

## **TRACING THE PATH TO DEFINE THE PROFILE OF THE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

There is increasing recognition of the impact of social entrepreneurship on economic and social development, particularly in the health sector, as highlighted in the latest publication by Pipe.Labo (2024). This recognition has ignited academic and political interest in social entrepreneurship (Bhardwaj, Weerawardena, & Srivastava, 2023). Despite the growing interest, the field's conceptualization remains a recurring debate among researchers, needing to provide a comprehensive framework and definition (Bull, 2018). The literature on social entrepreneurship has explored the concept and area from various perspectives, but progress could be faster, particularly in value creation (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2017). Additionally, a sizeable portion of the social entrepreneurship literature aligns with traditional entrepreneurship theory (Saifan, 2012).

Constantly challenged by the restriction of resources (Austin, Stevenson, Skillerns, 2012; Barki, 2020) social entrepreneurs operate with a dual focus: creating social value for the community and generating commercial value to sustain their organizations (Bhardwaj, Weerawardena & Srivastava, 2023). The characteristic that defines social entrepreneurs in the literature is their capacity to identify a social problem and leverage resources to meet or even promote social changes (Maír & Noboa, 2006).

Social entrepreneurs are frequently characterized as empathetic individuals with strong moral judgment, self-sufficiency, and a focus on building effective partnerships to support their ideas. Because of their empathetic nature, social entrepreneurs can understand and relate to others' experiences, enabling them to identify opportunities and utilize resources (Maír & Noboa, 2006). Miller et al. (2012) referred to this trait as compassion, which involves a selfless focus on others and an emotional connection to their suffering. As a result, social entrepreneurs possess an integrative way of thinking that allows them to be flexible and holistic when addressing a problem (Miller et al., 2012). Empathy, compassion, and pro-social motivation are the closest characteristics of social entrepreneurs (Abebe, Kimakwa & Redd, 2020).

The field of social entrepreneurship has been progressing slowly in recent years, and there is a need to better understand the nuances of a social entrepreneur's profile. Research has focused on comparing social entrepreneurs to commercial entrepreneurs but has failed to capture the unique profile of social entrepreneurs (Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn, 2016; Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada, 2018). Understanding these differences can help expand theoretical and empirical knowledge of the motivations of social entrepreneurs, providing a better understanding of their actions.

The studies noted that the understanding of how pro-social characteristics influence the acquisition of resources is still limited (Abebe, Kimakwa & Redd, 2020), as well as their influence on entrepreneurial intention (Sotiropoulou, Papadimitriou & Maroudas, 2021). This research aims to address the question: How does the literature depict the social entrepreneur profile? The main objective of this research is to analyze the social entrepreneur's profile as discussed in the literature. To achieve this, a literature review was conducted aiming to answer the following questions: a) What are the conceptual choices and theoretical schools regarding social entrepreneurship? b) In which contexts and countries have these studies been conducted, and what kinds of organizations were involved? c) How have the studies depicted or characterized social entrepreneurs?

The discussion proposed in this study aims to help researchers understand the social entrepreneur profile and identify their main characteristics. Additionally, this discussion is expected to provide insights for comprehending social entrepreneurship in both entrepreneurial practice and field development. Lastly, a research agenda is presented for future studies based on the analysis of the articles collected for this literature review.

Therefore, this article is structured as follows. First, we make an introduction of the theme and the objective of this study. Second, we present the methodological aspects of conducting the literature review. Third, it presents the results of the data analysis and fourth is the discussion of the data, as well as the presentation of the research agenda.

## **2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted through a qualitative research of Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on protocols and previous studies (Flink, 2019; Paul, Khatri, and Dugal, 2023). Aiming for methodological transparency, the following paragraphs describe the step-by-step process leading to the final definition of the selected sample in a manner consistent with the proposition of this research.

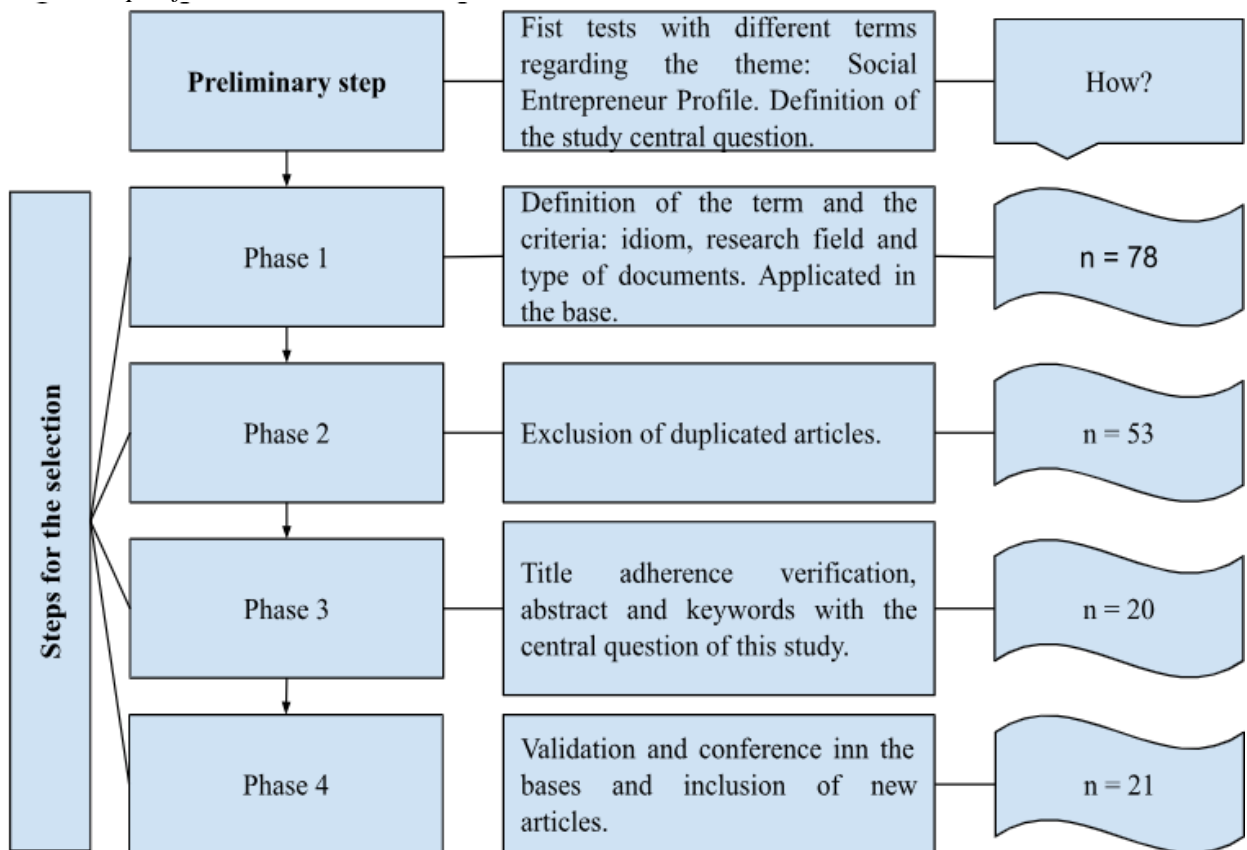
The first step was defining the study theme: Profile of the Social Entrepreneur, as well as the databases: Web of Science and Scopus, as they are references in the management field guiding this study and are international databases (Gouvêa et al., 2022).

Based on the first pilot tests in the databases for adequacy and coherence with the theme and area, the following criteria were defined: terms ("social entrepren\*" AND profile), research areas according to each database (WOS: business economics; Scopus: business, management, and accounting), language (English, Portuguese, and Spanish), and document types (articles and review articles). Additionally, it was decided not to apply a publication time limit for the articles, according to the results of the pilot tests.

In the selection stage, 78 articles were selected by applying the outlined criteria. After analysis, 25 duplicate articles were identified. The second phase of the research involved a preliminary analysis of the adherence of the article abstracts to the theme and the central question of this research (RQ1): How has the literature depicted the profile of the social entrepreneur?

After the adherence evaluation, 20 articles were selected; this was the first search in the databases conducted in May 2024. Following this second phase, a new search was conducted in the databases to validate and consolidate the sample, resulting in the identification and selection of one more article relevant to the theme for review.

Figure 1  
Steps of the SLR



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024)

In total, this study includes 21 articles that meet the presented criteria, finalized in July 2024. Additionally, the article is based on Paul, Khatri, and Dugal (2023), which supported the design of the presentation of results and analysis of the articles to achieve the main objective (RQ1) of this study, which is guided by an analysis of conceptual, typification, and contextual approaches. Thus, the following specific guiding questions for the analysis were defined: (RQ2): What are the conceptual choices and theoretical schools regarding social entrepreneurship?; (RQ3): In what contexts, countries, and types of organizations are these studies being applied?; (RQ4): How have these studies characterized or typified social entrepreneurs?

### 3 DATA RESULTS

This study involved the systematic analysis of 21 documents that explored, to a greater or lesser extent, the profile of the social entrepreneur. Initially, we describe our sample based on key concepts for social entrepreneurship, orientation of social entrepreneurial activity, context, and the types of organizations that were explored, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1  
*Description of the sample*

ID	Author (s)	Key Concepts for Social Entrepreneurship	Orientation/ context	Types of organizations
1	Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn (2016)	Use the broad definition of social entrepreneurship, addressing individuals, organizations, and initiatives oriented towards a social objective.	Morals and ethics of social entrepreneurs disseminated in literature and media. / Belgium and the Netherlands	Social Entrepreneurs
2	Bernardino & Santos (2016)	Social entrepreneurs have skills and behaviors similar to economic entrepreneurs. However, they are oriented towards a social mission aimed at creating innovative solutions for a problem faced by society or the community.	Traits of social entrepreneurs and the choice of funding from the CF platform in Portugal / Portugal	Entrepreneurs responsible for the creation of non-governmental companies, involved in social and economic projects, and individuals who worked in the business, public, and non-profit sectors.
3	DiVito & Bohnsack (2017)	The social entrepreneur is oriented towards a mission that seeks to create social wealth with little or no economic resources.	Profiles of sustainable entrepreneurs and decision-making / Netherlands/United Kingdom/France/Germany and Belgium	Companies in the sustainable fashion sector
4	Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada (2018)	Social enterprises, in addition to mobilizing resources and generating jobs, respond to social problems that are generally ignored by institutions.	Analyze the profile of social entrepreneurs / Comparative study of underdeveloped, developed, and emerging regions.	Secondary data from Social Entrepreneurs who participated in the GEM 2015 Project
5	Pangriya (2019)	Social enterprises are organizations that aim for sustainability and are oriented towards fulfilling a social mission.	Characterize the profile of social entrepreneurs and motivational factors.	Secondary data from eight social enterprises participating in the Yunes Center and Yunus Business Conference in 2018
6	Abebe,	Social entrepreneurs aim to solve social,	Create a typology of	81 social

	Kimakwa & Redd (2020)	environmental, and economic challenges using an innovative approach by embracing the dual logic of social mission and generation of economic value.	the profile of social entrepreneurs. / USA	entrepreneurs from social impact companies and social businesses
7	Onalan, Ersoy & Magda (2020)	Social entrepreneurs aim to generate collective benefits	Examining the profile of entrepreneurs in Türkiye concerning motivational persistence and intolerance to uncertainty / Türkiye	268 interviews from the commercial entrepreneurship, strategic entrepreneurship, and social entrepreneurship sectors
8	Griffin-El (2021)	Social entrepreneurs are compelled to find solutions to make a positive impact, integrating information and promoting the connection and flow of information.	Understanding how social entrepreneurs' compassion helps them mobilize resources for action / Cape Town, South Africa	Case study with social enterprises located in the Western Cape, Southern Africa.
9	Sotiropoulou; Papadimitriou & Maroudas, (2021).	Social Entrepreneurship represents a paradigm shift. One that promotes socially innovative business models to address socioeconomic problems in different contexts around the world.	Education for Social Entrepreneurship with a focus on training skills at different academic levels.	Courses aimed at training skills with a focus on Social Entrepreneurship.
10	Mir Shahid & Alarifi (2021)	They bring different definitions and visions of social entrepreneurs: idealistic vs. pragmatist, types of entrepreneurs based on their characteristics such as motivation, personal attributes, and entrepreneurial traits. Throughout this research, scholars bring aspects of motivation and involvement to the discussion of entrepreneur behavior, which are used in the questionnaire and discussions. With this, it suggests a new typology of four homogeneous groups of social actors based on the values held, pertinent to Greek social entrepreneurship: conservative, conventional, prudent, and pretentious.	They identify the personal values of social entrepreneurs in Greece to determine the motivational bases and influences of values on their involvement in the business.	Active social entrepreneurs from social cooperative companies registered in the National Register (GNR) of the Greek social economy.
11	Lladós-Masllórens & Ruiz-Dotras (2021)	The term “Social Entrepreneur” described in the article identifies people who seek innovations to solve social issues, prioritizing social impact over financial gain. These individuals are more likely to dedicate themselves to social entrepreneurship, valuing work-life balance and flexibility to meet family demands.	They examined the financial and numerical skills of women intending to undertake, one of the hypotheses of intention and motivation to undertake to be	University women and faculty members with entrepreneurial intentions. Questionnaires were administered at a Spanish university with

			involved with social entrepreneurship in Spain.	entirely online courses.
12	Schachter (2022)	Based on the perspectives adopted by the author, she determines that Social Entrepreneurship transcends the figure of entrepreneurs, also encompassing employees or consultants who redirect organizational resources to positively impact social issues. This implies that, according to studies, they are individuals engaged in the dynamics of new companies that aim for significant transformations through innovative and disruptive ideas, exemplified by the role of unions and women's clubs in facing social challenges.	Critical view of Canonical Entrepreneurship sought to understand the role of women, race, and class in the US Progressive Era. Specifically, those who led movements, organizational creation, and innovation, which can be studied as part of social entrepreneurship.	Portrait of women social entrepreneurs.
13	Lozano, Feldman & Guerra (2023)	Social enterprises are recognized for being aimed at actions that benefit the general interest or common good, providing innovative tools for economic and human development. These companies have three basic elements: social purpose, transformative innovation, and a sustainable business model. They are social entrepreneurs, who through business development are agents of change in the social, environmental, and economic spheres.	Leadership profile and characteristics of Peruvian entrepreneurs, who created companies with a socio-environmental focus. They focus on the challenges of starting a business, especially in Latin America.	Founders of socio-environmental enterprises in Peru, with recognition legitimized by awards.
14	Reis et al. (2024)	Social entrepreneurship is presented as a driver of society by reducing poverty and unemployment through business opportunities. In this same sense, entrepreneurship for refugees is defined as it is a driver of the integration of refugees in the host country and the development of entrepreneurial skills.	Understand theoretical-empirical gaps through a systematic literature review.	Refugee entrepreneurship
15	Bargsted et al. (2013)	'Social entrepreneurship encompasses the activities and processes undertaken to discover, define, and exploit opportunities to enhance social value by creating new ventures or innovatively managing existing organizations' (Zahra et al. 2009, p. 522).	Market/Chile	Social Entrepreneurs, volunteers, philanthropists, and commercial entrepreneurs
16	Nicolopoulou (2014)	Discusses the definition of social entrepreneurship as an innovative activity with a social objective, whether in the for-profit sector, the corporate social responsibility (CSR) sector, or the non-profit sector.	N/A	N/A

17	Othman & Wahid (2014)	“Social entrepreneurship is a series of organizational activities in three key categories: sociality, innovation, and market orientation” (Nicholls & Cho, 2008).	Develop skills in students to become social entrepreneurs /Malaysia	Institutions of higher learning participating in the Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) program.
18	Parente, Lopes & Marcos (2014)	Used the Emergence of the Social Enterprises in Europe (EMES) definition of social entrepreneurship, through the lens of social enterprises which are private organizations that provide products and services for the explicit benefit of the community.	Organization for-profit/Portugal	Third Sector organizations
19	Sastre-Castillo, Peris-Ortiz & Danvila-Del Valle (2015)	Social entrepreneurs are those who seek to solve social problems by creating opportunities that generate sustainable social value, integrating non-profit organizations, companies, and government entities (Guzmán & Trujillo, 2008).	Unidentified orientation/Spain	Workers and students between 18 and 55 years old.
20	Tigu et al. (2015)	Social entrepreneurs as agents of change in the social sector who play a fundamental role in creating and sustaining social value, differentiating themselves from commercial entrepreneurs by adopting a mission to create and maintain social value, rather than private value (Dees, 2001).	For-profit/Romanian	Romanian social entrepreneurs.
21	López (2024)	As it is a literature review, the author addresses different concepts of social entrepreneurship, schools and theories, models, and the contemporary profile of the social entrepreneur in the study. It concludes that there are some convergences in the studies: social element and orientation towards innovation and opportunities with a focus on results that lead to social changes. In other words, they seek a solution to a problem or need in society.	Systematic literature review with conceptual, theoretical, and study trend guidance.	Reviews articles from both international databases and indexers, and with a Hispanic and Latin American focus.

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**Source:** Research data (2024).

The studies in Table 1 aimed to identify the differences between social and commercial entrepreneurs (Bargsted et al., 2013; Sastre-Castillo, Peris-Ortiz & Danvila-Del Valle, 2015; Friffin, 2021). However, these studies have not fully captured the unique profiles of social entrepreneurs, resulting in a significant delay in the field (Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn, 2016; Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada, 2018). Understanding these differences will not only contribute to significant social changes but also help in comprehending the motivations behind social entrepreneurs' actions. This understanding can lead to innovative practices, inspire new business models, and promote collaboration between sectors.

Researchers have been using various approaches to clarify the definition of social entrepreneurship (Sastre-Castillo, Peris-Ortiz & Danvila-Del Valle, 2015), organizational types (Abebe, Kimakwa & Redd, 2020), organizational profiles (Parente, Lopes & Marcos, 2014), and market orientation for organizations (DiVito & Bohnsack, 2017; Dwivedi, Weerawardena, 2017).



These are specific issues that have not been well established in the field, particularly due to the focus on European and North American contexts.

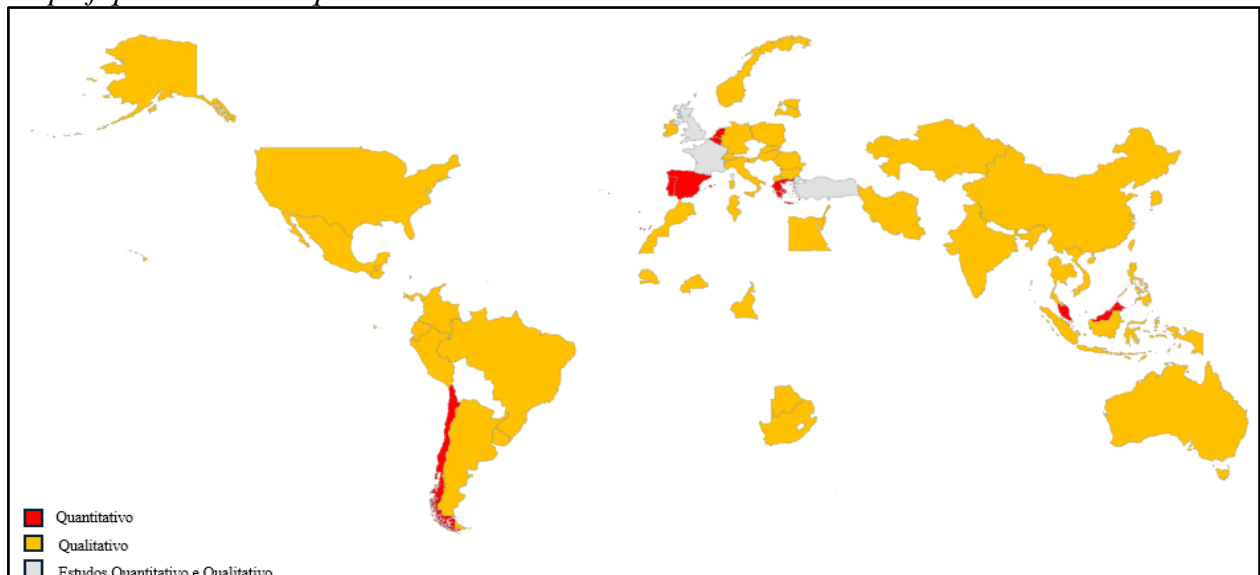
Studies that explore other regions' contexts can broaden the comprehension of the social profile and help to understand the impact of social entrepreneurship on economic development (Pangriya, 2019). In this sense, the study of Lozano, Feldman & Guerra (2023) contributes to the conceptual development of the definition of social entrepreneur in bringing an intercultural approach. Such an approach will also help in the comprehension of entrepreneurs and their different stakeholders.

Regarding the methodology used to observe the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship profiles, researchers have opted for qualitative studies such as case studies, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data from the speeches of entrepreneurs in congresses, media, and magazines (Pangriya, 2019; Abebe, Kimakwa & Redd, 2020; Onalan, Ersoy & Magda, 2021; Griffin-El, 2021). Additionally, they have used bibliographies of female social entrepreneurs based on documents from the Progressive Era in the United States (Schachter, 2022), quantitative studies involving factor analysis and regression using secondary data from the GEM or surveys (Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn, 2016; Bernardino & Santos, 2016; Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada, 2018), and mixed approaches (quantitative and qualitative) that aimed to address the social entrepreneurial profile both through interviews with social entrepreneurs and through predominant entrepreneurial profile characteristics (DiVito & Bohnsack, 2017).

Figure 2 shows the relation between countries and the approach used. As demonstrated in the map the qualitative approach has predominated more, especially in the United States, United Kingdom, India, China, and Brazil. On the other hand, the quantitative approach predominated in Chile, Spain, Portugal, and Greece.

Figure 2

*Map of qualitative and quantitative studies*



**Source:** Research data (2024). Note. Qualitative: Countries are colored in orange (Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, México, United States, South Africa, Cameroon, Senegal, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Iran, China, South Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia, Hungary, Norway, Latvia, Estonia); Quantitative: Countries are colored in red (Chile, Spain, Portugal, Greece).

Netherlands, Greece, Malaysia); Mixed Approaches: Countries are colored in grey color (Turkey, France, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland).

Furthermore, there are controversies regarding the definition of the concept of social entrepreneurship. In different studies, the concept is usually linked to what exists in the traditional entrepreneurship literature (Saifan, 2012). This can be explained by the abundance of concepts and definitions of social entrepreneurship in the literature, as well as the lack of consensus on the conceptualization and clear and universal definition of the field (Bull, 2018; Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada, 2018; Barki, Rodrigues & Comini, 2020), which has also been noted in some studies of the social entrepreneur profile conducted for this research (Pangriya, 2019; Sotiropoulou; Papadimitriou & Maroudas, 2021; López, 2024).

We observed a theoretical conflict between the social entrepreneur profile and the organization's structure/routine, as researchers tended to link the concept of the social entrepreneur to the type of social organization (social enterprise, social impact business, base of the pyramid businesses, third sector) (Tigu et al., 2015; Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada, 2018; Pangriya, 2019), to their potential impact (Bernardino & Santos, 2016; Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada, 2018), and their pro-social motivations, whether they are hybrid entrepreneurs (social entrepreneur), philanthropic, market-oriented, sustainable entrepreneurs (Bargsted et al., 2013; DiVito & Bohnsack, 2017).

Table 2 illustrates the schools and theories of social entrepreneurship that the authors used to address the social entrepreneur profile.

Table 2  
*Theoretical approach*

Theoretical approaches	Authors
European theory of social entrepreneurship	Nicolopoulou (2014); Parente, Lopes & Marcos (2014); Tigu et al. (2015); Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada (2018); Onalan, Ersoy & Magda (2020); Sotiropoulou; Papadimitrio & Maroudas, (2021).
Anglo-American Theory of Social Entrepreneurship	Bargsted et al. (2013); Othman & Wahid (2014); Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn (2016); Bernardino & Santos (2016); DiVito & Bohnsack (2017); Pangriya (2019); Abebe, Kimakwa & Redd (2020); Griffin-El (2021); Lladós-Masllorens & Ruiz-Dotras (2021); Lozano, Feldman & Guerra (2023).
European and Anglo-American Theory	Shahid & Alarifi (2021); Schachter (2022).
Latin-American Theories	Sastre-Castillo, Peris-Ortiz & Danvila-Del Valle (2015); López (2024).

**Fonte:** Research data (2024).

Apart from focusing on theoretical schools from the USA and Europe, some studies point out theoretical and empirical gaps, calling attention to more studies in emerging countries that help strengthen and develop the social entrepreneurship ecosystem, such as in Latin America (Bargsted et al., 2013; Lozano, Feldman & Guerra, 2023). There are also studies that, although not mentioning gaps, chose theoretical paths based on previous Latin American studies (López, 2024).

Some studies have critically addressed canonical studies of social entrepreneurship, arguing that these are still limiting in building comprehensive and inclusive profiles and seek to explore intersectionality and how different identities influence the profile of social entrepreneurs in aspects such as gender, race, and class (Llados-Masllorens & Ruiz-Dotras, 2021; Schachter, 2022). For example, Schachter's study (2022) expands on the class background, showing the diversity of women who have created organizations to serve marginalized populations and the obstacles they face due to class or race.

On the other hand, Llados-Masllorens & Ruiz-Dotras' study (2021) sought to interrelate women's entrepreneurship with financial skills, proposed hypotheses where they tested different types of motivation that lead to different profiles in potential entrepreneurs and identified personal characteristics such as the past experiences of the interviewees. In addition, among the hypotheses, they sought to identify if social entrepreneurship is correlated with complex cognitive skills, such as financial ones, but found no direct relationship between these variables (Llados-Masllorens & Ruiz-Dotras, 2021).

It can be concluded that for these authors, the profile of the social entrepreneur develops in an integrated manner through the individual's personal profile and can be supported by the academic environment through teaching focused on skills for social entrepreneurs. (Sotiropoulou; Papadimitrio & Maroudas, 2021).

Mir Shahid and Alarifi (2021) understand Education for Social Entrepreneurship as a process of training and empowerment, encouragement, adaptation, and awareness that can drive creation and innovation for SE. The study highlights the importance of values in understanding the motives and orientation of the actors concerning organizational behavior and introduces new discussions on how personal values can differentiate the involvement and activity of these members in social entrepreneurship.

Regarding the profile, we observe that social entrepreneurs have common characteristics with traditional entrepreneurs (tendency to take risks, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and career anchor of autonomy) (Bargsted et al., 2013; DiVito & Bohnsack, 2017), but they have some profile differences in orientation, motivation, and entrepreneurial activities, which we will discuss in the following topic.

## 4 DISCUSSIONS

To discuss the results found Table 3 presents the characteristics of the social entrepreneur's profile, in common with the findings of the reviewed authors. The results demonstrate the characteristics of vision, search for opportunities, innovation, social motivation, and empathy as fundamental to the profile of social entrepreneurs.

Table 3  
*Social entrepreneur characteristics according to the literature analyzed.*

Social entrepreneur characteristics	Authors
Social entrepreneurs have self-direction or self-efficacy	Bargsted et al. (2013); Llados-Masllorens & Ruiz-Dotras (2021)
They are oriented toward entrepreneurship and have a social, sustainable, and long-term vision.	Bargsted et al. (2013); Othman & Wahid (2014); Sastre-Castillo, Peris-Ortiz & Danvila-Del Valle (2015); López (2024).

They are benevolent, empathetic, and compassionate.	Bargsted et al. (2013); Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn (2016); Pangriya (2019); Griffin-El (2021).
They have social motivation and an extreme passion focused on the cause or problem.	Bargsted et al. (2013); Othman & Wahid (2014); Abebe, Kimakwa & Redd (2020); Sotiropoulou; Papadimitrio & Maroudas, (2021); Lozano, Feldman & Guerra (2023); López (2024).
Career Identity.	Bargsted et al. (2013)
They are visionary and look for opportunities.	Bargsted et al. (2013); Nicolopoulou (2014); Othman & Wahid (2014); Tigu et al. (2015); Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn (2016); Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada (2018); Griffin-El (2021); Shahid & Alarifi (2021); Schachter (2022); López (2024).
Develop collaborative leadership.	Othman & Wahid (2014); Shahid & Alarifi (2021).
Your motivation is self-transcendence.	Sastre-Castillo, Peris-Ortiz & Danvila-Del Valle (2015); Pangriya (2019).
Have previous experience in the public or private sector.	Tigu et al. (2015); Pangriya (2019); Abebe, Kimakwa & Redd (2020); Reis et al. (2024).
Not afraid of failure.	Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn (2016).
They are extroverted and have the ability to form and maintain partnerships.	Othman & Wahid (2014); Bernardino & Santos (2016); Schachter (2022); Reis et al. (2024).
They are innovative and creative.	Bernardino & Santos (2016); DiVito & Bohnsack (2017); Pangriya (2019); Sotiropoulou; Papadimitrio & Maroudas, (2021); Schachter (2022); Lozano, Feldman & Guerra (2023); López (2024).
Risk-taking.	DiVito & Bohnsack (2017); López (2024).
They are persistent.	Onalan, Ersoy & Magda (2020)
They use integrative thinking to solve problems	Griffin-El (2021)
They are individuals motivated to seek new knowledge, understand market routes and business models, as well as financial skills	Shahid & Alarifi (2021); Lladós-Masllorens & Ruiz-Dotras (2021); López (2024).
They are resilient individuals	Reis et al. (2024).

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**Source:** Research data (2024)

Johannisson (2018) argued that entrepreneurs are committed to a social cause, a characteristic supported by studies from Bargsted et al. (2013); Othman and Wahid (2014), Abebe, Kimakwa, and Redd (2020), Sotiropoulou, Papadimitrio, and Maroudas (2021), Lozano, Feldman, and Guerra (2023), and López (2024). This characteristic can be explained by empathy, as Maíř and Noboa (2006) suggested that social entrepreneurs have an empathetic trait that sets them apart, allowing them to visualize problems and place themselves in others' shoes. The traits of empathy and compassion are also corroborated in these studies.

Upon analyzing the results of the studies, it becomes evident that it is the empathetic ability of entrepreneurs that enables them to identify social problems. This ability often inspires them to implement changes in their environment, whether through the creation of standards and laws or through resource mobilization (Johannisson, 2018; Griffin-El, 2021). In general, the findings of the studies prove that empathy is a vital characteristic for the profile of a social entrepreneur (Pangriya, 2019), as it leads them to commit to social causes (Abebe, Kimakwa & Redd, 2020) and to act proactively in achieving their goals (DiVito, Bohnsack, 2017).

However, being empathetic and compassionate is not the only characteristic that drives social entrepreneurs to invest in and lead social enterprises. Some studies (Sastre-Castillo, Peris-Ortiz & Danvila-Del Valle, 2015; Pangriya, 2019) highlighted the factor of self-transcendence, indicating that social entrepreneurs seek motivation that goes beyond financial profit. They aspire to feel that they have positively contributed to society and social well-being.

In some cases, social entrepreneurs are so integrated into the community and experience problems daily that the motivation to start a social enterprise naturally arises because of their context and the local demographics. For example, Sotiropoulou, Papadimitrio, and Maroudas (2021) delve into this issue by addressing the influence of personal and demographic factors on the profile of the social entrepreneur and their characteristics. These factors may be one of the explanations for the fragmentation of the concept in the field of social entrepreneurship.

Previous work experience is also mentioned by the authors, although Onalan, Ersoy & Magda (2020) did not find this factor in their studies. Still, Nicolás, Rubio & Fernández-Laviada (2018) found that in developed and emerging countries, social entrepreneurs tend to be individuals seeking information, usually older and educated. This finding is consistent with the characteristic of seeking information and knowledge in the studies of Shahid and Alarifi (2021); Lladós-Masllorens and Ruiz-Dotras (2021); López (2024). However, in developing countries, it is younger individuals who start social enterprises, demonstrating that depending on the context of the social entrepreneur, this characteristic may or may not be present.

In the case of refugee entrepreneurs, as addressed in the study by Reis et al. (2024), the antecedents, or the factors that led to the impulse, are constraints that prevent refugees from accessing the conventional job market, and attraction (entrepreneurial ambitions and the personal desire for refugee integration). In the case of refugee entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurship is seen as a way to overcome language barriers and workplace discrimination, with social entrepreneurship being a form of survival, economic self-sufficiency, and self-empowerment (Reis et al., 2024).

These findings demonstrate that the profile of the social entrepreneur may be even more complex than what is commonly found in the field since the motivations of social entrepreneurs do not always converge toward seizing an opportunity or an entrepreneurial attitude. Indeed, one of the findings of Bacq, Hartog, and Hoogendoorn (2016) demonstrates that social entrepreneurs exhibit a resistance to entrepreneurial attitude and commitment. For example, Abebe, Kimakwa, and Redd (2020) present four types of social entrepreneur profiles: 1) Seasoned Champions, 2) Corporate Veterans, 3) Local Pragmatists, and 4) Social Activists, whose motivations and orientations differ from each other.

For example, Seasoned Champions and Corporate Veterans are individuals with extensive careers and experience in public and private sectors, whose motivation is self-transcendence and the desire to contribute to the well-being of society in their own way. Due to their previous experience, they find it easier to form partnerships and gain institutional support for their idea. On the other hand, Local Pragmatists and Social Activists are typically people with strong passions

and oriented towards a social cause, intrinsically involved in their community and its existing problems. For these profiles, social entrepreneurship is not a cause, but a natural consequence.

Even though the study endeavored to comprehend the unique profile of social entrepreneurs, we notice that some entrepreneurial characteristics are similar to traditional/commercial entrepreneurs. For example, opportunity visualization, risk-taking, self-efficiency, and leadership. However, social entrepreneurs have characteristics linked with philanthropy as well, such as the desire to help others.

Through the analysis of the articles, it is possible to see that social entrepreneurs have an entrepreneur orientation, being motivated by the chance of meeting or solving a social problem. Social entrepreneurs visualize opportunities differently, often focusing on a social problem or a market failure that significantly affects the community. As demonstrated in the studies the capability of being empathic and compassionate makes social entrepreneurs leverage resources to achieve the well-being of others, leaving apart their desires to assist social causes and problem solutions.

Empathy is a vital characteristic that distinguishes social entrepreneurs, since it is this characteristic that makes them feel uncomfortable and at the same time encourages them to solve the problem. However, as demonstrated in the studies, empathy is sufficient to explain why social entrepreneurs become what they are. In other studies, opportunity visualization is a crucial characteristic that helps to explain in part why they desire to set up a social enterprise, even with the political, governmental, and demographic odds and the constraint of resources faced by social entrepreneurs in emergent contexts.

Notwithstanding, this study proposes that other studies about social entrepreneurs' profiles go a step forward from the "empathy" and "opportunity" characteristics. This study also advances the discussion about the desire and motivation of social entrepreneurs to assist society with their knowledge and previous work experience in the public and private sectors. Such a characteristic is cited in the literature as self-transcendence, translated as the desire to leave a legacy for society. Therefore, the social entrepreneur profile cannot be defined in a set of nouns such as "empathy" and "opportunity". Social entrepreneur, as shown in this study, are a set of context factors of their history that motivate them to provide well-being.

This study aims to contribute to the field of social entrepreneurship by describing the unique characteristics of social entrepreneurs and highlighting what sets them apart from traditional entrepreneurs. Additionally, it seeks to understand the motivations behind why individuals choose to become social entrepreneurs and aims to explore other important traits such as resilience. However, it is noted that further studies on the entrepreneurial profile are needed to capture these additional characteristics.

#### **4.1 Research Agenda for Future Research**

The research suggests that future studies should focus on understanding the profile of social entrepreneurs more comprehensively. Bacq, Hartog, and Hoogendoorn (2016) emphasize the need to go beyond the portrayal of social entrepreneurs in the media. Therefore, it is recommended that future research consider additional factors to understand the ethical principles and core values that influence the actions and decisions of social entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, there is limited information available regarding how the profile of social entrepreneurs influences their attitudes toward seeking financial support. A study by Bernardino and Santos (2016) initiates this discussion with a focus on financial institutions in Portugal. This

prompts the proposal for new research in various contexts, such as identifying the characteristics of social entrepreneurs in Brazil that drive them to seek financial assistance.

In addition to external factors, internal factors such as cognitive processes and personal environments should be considered when analyzing the profiles of social entrepreneurs. It is also indicated that the Search for studying different contexts and global regions in a fragmented or restricted way can be one of the limitations of analytical generalization and development of comprehensive theoretical models, which highlight the need for correlating studies and the elaboration of multilevel abstractions.

Given that social entrepreneurs often face uncertainty, the ability to recover quickly and adapt to adversity, known as resilience, has been identified as a crucial characteristic in the study by Reis et al. (2024). It is recommended that further studies explore whether resilience is a dominant trait among refugee entrepreneurs and whether it is also prevalent in the profile of social entrepreneurs. Additionally, more research is needed to clarify how social entrepreneurs deal with failure.

It is recommended that future researchers explore the support networks (family, community, institutions) that social entrepreneurs utilize to overcome challenges and how these networks influence their resilience. Comparing social entrepreneurs in distinct cultural contexts will help understand how culture impacts resilience strategies. Identifying protective factors that enhance resilience, self-efficacy, social support, coping capabilities, and adaptive changes may assist in clarifying crucial traits in social entrepreneurs to confront obstacles with determination and creativity, innovating solutions to cope with challenges.

Regarding entrepreneurial vision, we recognize the "perceived need" approach. Social entrepreneurs have a strong focus on the problem or cause (Abebe, Kimakwa & Redd, 2020). However, according to Gawell (2012), opportunity is a means that entrepreneurs use to accomplish a goal, and in some cases, what the social entrepreneur perceives is a need. In this regard, we suggest that recent studies explore the theme of "perceived need" integrated into the profile of the social entrepreneur to aid in understanding how social entrepreneurs can align their profiles, skills, and strategies with the genuine needs of the communities they aim to serve.

Concerning entrepreneurial education, we propose that studies delve into how entrepreneurial education can help develop concepts and typologies and enable the acquisition of vital skills, such as leadership, problem-solving, decision-making, resource management, and negotiation skills in young social entrepreneurs. Furthermore, we encourage studies that contribute to outlining future steps for public policies and educational programs, facilitating social entrepreneurs to establish connections with other entrepreneurs, mentors, investors, and partners.

Concerning the field of entrepreneurship, a discussion is suggested about how to arrive at a comprehensive and abstract concept for the field. Furthermore, we point to the need for studies that focus on and explore the profile of social entrepreneurs in Brazil. To date, only one quantitative study has globally addressed the profile of social entrepreneurs in the country. Studying the social entrepreneur profile not only provides crucial insights into the personal and professional development of these leaders but also contributes to the progress and sustainability of the social initiatives they lead.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

This study aimed to analyze the characteristics of social entrepreneurs discussed in the literature. The results show that there is a diversity of approaches and definitions of social

entrepreneurs, leading to theoretical conflicts between their profiles and organizational structure. Despite these differences, four main characteristics were identified: 1) vision and opportunity seeking, 2) innovation, 3) social motivation, and 4) empathy. These traits distinguish social entrepreneurs from traditional ones and include empathy, social vision, innovation, motivation for social causes, and the pursuit of opportunities.

We found that social entrepreneurs not only identify complex social problems but are also motivated to seek solutions that go beyond financial profit, aiming to contribute positively to society's well-being. However, the diverse profiles and paths of social entrepreneurs highlight the complexity of the field, suggesting the need for specific policies and support to recognize and enhance their unique capabilities. Furthermore, future studies should explore other dimensions, such as resilience and specific demographic contexts, for a more complete and inclusive understanding of social entrepreneurship.

Empathy and self-transcendence were identified as central characteristics that enable social entrepreneurs to identify and solve complex social problems. Our results revealed that the challenges faced by social entrepreneurs, such as political, governmental, and resource barriers, require a more holistic approach to understanding their profile, going beyond the isolated characteristics of empathy and vision.

In conclusion, analyzing the profile of social entrepreneurs not only reveals their characteristics but also highlights the need for policies and institutional support that recognize and promote such distinctive qualities to create a broader and more sustainable social impact. Our findings can contribute to expanding the theoretical and empirical field regarding the profile of social entrepreneurs and aid in new discussions about the motivations of social entrepreneurs and additionally, can also provide a conceptualization of the social entrepreneur profile, based on their unique traits and skills, which can help researchers to understand not just their profile, but also how they think and the influence of such traits on their entrepreneurial intention. This may impact in new research in the field, providing a better comprehension of the action and behaviour of social entrepreneurs. As a contribution, we present a future research agenda to expand discussions about the profile of the social entrepreneur.

A limitation of our study was the difficulty in comparing results, as the studies analyzed differed in their definition of a social entrepreneur. We also encourage new empirical and theoretical studies to seek to understand and expand the definition and characteristics of social entrepreneurs, especially in emerging contexts.

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