other organisations. This creates an opportunity to apply practice theories and a process perspective, especially considering the growing prominence of more processual and practice-based understandings of entrepreneurship, or as Johannisson (2018) labels it, ‘social entrepreneuring’. The application of practice theories is also likely to provide

deeper insights into microfoundations of SEO collaboration, micro-actions and interactions of social entrepreneurs and their partners (Hydle and Billington, 2021; Resch and Steyaert, 2020). This approach shifts the focus from structures and governance of collaborations to entrepreneurial ‘doings’ for collaboration. Further, recent research (Moss *et al.*, 2021) has shown that not only social entrepreneurs may act resourcefully but prosocial collaborations and partnerships can also yield resourceful behaviours. Thus, future research would benefit from looking at SEO collaboration from complementary theoretical lenses such as entrepreneurial theories of resourcefulness (Barraket *et al.*, 2019) which can offer novel contributions to the literature.

Further theories represented in the sample were predominantly theories from sociology, such as social capital (Jenner and Oprescu, 2016), Bourdieu’s theory of field (Pret and Carter, 2017), embeddedness (Vannebo and Grande, 2018), social exchange theory (Di Domenico *et al.*, 2009), identity theory (Smith *et al.*, 2014); entrepreneurship theories, such as opportunity recognition (Henry, 2015; McDermott *et al.*, 2018); and public administration, for example, collaborative governance (Smeets, 2017). Therefore, established theoretical lenses from various disciplines can be effectively used to shed light on emerging phenomena in varied contexts. In addition to the above theoretical frameworks, research on collaboration in the context of SEOs could benefit from incorporating a collective action perspective given recent developments in entrepreneurship research, such as a shift from the concept of a heroic individual towards a more collective and collaborative endeavour (Bacq and Lumpkin, 2021; Ben-Hafaïedh and Dufays, 2021; de Bruin *et al.*, 2017; Branzei *et al.*, 2018). This might advance our understanding of the collective interpersonal dynamics in SEO collaboration.

In contrast to the focus on a single theory, only a few studies (n =3) combined two or more theoretical frameworks to analyse the collaborative aspects of SEOs, thereby promoting theoretical

syntheses (e.g. Kwong *et al.*, 2017; Meyskens *et al.*, 2010; Pret and Carter, 2017), which envisages research opportunities that leverage multiple theories that might be deployed in a novel fashion or combined with other theories. One such promising area for future research is the influence of different forms of embeddedness on the enactment and shaping of practices for collaboration. Furthermore, practice theory can be integrated with institutional theory in order to provide new insights into the impact of social entrepreneurs' agency and the effects of their collaborations with other organisations on the missions, vision and practices of collaborating partners and also on broader institutional and societal structures (de Bruin *et al.*, 2017).

### *Methodological trends*

Research on SEO collaboration utilises qualitative, quantitative, and conceptual approaches, but most of the articles use qualitative methodologies. Among the 40 studies in the sample, six are conceptual in nature, 28 used qualitative approaches, four used quantitative approaches, and one used a mixed-method approach. Most studies adopt a qualitative approach based on case studies as commonly used method for exploration of an underdeveloped topic and in-depth semi-structured interviews. In some cases (e.g. Pret and Carter, 2017), a phenomenological approach is utilised for in-depth investigations of collaborative activities. Very few have opted for ethnographic or alternative, situated and interventionist approaches, for example, engaged scholarship (e.g. Barinaga, 2017). Additionally, these studies rarely adopt longitudinal study designs (e.g. Gillett *et al.*, 2016, 2019; Pret and Carter, 2017) observing SEO collaboration as it unfolds in real-time, which makes capturing the dynamics and theorising processes and practices difficult in that the findings become blunt, vague and abstracted from actual entrepreneurial 'doings' for collaboration and interactions. As shown, quantitative studies remain scant, and the exploratory character of the majority of studies signals the emerging nature of this field. A few

scholars have used surveys conducted at a single point in time by designing large-scale studies (Intindola *et al.*, 2019; Weidner *et al.*, 2019) to encompass collaboration in diverse localities or to gain sectoral variance.

Therefore, research on collaboration on the interplay of SEOs and collaboration can be significantly enhanced using more methodological diversity. Both theory-building and theory-testing studies are promising for examining different aspects of collaboration in the context of SEOs. This points to the opportunity to use case-based and longitudinal studies to unpack how collaboration unfolds over time and to illuminate the behaviours that SEOs adopt at different stages of collaboration, thereby providing a more dynamic, longitudinal perspective. This is particularly important, as much of the research focuses on the static aspects of SEO collaboration, thereby lacking a more dynamic understanding of the collaboration process over time. In a similar vein, there is a need for methodologies that allow scholars to capture the everyday lived experience of participants and the real-time entrepreneurial actions ('doings') for collaboration. Therefore, more in-depth longitudinal explorations of collaboration in the context of SEOs are warranted.

### **Thematic analysis**

The descriptive analysis of the literature indicated that although research focusing on collaboration in the context of SEOs has recently reflected the increasing scholarly attention, it remains fragmented and spans different fields of study, contexts, varied theoretical perspectives, and multiple units of analysis. The following thematic analysis therefore attempts to address the second research question of this review, that is, to map and consolidate the literature by appraising the dominant research themes.

Through thematic analysis, five themes accounted for the conceptual and empirical findings: motivations and strategies, antecedents of collaboration, the interplay of institutional logics and

tensions in collaborations, the impact of collaboration on the mission of social enterprises, and collaborative processes and practices for collaboration. The thematic patterns, the nature of each theme, and the main sources that exemplify particular themes, are now discussed.

### *Motivations and strategies*

Extant research frequently investigates the theme of motivation which focuses on why SEOs and their partners engage in collaboration with a particular emphasis on their values and goals, as well as the strategies used to form such collaborations. A common finding is that SEOs enact collaborations to scale their social impact and expand social value creation through collaboration (Barraket and Loosemore, 2018; Di Domenico *et al.*, 2009; Sakarya *et al.*, 2012). Smith *et al.* (2014) also stress the important role of ‘social’ motives in explaining the behaviour of SEO leaders, suggesting that being driven by socialising – the purposeful pursuit of social objectives at the expense of financial efficiency – social entrepreneurs establish strategic alliances.

A closer examination of studies reveals that collaboration with organisations within and across sectors also serves as a driver for SEOs by improving access to resources, competencies, and funding (Di Domenico *et al.*, 2009; Meyskens *et al.*, 2010; Sakarya *et al.*, 2012). Another cluster of studies posits that collaboration between SEOs and other actors are not limited to exchange relationships for resources, but that it also provides opportunities for synergy or collaborative advantage because partners cannot solve social problems on their own (Henry, 2015). Collaboration also allows to improve public and community service delivery (Henry, 2015; Simmons, 2008), build local support and credibility, and increase community capacity (Heinze *et al.*, 2016; Pret and Carter, 2017; Sakarya *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that in addition to access to resources, SEOs are guided by their search for organisational legitimacy in developing collaboration with corporations

(Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013). While external legitimacy is important for SEOs, more recently, research has also recognised the importance of establishing inter-partner legitimacy through collaborations by developing stakeholder-specific legitimising strategies (Weidner *et al.*, 2019). This research reinforces the role of inter-partner legitimacy in resourcing and legitimising SEOs as the support that is gained from establishing collaborations is a result of either a transfer of legitimacy through the partnership directly or of the exchange of specific resources. Huybrechts *et al.* (2017) demonstrate how fair-trade SEOs engage with mainstream business corporations to ‘institutionalise’ hybridity and fair trade in mainstream markets by adopting an active appropriation strategy and embedding a social welfare logic in corporations’ market logic. As there are profound distinctions between SEOs and corporations, there is a need for research on these types of collaborations in other contexts, such as the BoP context of the Global South.

While motivations are covered in-depth in the extant literature, little attention has been paid to the motivations of SEOs to collaborate between themselves, especially if they provide similar services and/or products, serve similar beneficiary groups, and often compete for the same public support. Research demonstrates that some SEOs, such as conversion foundations in the US (Heinze *et al.*, 2017) collaborate with one another, and social enterprises can form social enterprise partnerships (Henry, 2015), which can play a central role in social entrepreneurial opportunity recognition. At the same time, nascent research (Arenas *et al.*, 2021) suggests that social enterprises operating in the same field engage in both competitive and cooperative behaviours simultaneously. Essentially, little is known about whether SEOs are more collaborative in pursuing shared social outcomes in terms of interfirm competition and how collaborations between SEOs shape the entrepreneurial process.

### *Antecedents of collaboration*

Antecedents of collaboration, that is, various factors and conditions that influence SEOs' collaborative efforts and outcomes, have gained much scholarly interest, which is not surprising as collaborations can be difficult to establish and even more difficult to sustain (de Bruin *et al.*, 2017). The literature emphasises social entrepreneur-related, organisational, relational, and context-specific factors. Entrepreneur-level factors relate to social entrepreneurs' attributes that influence the potential for collaboration and success. These studies identify leadership, professional skills, personal drive, and socialising as individual factors in explaining the success of SEO collaborations with other organisations (e.g. Maase and Bossink, 2010; Smeets, 2017). Organisational antecedents comprise the SEOs' positive reputation among different stakeholders and prior collaborative experience (e.g. Gillett *et al.*, 2016; Maase and Bossink, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2014). In terms of relational antecedents, research has revealed several factors that are important for SEO collaboration: trust, shared motivation and social mission, relational embeddedness, social capital, (task) interdependence, existing networks, relational governance, inter-partner legitimacy, and capacity for joint action (e.g. Gillett *et al.*, 2016; Heinze *et al.*, 2016; Henry, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Weidner *et al.*, 2019). One of the key precursors to collaboration identified in these studies is mutual trust, shared motivation, and social mission. Future research can therefore reveal the different approaches and mechanisms to build social capital and trust to identify which yield the greatest insight and strong social ties. Finally, little attention has been paid to the role of context-specific factors such as institutional conditions, policies, and regulations (e.g. Jenner and Oprescu, 2016; Muñoz, 2009; Smeets, 2017; Vannebo and Grande, 2018). For example, Smeets (2017) finds that societal developments such as the changing roles of different organisations were important in catalysing collaboration and created a supportive environment for developing a social impact bond

(SIB) collaborative model in the Netherlands. Particularly, the declining role of governments in social welfare urges local governments to engage in collaboration with SEOs and search for diverse innovative collaborative models, such as SIBs. This creates future research opportunities that could scrutinise context-specific issues and contextual dynamics shaping collaboration in the context of SEOs, as it cannot be fully understood without considering the contexts in which SEOs are embedded.

*The interplay of institutional logics and arising tensions in collaborations*

A considerable amount of the literature, from the institutional theory perspective, relates to the interplay of multiple institutional logics and, as a result, tensions that arise in collaboration (Barinaga, 2020; Di Domenico *et al.*, 2009; Gillett *et al.*, 2016; Quélin *et al.*, 2017). This is hardly surprising, given that much scholarly attention has been devoted to the hybridity of SEOs guided by distinct and potentially contradicting institutional logics, the management of competing logics, and possible tensions arising between them (Battilana and Lee, 2014; McMullen, 2018; Savarese *et al.*, 2020). Specifically, an increasing amount of research has examined how market logic leads to pressure on SEOs that may cause them to drift from their original mission and how such pressures can be mitigated (Cornforth, 2014; Quélin *et al.*, 2017). Such sociological institutional perspectives place greater importance on tensions arising from contradicting logics and how SEOs deal with these conflicting dimensions.

Different aspects of this theme have been mostly investigated within the context of social enterprises as a specific organisational form. An important finding across these studies is that social enterprises face challenges in dealing with the different institutional logics of their partners, which affects collaboration. Conflicting institutional logics may lead to the subordination of the SEOs to the for-profit partner (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013). The studies reveal that differences



in institutional logics guiding actors can result in a conflict of logic, leading to divergent framings of social challenges (Barinaga, 2020). Furthermore, Gillett *et al.*'s (2016) study suggests that multiple institutional logics can be both a basis for collaboration, and a basis for tensions due to difficulty in managing conflicting social and business logics across organisations with asymmetric power, such as smaller SEOs. Interestingly, their study illustrates how in the context of multi-organisational collaboration involving two SEOs, a local authority, and a housing association, relational factors such as a sense of belonging and shared mission based on trust and commitment can lead to superior value creation and achievement of multiple objectives. For instance, in the context of social enterprise-corporate collaborations, the literature has demonstrated a paradox related to tension management within social enterprises (Savarese *et al.*, 2020). While a collaboration based on lower levels of engagement between partners reduces some of the inter-logic tensions, it is likely to compromise the organisational hybridity of social enterprises. By contrast, collaborations characterised by strong ties and stronger commitment might facilitate sustained hybridity if inter-logic tensions are managed.

Indeed, SEOs use two different approaches to design their relationships: an anthropocentric extroverted approach and a structurally integrated approach (Ostertag *et al.*, 2021). The first is characterised by the intensive use of engagement in a diverse set of partnerships simultaneously, stable and long-term relationships, and strong emotional bonds, while the second is characterised by focusing on compatibility and functional integration with a few selected partners in the value co-creation process.

However, Mair's (2020) findings suggest that the assumption of competing institutional logics causing tensions may have been exaggerated and 'forcefully direct(ing) attention to conflicts arising from a duality in logics' (Mair, 2020, p. 335) has led to particular theoretical questions

about how SEOs deal with conflicting logics. While much research has focused on the duality of social and commercial goals at the organisational level (Barinaga, 2020), Bacq and Lumpkin (2021, p. 287) note that scholars need ‘to look beyond organisational conflicts and tensions, and to consider the “bigger picture” that includes collaborations in addressing global social problems’. Thus, further insights are needed into how a focus on collaborative efforts changes the nature of tensions which SEOs are subject to in collaborative settings and what strategies they employ to navigate tensions without undermining their position in collaboration and their distinctive characteristics (Bacq and Lumpkin, 2021).

#### *The impact of collaboration on the mission of SEOs*

The effect of collaboration on the mission of SEOs has also gained scholarly attention. This stream of work has broadened its scope by focusing on a potential mission drift caused by the conflicting interplay of the social and economic logics (Cornforth, 2014; Ramus and Vaccaro, 2017) to the assumption that collaboration with other organisations could be another source of mission drift (Barinaga, 2020; Savarese *et al.*, 2020). A few studies (Barinaga, 2020; Kwong *et al.*, 2017) suggest that collaboration could lead to a venture drifting away from its original mission. As outlined before, the main reason for this is a conflict in the institutional logics guiding the actors in their collaboration, that is, the institutional logic of a more powerful partner being imposed on a weaker partner. For instance, Barinaga (2020) suggests that collaborations between SEOs and the public sector are potentially volatile hybrids. Based on this, mission drift can also be defined as the co-optation of a SEO by the dominant incumbent actors. Building on the typology of collaboration types (philanthropic, transactional, and integrative) suggested by Austin (2000), research has shown that collaboration based on a lower level of engagement and interaction between partners, that is, in the philanthropic, transactional types, increases the risk of mission

drift. Essentially, developing strong ties, a two-way flow of resources and skills, and a stronger commitment by establishing an integrative type of collaboration minimises the risk of mission drift and allows the hybridity to be translated to the collaboration level (Savarese *et al.*, 2020).

There seems to be conflicting evidence as to whether mission drift has the inherent negative nature. For example, the findings have shown that, in some circumstances, the benefits of mission drift could exceed the mis-targeting problems they create. In exploring the impact of collective bricolage on the pursuit of SEOs' missions in resource-scarce contexts, Kwong *et al.* (2017) identified three types of mission drifts caused by collaboration. Their findings demonstrate that mission drift can also increase the overall social impact compared to situations in which partners operate separately. Thus, their study offered novel contributions to the literature by challenging the traditional view that mission drift is inherently negative. However, the authors note that the findings are limited to the UK context, which indicates that there is a need to collect empirical data from other contexts to enhance the understanding of the role of collaboration, bricolage, and mission drift, which is a fruitful avenue for further research.

Therefore, it would be beneficial for future research to investigate situations in different contexts in which collaboration is combined with other resourcing practices, such as bricolage that leads to new or increased collaborations. Additionally, while mission drift may delegitimise SEOs with collaborating partners (Ramus and Vaccaro, 2017), thus undermining their willingness to collaborate with the venture, further research is needed to investigate the strategies that delegitimised SEOs adopt to capture the attention of external stakeholders.

#### *Collaborative processes and practices for collaboration*

The final theme examines collaborative processes and practices for collaboration (Barinaga, 2017, 2020; Heinze, 2016; Smeets, 2017). Totalling just five articles, this branch of research remains

wholly underserved, limiting our understanding of the dynamic nature of collaborative processes over time and entrepreneurial ‘doings’ for collaboration (practices). For instance, Heinze *et al.*’s (2016) study of collaborative processes provides a process model of local SE which demonstrates relationships between the mechanisms through which SEOs build a groundwork for collaboration: defining a social problem locally, developing social capital and educating partners through generating trust, and helping convene partners with complementary competencies to develop solutions. By adopting a processual approach, Barinaga’s (2017) study suggests the notion of ‘tinkering’ to underscore the adaptive and fluid nature of the organisational practices and the ongoing everyday work of organising processes in social enterprises to bring about collaboration. Furthermore, in certain contexts, such as the craft sector, collaboration and sharing of various forms of capital have been embraced in response to community norms and expectations that promote socially oriented business practices (Pret and Carter, 2017). These studies highlight the collective dimension of SEOs and their findings challenge and contrast with mainstream entrepreneurship research that emphasises strategy and market-driven perspectives.

As outlined, there has been little focus on processual and practice approaches to study collaboration in the context of SEOs, recognising the embeddedness of SEOs in different contexts. Further inquiry is certainly warranted, given the emerging EaP research field (Claire *et al.*, 2020; Thompson *et al.*, 2020), which focuses on the relational and processual nature of entrepreneurial activities as they are carried out by individuals in interactions and through practices (Gartner and Teague, 2020). As highlighted above, collaboration is a common path to resourcing SEOs and serves as an important mechanism for gaining legitimacy for social entrepreneurs and their SEOs. As such, future studies could draw on the EaP research platform and diverse interesting theories from social sciences to reveal entrepreneurial practices for collaboration and practices employed

by social entrepreneurs to resource their organisations and gain legitimacy through collaborations to better understand entrepreneurs' behaviour. Thus, more research is needed to understand the resourcing process in a social entrepreneurial context through collaboration. Further research could also illuminate how SEOs manage complex relationships with their partners, the challenges that permeate the context that surrounds them, and how these organisations find ways to navigate the challenges in a collaborative setting.

### **Conclusion and research agenda**

This SLR aimed to systematically analyse and synthesise empirical and conceptual research that focuses on the collaboration between different types of SEOs and other organisations, within and across sectors, seeking to establish further research avenues. This research is timely, as the role of collaboration in the context of SEOs has witnessed a very dynamic rise in scholarly interest. As this literature is highly fragmented and diverse, calling for further theoretical and empirical development, the main contributions of this paper lie in synthesising the extant research on collaboration in the context of SEOs, appraising the key research themes through thematic analysis and identifying relevant gaps worth investigating within each of these themes and beyond.

First, this study mapped the progress of the field over the research period (2005-2021), discussed general trends, various theories, conceptual perspectives, research contexts, and methodological trends. Collaboration in the context of SEOs is a rapidly expanding area of research that has experienced increasing growth in the number of new publications in the last five years (2017-2021). This field remains overwhelmingly dominated by empirical studies conducted in Western countries, with the majority of studies coming from the UK. The review identified a limited number of studies that examined SEO collaboration in developing countries. Moreover, given the contextual intricacies of emerging market countries, there is currently a conspicuous lack of

research on the rapidly growing social entrepreneurship literature emerging from India or South America. There is also evidence indicating that research into SEO collaboration is an emerging field with predominantly exploratory qualitative studies and diverse theoretical perspectives, although institutional theory and RBV remain the most frequently used theories in studying different collaborative aspects. Considering that the studies were published in 21 different journals, the review demonstrates that this area of research is interdisciplinary and spans diverse fields of study, such as entrepreneurship and small business management, public administration, non-profit management, economics, organisation studies, and sustainability.

Second, based on a thematic analysis of the literature, this review rendered some structure to the fragmented literature by identifying the five dominant research themes which have been inductively developed from the literature to understand current research and act as a guide upon which to build future research efforts. These themes include: motivations and strategies of collaboration, its antecedents, the interplay of institutional logics and tensions arising in collaboration, the impact of collaboration on the mission of SEOs, and collaborative processes and practices. These themes represent dominant areas of scholarly interest in the study of collaboration in the context of SEOs. The analysis also showed a strong dominance of studies building on the fields of interorganisational collaboration, such as cross-sector partnerships and social alliances, including SEOs. Further, the review revealed that many studies take the hybridity of SEOs as a starting point to explore the influence of their conflicting institutional logics on different aspects of collaboration with diverse organisations, while there is a dearth of studies focusing on the collaborative processes and practices, which signal further potential avenues for research.

Third, based on the identified five key research themes and developmental patterns, this article develops a research agenda (see Figure 4) to inspire scholars to continue conducting much-needed

research in this area that is reflective of, though not necessarily limited to, the suggested directions provided below. Figure 4 presents the potential research avenues and relevant research questions worthy of further investigation to move forward research on collaboration in the context of SEOs. The research questions are sufficiently broad to warrant further sharpening and focusing on future studies.

Insert Figure 4 here

While acknowledging that work in this area is still immature, there are substantial knowledge gaps yet to be filled. There is a need for further qualitative and quantitative empirical and conceptual studies to aid the development of the theory. The use of concepts and theories from established social sciences could be fruitful in supporting such theory building. As outlined in the review, much attention has been paid to social enterprises as a particular organisational form under umbrella of SEOs. Further comprehensive examination of collaborative aspects of other organisational forms beyond social enterprises would provide invaluable insights into collaborative dynamics in the context of SEOs. Further research examining how collaboration manifests itself in the context of both nascent and mature SEOs would also make a significant contribution to current knowledge. By prolonging this line of thought, another area of research warranting wider investigation is whether particular collaborations might be effective at different points of time in the development and growth of SEOs. Additionally, the articles examined in the review highlight the paucity of longitudinal studies exploring how SEO collaboration unfolds over time. This would suggest the urgent need to dig deeper into the collaboration processes and explore how they unfold over time by employing processual and practice approaches. The review also suggests that theories such as RBV and resource dependence theory appear to be limited in their explanatory scope, in that they do not allow us to fully appreciate the richness and diversity of the

entrepreneurial actions for collaboration and recognise social entrepreneuring as socially situated and socially enacted. Thus, the insights emerging from the studies suggest more research is needed into the microfoundations of collaboration in the context of SEOs as it redirects the traditional lines of inquiry in the extant literature and offers new research avenues. There is clearly a need to tell a fuller story of the collaboration processes and entrepreneurial practices, thereby providing a more nuanced view of how SEOs enact collaboration. As collaboration is acknowledged to be a common path to resourcing SEOs, it is also believed much will be gained as studies shift their focus from the transactional exchanges and viewing resources as fixed entities, and instead focus on the playing out of the relational dynamics and collective aspects of resourcing through collaboration over time.

The analysis of the articles also points to the scarcity of empirical studies on the outcomes and impacts of collaborative endeavours. Therefore, a fruitful area for future research is to assess the impact of collaborative solutions developed by SEOs and their partners. Although some studies provide some evidence of impact (Rey-García *et al.*, 2019), future research can more systematically examine the impact of different forms of collaboration in the context of SEOs. Future studies could further scrutinise different types of collaboration. For example, SIBs originating from the UK have recently received much attention in public management and administration literature as well as strategic management literature (Fraser *et al.*, 2018); however, little is known about their relationship with social entrepreneurship, their collaborative and social aspects and how such collaborative models can support and enhance collaboration between SEOs and local governments. How these innovative collaborative forms apply to social entrepreneurs and SEOs has yet to be examined in the entrepreneurship literature. Moreover, future studies could



pay more attention to the dark side of collaboration in the context of SEOs, as most of the studies provide a positive view of collaboration and consider mission drift as the main risk.

Another relevant question for further studies is how SEOs are in terms of practicing collaboration between themselves, especially those ones that provide similar services and products. The review demonstrates that this is an emerging line of research which deserves future scrutiny.

### *Practical implications*

This review has important implications for social entrepreneurs and policymakers. For social entrepreneurs, the study shows that collaboration is an important mechanism by which they can resource their organisations to remain economically viable, gain legitimacy and increase their social impact. Moreover, empirical evidence indicates that long-term collaboration with diverse organisations within and across sectors is crucial for the success of SEOs. However, such collaboration requires significant investments in developing social capital, long-lasting relationships, trust, and a high level of engagement to achieve societal goals. Empirical studies included in the review have revealed that the collaborations that SEOs tap into appear to be dependent on the individuals managing the collaboration, rather than on the established relationships between the organisations themselves (Gillett et al., 2019; Meyskens et al., 2010). Thus, social entrepreneurs who consider starting a collaboration should allocate enough time to the formation of strong ties and bonding with potential partners.

Policymakers need to develop an environment that supports the development of collaboration within and across sectors. Knowledge about the antecedents, processes, tensions and challenges that influence collaboration between SEOs and other organisations can be used by policymakers and public organisations to design interventions that assist and support social entrepreneurial activities. This could include an increased focus on developing intermediaries to connect SEOs

with other organisations. Furthermore, it is believed that social investor companies might play a significant role as boundary spanners in bridging structural holes and connecting SEOs with other organisations within and across sectors. Moreover, policymakers have the greatest potential to facilitate the development of regulations and initiatives that support SEO collaborations.

### *Limitations*

Finally, this study had some limitations. First, despite extensive efforts, the literature search may have failed to capture a small handful of potentially seminal texts on collaboration in the context of SEOs. Particularly, contributions such as book chapters, conference proceedings, and theses were excluded from the review in light of quality standards. Second, as only articles written in English comprised the sample, another limitation is that the studies published in other languages were excluded. Third, there is always an element of subjectivity in the thematic classification of articles which might result in potential biases. Nevertheless, to address this shortcoming, using an iterative approach helped identify the most important themes in the research on collaboration and SEOs. Fourth, a careful elaboration of the contextual differences regarding collaborations might generate interesting findings.

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Appendix					
Article	Journal	Theory	Method	Country	Organisational form
Arenas <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly	Coopetition	Qualitative	Spain	Social enterprise
Barinaga (2017)	Organization Studies	ANT	Qualitative	Sweden	Social venture
Barinaga (2020)	VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations	Fligstein's and McAdam's theory of fields	Qualitative	Sweden	Social venture
Barraket and Loosemore (2018)	Construction Management and Economics	New institutionalist perspective	Qualitative	Australia	Social enterprise
Barth <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	Institutional logics	Qualitative	Australia	Social enterprise and cooperative
Chapman <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Social Enterprise Journal	Not reported	Qualitative	UK	Social enterprise
Choi (2015)	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	Resource-based view	Quantitative	Korea	Social enterprise
De Bruin <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	Special issue	Special issue		Social enterprise
Di Domenico, <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Organization Studies	Social exchange theory Dialectical theory	Conceptual	UK	Social enterprise
Gillett <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Public money & Management	Institutional theory Institutional logics	Qualitative	UK	Social enterprise
Gillett <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Journal of Business Ethics	Institutional logics	Qualitative	UK	Social enterprise
Gold <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Business Strategy and the Environment	Resource-based view	Qualitative	Bangladesh	Social business
Heinze <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Nonprofit Management & Leadership	A grounded theory approach	Qualitative	US	Conversion foundations as organisational social entrepreneurs
Henry (2015)	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	Opportunity recognition	Qualitative	UK	Social enterprise
Herbst (2019)	Business Strategy & Development	Social marketing, coopetition	Qualitative	Australia	Social enterprise
Huybrechts, <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	Institutional theory	Qualitative	Belgium, Germany and the UK	Fair trade social enterprise
Huybrechts and Nicholls (2013)	Social Enterprise Journal	Institutional theory	Qualitative	UK	Fair trade social enterprise
Intindola <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	A grounded theory approach	Quantitative	Mexico and US	Community foundation
Jenner and Oprescu (2016)	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	Social capital	Mixed methods approach	Australia and Scotland	Social enterprise

Kwong <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	Bricolage theory Resource dependency theory Transaction cost theory	Qualitative	UK	Social enterprise, social business, public sector social enterprise
Liu <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Journal of Business Ethics	Resource-based view	Quantitative	UK	Social enterprise
Maase and Bossink (2010)	Journal of Enterprising Communities	Not reported	Qualitative	The Netherlands	Social enterprise
McDermott <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Journal of Cleaner Production	Opportunity recognition, discovery and creation (in social enterprise collaborations)	Qualitative	Canada	Social enterprise
Meyskens <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	Population ecology, resource dependency and resource-based view	Qualitative	US	Social venture
Mitzinneck and Besharov (2018)	Journal of Business Ethics	Institutional theory	Qualitative	Germany	Cooperative
Montgomery <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Journal of Business Ethics	Collective action	Conceptual		Social venture
Muñoz and Tinsley (2008)	The Journal of Corporate Citizenship	A grounded theory approach	Qualitative	UK	Social enterprise
Muñoz (2009)	Social Enterprise Journal	Not reported	Qualitative	UK	Social enterprise
Ostertag <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Journal of Business Research	Relational view	Qualitative	Germany	Social enterprise
Pret and Carter (2017)	Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	Bourdieu's theory of practice Embeddedness	Qualitative	UK	Craft entrepreneurs, social enterprise
Quélin <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Journal of Management Studies	Hybridity	Conceptual / Special issue		Social enterprise
Rey-García <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Management Decision	Resource-based view Relational view of competitive advantage	Qualitative	Spain	Social enterprise
Sakarya <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Journal of Business Research	Systems approach	Qualitative	Turkey	Social enterprise
Savarese <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Journal of Business Ethics	Institutional logics Organisational hybridity	Conceptual		Social enterprise
Simmons (2008)	Public Policy and Administration	Not reported	Qualitative	UK	Social enterprise
Smeets (2017)	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	Collaborative governance	Qualitative	The Netherlands	Social enterprise
Smith <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	Identity-based perspective	Conceptual		Social venture

Tracey <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Journal of Business Ethics	Not reported	Conceptual	UK	Community enterprise
Vannebo and Grande (2018)	International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business	Embeddedness	Qualitative	Norway	Social venture
Weidner <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Business & Society	Institutional theory	Quantitative	Worldwide	Social enterprise

Table I. Research on collaboration in the context of SEOs

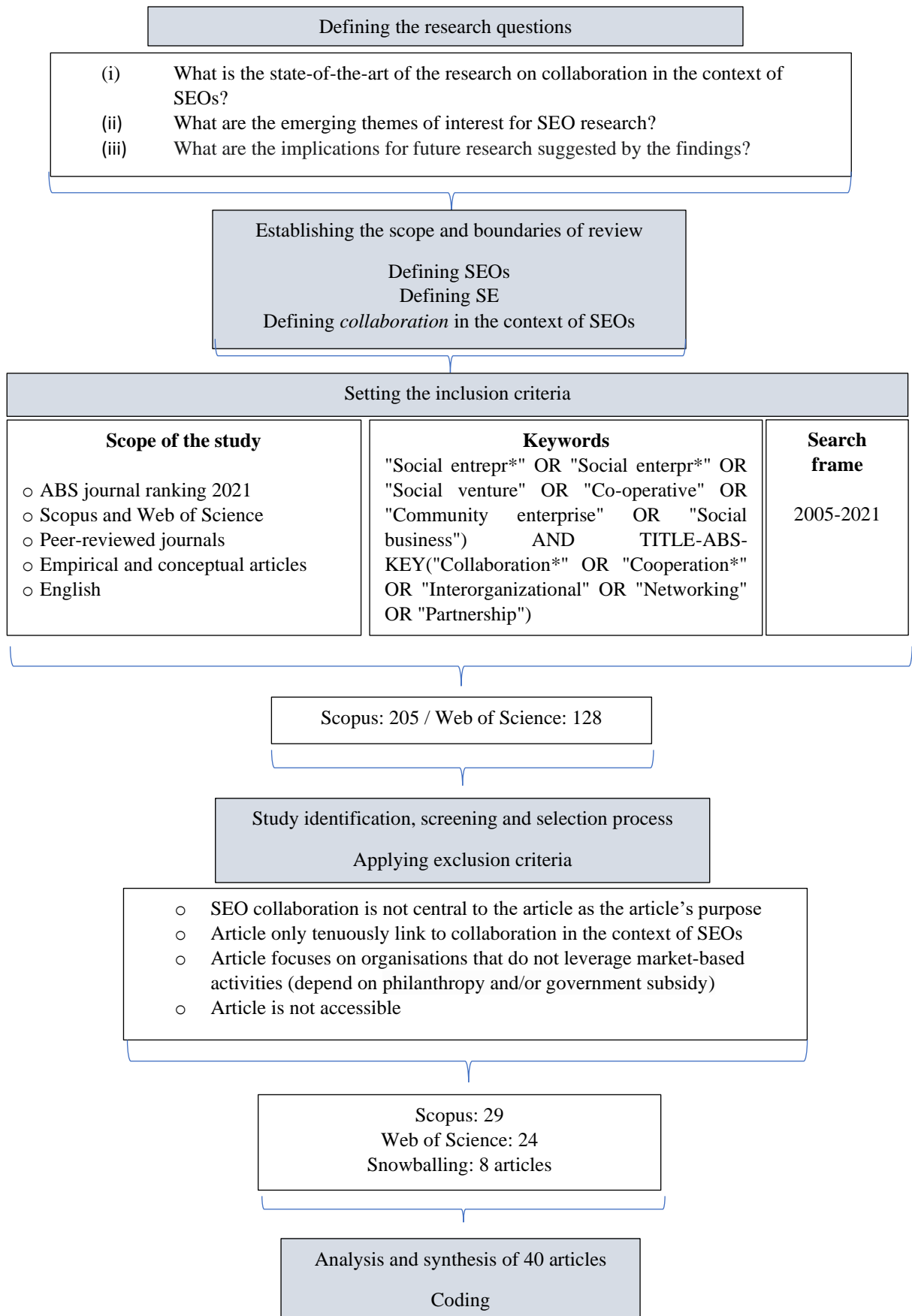


Figure 1. Summary of the systematic review methodology

<i>Journal title and subject area</i>	<i>Total article count</i>
<b><i>Entrepreneurship &amp; Small Business Management</i></b>	
Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	6
Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	6
Journal of Business Ethics	6
Social Enterprise Journal	3
Journal of Management Studies	1
Management Decision	1
Business Strategy and the Environment	1
Business Strategy and Development	1
Journal of Business Research	2
International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business	1
Business and Society	1
Journal of Enterprising Communities	1
<b><i>Public Administration</i></b>	
Public Money & Management	1
Public Policy and Administration	1
<b><i>Nonprofit Management</i></b>	
Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations	1
Nonprofit Management and Leadership	1
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly	1
<b><i>Economics</i></b>	
Construction Management and Economics	1
<b><i>Organisation studies</i></b>	
Organisation Studies	2
<b><i>Sustainability</i></b>	
The Journal of Corporate Citizenship	1
Journal of Cleaner Production	1
<i>Total:</i>	
21 journal	40 articles

Figure 2. Subject categories and associated journals



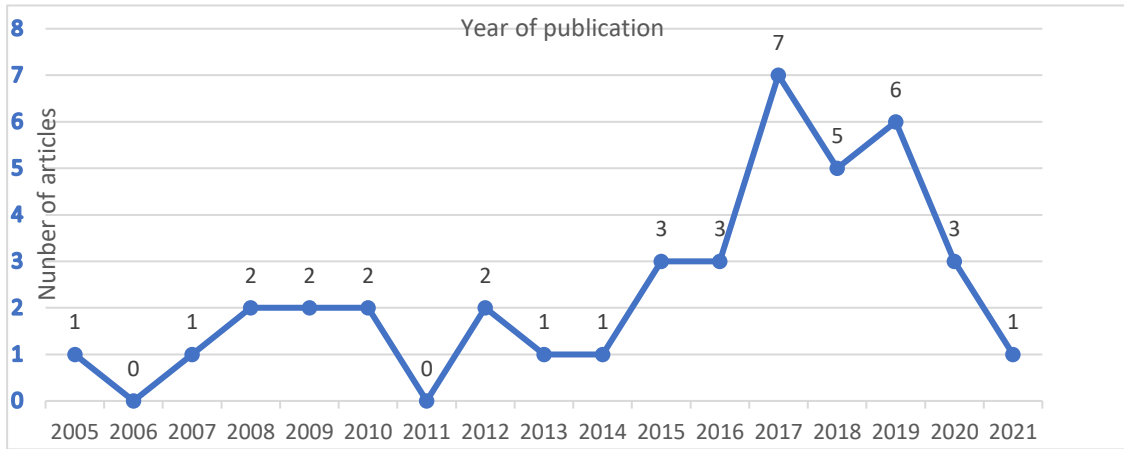


Figure 3. Number of articles published between 2005 and 2021

Theme	Suggestions for future research and potential research questions
Motivations and strategies	<p>When and why do SEOs collaborate between themselves? How these collaborations shape both the SE process and societal perspectives about social problems?</p> <p>To what extent are SEOs more collaborative in pursuing shared outcomes in terms of interfirm competition?</p> <p>How SEOs can engage in longer-term interactions with the public sector?</p> <p>How are these collaborations are governed and managed?</p>
Antecedents	<p>What are the factors and conditions for scaling up the collaborative innovative solutions and outcomes?</p> <p>What is the role of intermediaries (boundary spanners) in facilitating SEO collaboration?</p> <p>What social skills do social entrepreneurs need in order to mobilise or gain legitimacy from different stakeholders to establish new forms of collaboration?</p> <p>Emotional aspects</p> <p>How do governance practices operate in a collaborative setting?</p> <p>How do sectoral (e.g. public, private, or third sector) cultures affect the relationship dynamics within collaborations?</p> <p>What are unique capabilities that SEOs lack and public actors can provide in collaborations and vice versa?</p> <p>Which kinds of collaborations are most effective at which point of time in the development and growth of SEOs?</p>
The impact of collaboration on the mission of social enterprises	<p>To what extent are missions of SEOs fluid to respond to the demands of collaborating partners?</p> <p>What strategies and practices do delegitimised SEOs pursue to capture the attention of potential partners for collaboration and external stakeholders?</p> <p>What are the sources of misalignment between SEOs' mission and mandate imposed by powerful institutional actors?</p> <p>To what extent does a sudden shift in societal needs expose the boundary conditions of mission drift and reveal the need for 'mission agility' instead? (Bacq and Lumpkin, 2021)</p> <p>Do SEOs' strategies to engage in collaboration have dark sides?</p>
The interplay of institutional logics and tensions arising in collaboration	<p>How do SEOs employ different strategies to navigate potentially contradictory institutional logics of collaborating partners in order to facilitate entrepreneurial venturing?</p> <p>How do SEOs manage the tension of appearing hybrids while building legitimacy with established actors (for example, industry associations or public authorities)?</p> <p>How do SEOs resolve tensions without undermining their position in collaboration and their distinctive characteristics?</p> <p>How does a focus on collaborative efforts change the nature of tensions which SEOs are subject to in collaborative settings?</p> <p>How and when do legitimacy issues create significant obstacles to collaborative efforts with SEOs?</p> <p>What kind of tensions lead to the conflictive relationships between SEOs and their partners? In what ways are resulting conflicts and tensions resolvable, or if they are not resolvable, then, why?</p> <p>How do the various institutional factors affect the legitimacy of different forms of collaborations?</p>

<b>Collaborative processes and practices for collaboration</b>	<p>How and through which practices do social entrepreneurs resource their SEOs by means of collaboration?</p> <p>How and through which practices do SEOs gain legitimacy through collaboration?</p> <p>It is promising to investigate how collaboration is combined with other resourcing mechanisms, like bricolage, bootstrapping leading to new or increased collaborations</p> <p>Acknowledging that collaboration is fluid rather than stable, taking a process and practice lens to study how collaboration unfolds (emerges, develops and changes) over time is warranted</p> <p>Which practices enable social entrepreneurs to manage complex relationships in a collaborative setting?</p> <p>Which specific practices SEOs employ to further mutual learning and experimentation through collaboration with their partners?</p> <p>How do SEOs extend collaborations beyond their community?</p> <p>How do SEOs foster and sustain collaborations after the results are achieved?</p> <p>A need to consider the power relationships and politics that underline how different forms of collaboration SEOs establish with other entities and how they are negotiated by both sides</p> <p>A need for longitudinal studies, ethnography</p>
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Figure 4. A research agenda for collaboration in the context of SEOs