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# Social Enterprises in Developing Countries: Bibliometric Analysis and Trends\*

[English Version]

Empresas sociales de países en desarrollo:  
análisis bibliométrico y tendencia

Empresas sociais nos países em desenvolvimento:  
análise bibliométrica e tendências

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**Colombia**

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## Abstract

**Objective:** This article provides a bibliographic analysis and review of trends on the subject of social enterprises in developing countries. The number of publications per year, countries, authors, journals and universities are taken into account. **Methodology:** Bibliometric techniques and tools were used: R, Tree of Science and a network analysis, which classifies the consulted material into three sections with a similarity in the image of a tree; where the root corresponds to classic documents, the trunk to structural documents and the leaves to emerging sub areas or trends. **Results:** The outcomes show three sub areas highlighted for future research on social enterprises: development, evolution, limitations of social enterprises, obtaining financial resources, organizational form and corporate social responsibility.

**Keywords:** social enterprises; social economy; solidarity economy.

## Resumen

**Objetivo:** en este artículo se realiza un análisis bibliográfico y revisión de tendencias sobre la temática de empresas sociales de países en desarrollo. Se tienen en cuenta el número de publicaciones por año, países, autores, revistas y universidades. **Metodología:** se utilizaron técnicas y herramientas bibliométricas: R, Tree of Science y un análisis de red, que clasifica el material consultado en tres apartados con una similitud en la imagen de un árbol; donde la raíz se corresponde con documentos clásicos, el tronco con documentos estructurales y las hojas con subáreas emergentes o tendencias. **Resultados:** en los resultados se evidencian tres subáreas destacadas para futuras investigaciones de las Empresas Sociales: desarrollo, evolución, limitaciones de las empresas sociales, consecución de recursos financieros, forma organizacional y responsabilidad social empresarial.

**Palabras clave:** empresas sociales; economía social; economía solidaria

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** este artigo realiza uma análise bibliográfica e uma revisão de tendências sobre o tema das empresas sociais nos países em desenvolvimento. Leva em conta o número de publicações por ano, países, autores, jornais e universidades. **Metodologia:** foram utilizadas técnicas e ferramentas bibliométricas: R, Tree of Science e uma análise em rede, que classifica o material consultado em três seções com uma semelhança na imagem de uma árvore; onde a raiz corresponde aos documentos clássicos, o tronco aos documentos estruturais e as folhas às sub-áreas ou tendências emergentes. **Resultados:** os resultados mostram três sub-áreas destacadas para futuras pesquisas sobre empreendimentos sociais: desenvolvimento, evolução, limitações dos empreendimentos sociais, recursos financeiros, forma organizacional e responsabilidade social corporativa.

**Palavras-chave:** empresas sociais; economia social; economia solidária.

## Introduction

Social enterprise (SE) is a trend where companies have a positive environmental and/or social impact, generate economic benefit for stakeholders, and is particularly prevalent in developing countries. The rise of social enterprise is a new entrepreneurial form that combines financial resources with a focus on social values as the driving force behind economic growth. These values include honesty, transparency, social responsibility, democracy, equity, equality, concern for others, solidarity, associativity and mutual aid (Kruse, 2021). According to Bharti and Malik (2021), Social enterprise is expected to promote more equal economic growth and contribute to the development of developing countries. Lo anterior hace que se puedan desarrollar modelos de ES y se generen, así, nuevos emprendimientos. Esto relacionado, también con bases productivas y de consumo donde se practican además los valores de producción, consumo responsable y limpio, reciclaje, reparación, reutilización, renovación, o lo que comúnmente se denomina como economía circular; la cual implica compartir para generar valor agregado (Lekan et al., 2021).

This growing trend allows for the development of SE models and therefore create new ventures. In addition, social enterprise encompasses practices such as responsible and clean production, and circular economy principles like recycling, repair, and reuse. These collaborative models promote a sharing economy, which creates added value. (Lekan et al., 2021).

One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) seeks to reduce poverty, which is approached in many different ways around the world (Sodhi and Knuckles, 2021). This is in line with making conceptual changes in how we understand/view one another and promoting and caring for the rights of minority populations, an issue that must be addressed with utmost urgency around the world (Hossein, 2021; Li et al. 2021).

The idea of SEs has been researched for a long time, is ever-expanding and becoming more relevant every day. To examine the background of this research, different literature reviews were analyzed: a trend in research focused on the need to include companies in the technology sector that collaborate with social development for common benefit (Zambiazzi et al., 2018). Research based on the development characteristics of studied countries have shown differences in the profile of social entrepreneurs compared to non-social entrepreneurs in developing countries. (Nicolás et al., 2018). In addition, the construction cooperatives in the transport sector have been studied as a means of promoting local

development by improving mobility and aligning the economy and employment with cooperativism. (Méndez-Reyes, 2017).

Similarly, a study was consulted that analyzed how traditional capital companies should break economic inequality gaps through sponsorship in HE incorporation where employees and entrepreneurs should be socially empowered (Prinsloo, 2018). Furthermore, a study related to investors was analyzed, what they look for to put their SE resources in and how to attract capital that produces and provides the expectations of any investor (McWade, 2012).

The similarities between all these studies are that in developing countries, through social and collaborative work, SEs are considered major drivers of the economy not only through social leadership, but also the relationship between the State and private enterprises.

Despite Social enterprises (SEs) being private initiatives, through social and collective interventions, SEs enable people in social collectives to have equal opportunities to achieve development goals which have a positive impact on a specific area.

This article, which aims to fill a gap in knowledge, performs a literature review of Scopus database between 2000 and 2021, using the definition of social enterprise (SE) —as a non-profit company that uses its surpluses for reinvestment, benefiting less privileged communities and protecting the environment—. The objective of this analysis is to review the trends of SEs in developing countries by examining the number of publications per year, countries, authors, journals and universities. The aim is to understand the significance of the subject, its conceptual evolution, and how these companies promote economic development in territories, and other emerging issues.

The structure of the document is based on four sections, the first one refers to the methodology of research development where scientific mapping and network analysis are privileged. The second includes research findings of an analysis of publications by year, the countries and journals with the most publications, the most significant authors and universities in the subject, word concurrence, author collaboration and network analysis. The third considers the conclusions of the research in terms of the variables under study, and the fourth provides the agenda for future research.

## Methodology

The methodology of this research is made visible in two ways: the first is related to the bibliometric analysis or scientific mapping that takes documents from the

Scopus database. The second is based on a network analysis, where the most relevant documents from the perspective of SEs were identified and the most relevant research on this topic was examined. Details are described below.

## Scientific Mapping

For this analysis, the research focused on five bibliometrics criteria proposed by Zupic and Čater (2015): citations, word co-occurrence, co-citations, co-authorships, and bibliographic coupling analysis. Scopus database was chosen for its wide range of journals and documents, as well as its relevance to the research topic (Echchakoui, 2020) and its reputation as one of the most respected databases globally (Bar-Ilan, 2008; Zhu & Liu, 2020).

**Table 1.** Search benchmark.

<b>Database</b>	Scopus
<b>Query range</b>	2000 – 2021
<b>Consultation date</b>	26-09-2021
<b>Material type</b>	All
<b>Journal Classification</b>	All
<b>Search fields</b>	Article title, abstract, keywords
<b>Search terms</b>	("social enterprise") and ("developing countries" or "economic development")
<b>Results</b>	244

The bibliographic exploration yielded 244 results in Scopus. The Bibliometrix tool was used for the analysis, which offers multiple functionalities and is widely used and validated by other researchers (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Acevedo et al., 2020; Aria et al., 2020; Bond et al., 2019; Demiroz & Haase, 2019; Duque et al., 2020a; Duque et al., 2021c; Tani et al., 2018).

## Network Analysis

The documents extracted from Scopus were processed through R software to obtain the bibliographic references and construct the citation network. The graph-theoretic prototype was used, a technique that allows gathering information on the typology and characteristics of the network, as well as the records that constitute it (Wallis, 2007; Yang et al., 2016).

Subsequently, three bibliometric indicators were assessed: “indegree”, “Outdegree” and “betweenness” (Wallis, 2007). The first is related to the number of times a document has been cited by other people, the second with the number of times others are cited (Wallis, 2007); which corresponds to the network connections, and the third to the intermediation or center of the network (Freeman, 1977). This last index reveals when the document is referenced by others, and in turn, this references other authors (Zhang & Luo, 2017).

In short, it is the area-specific knowledge network made up of all the bibliographic materials extracted from Scopus with their respective references, which led to the involvement of works from various sources. This study of networks, with its respective map of co-citations, makes it possible to represent the area of specific knowledge related to the research object, which favors the typification of their sub-areas or currents of inquiry (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2017; Zuschke, 2020). To graphically represent the knowledge network on social enterprises, the Gephi tool addressed by Bastian et al. (2009) was used.

The indegree, outdegree and betweenness indices are measured for each of the documents on the network, which facilitate the generation of categories that are used in the metaphorical image of the tree (Robledo et al., 2014; Valencia et al., 2020). Three categories of analysis were born from this analogy. The roots, known as high “indegree”, which support the search results of classic documents, and serve as a theoretical reference on the subject. More specifically, the roots are related to publications that are cited, but that do not cite others (Wallis, 2007). Then, the trunk of the metaphorical image becomes visible, known as high “betweenness”, where the records that are cited are located, but are also cited by other people (Zhang & Luo, 2017). Here, research from a structural plane perspective means a blending between classic and contemporary studies. Finally, there is the metaphorical image of the leaves (high “outdegree”), focused on modern documents, which refer to the others (Wallis, 2007). These studies present novel trends which are pinpointed to an area, or similarly give us perspective, which integrate the emerging research perspectives. This methodological procedure has been used and validated in previous research (Buitrago et al., 2020; Clavijo-Tapia et al., 2021; Duque *et al*[/ i], 2021a; Duque et al., 2021b; Duque



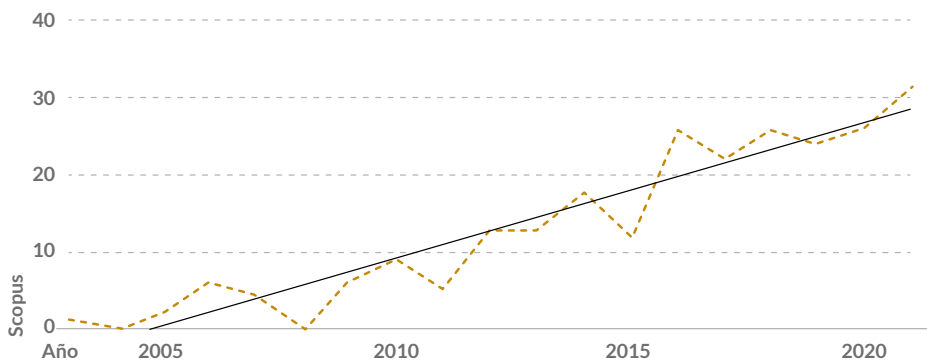
et al., 2020b; Duque and Cervantes, 2019; Hernández et al., 2020; Ramos et al., 2021; Trejos-Salazar et al., 2021).

## Results

### Publications Per Year

Within the analysis carried out on the documents, magazines or articles that are published each year related to the topic of “social enterprise”, “developing countries” or “economic development”, a positive trend is evident. This leads to the conclusion that it is a topic that has clearly gained strength and is more appealing to researchers and readers. Although a variation rate of 30 documents represents a small figure, the issue has become quite relevant as companies show a social focus to contribute to economic and territorial development. The literature search was conducted from 2000 to 2021 with the first and only publication found in 2003, however since then there has been an evident growing trend.


**Figure 1.** Publications per year.



## Countries with the Highest Number of Publications

The country with the highest number of participation —that also has influence over other countries— is the United Kingdom, a nation made up of 4 countries (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). The USA however has a somewhat higher participation compared to the United Kingdom. Between the two nations, relevant information is obtained for the development of the topic: The US contributes 19.7% of articles and the United Kingdom 18.8%, therefore together they provide 38.5% of the overall publications. This information is correlated with the authors and universities that also contribute to the creation and evolution of the studies carried out. The most noteworthy is that the countries with the greatest economic development are the most interested in the subject of SE. This notion leads us to conclude that a large part of their evolution is due to the critical work that they have carried out through collective social development, but also, it is in these countries where the greatest possibilities are created to finance these types of initiatives.

**Table 2.** Network of countries.

Country/ Region	Scopus	% Participation	Country collaboration
United States	8	19,7	
United Kingdom	46	18,9%	
Canada	25	10,2%	
India	21	8,6%	
Australia	17	7,0%	
China	10	4,1%	
Italy	10	4,1%	
South Africa	9	3,7%	
New Zealand	7	2,9%	
Spain	7	2,9%	

## Journals with the Largest Number of Publications

In this analysis, it was possible to show, in terms of publication of records, a similarity in the number of journals published with an average of 4.8. However, the prestige of each of the universities and their respective publications must also be taken into account: Q1 and Q2 are reliable and truthful sources, while Q3 and Q4 sources are in the process of being recognized and their information may not be as reliable. Most of these journals are avant-garde, with a socio-environmental focus and ecological economic development. For this reason, they attach great importance to all issues related to SE, sustainable economic development and socially responsible business. In short, they become a great source of information where you can consult the different advances in related topics.

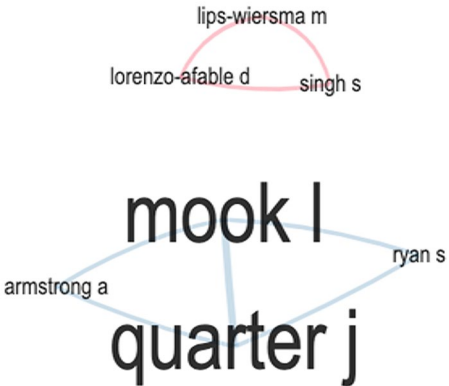
**Table 3.** Main magazines.

Source	Number of records	% Participation	SJR 2020	Quartiles SJR	h-index (SJR)	Countries
Sustainability Switzerland	9	3.69%	0.33	Q2	9	Singapore
Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	6	2.46%	0.61	Q2	25	United Kingdom
Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies	5	2.05%	0.2	Q3	5	United Kingdom
Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	5	2.05%	1.67	Q1	90	United Kingdom
Social Enterprise Journal	5	2.05%	0.39	Q2	7	United Kingdom
International Journal of Social Economics	4	1.64%	0.29	Q2	39	United Kingdom
Journal of Business Ethics	4	1.64%	2.21	Q1	187	Netherlands
Local Economy	4	1.64%	0.39	Q2	37	United Kingdom
Calitatea Vietii	3	1.23%	0.16	Q3	5	Romania
IFIP Advances in Information and Communication Technology	3	1.23%	0.19	Q3	53	United States

## Authors with the Largest Number of Publications

An analysis of the authors who have the largest number of publications on SE in developing countries was conducted. Most of these authors are economists with various publications focused on social sciences. This implies that their publications and different investigations are carried out by analyzing the economic and social situation of these countries. Relevant authors include Aoyama Yuko, Mook Laurie, and Richard Heeks. The first two are American authors while the last is a British author. The economies of both nations are very strong, but what they have in common is they both set out to develop their economies by incorporating SEs and cooperatives. This therefore implied that rapid development on any level can serve the needs of the communities that want to grow.

**Table 4.** Main authors.

Number	Author	Number of publications	Number of citations	h-index	Collaboration amongst authors
1	Mook, Laurie	47	546	14	
2	Quarter, Jack J.	56	554	14	
3	Luke, Belinda	42	476	13	
4	Aoyama, Yuko	39	878	18	
5	Armstrong, Ann	8	99	3	
6	Chikadzi, Victor	18	25	3	
7	Ciambotti, Giacomo	4	5	2	
8	Fernández-Laviada, Ana	16	20	7	
9	Haughton, Andre Yone	8	49	4	
10	Heeks, Richard	99	4.545	26	

## Universities with the Largest Number of Publications

The following table illustrates the participation by universities that publish in Scopus on the addressed topic. There is a similarity in the publications of the various universities, with a range that oscillates between 3 and 5 files with a % participation of no more than 3%. Despite the similarity, in their statistical data it was possible to show a difference in publicity by university. The United States had a participation of 40%, higher than the other countries that scarcely reached 20% participation.

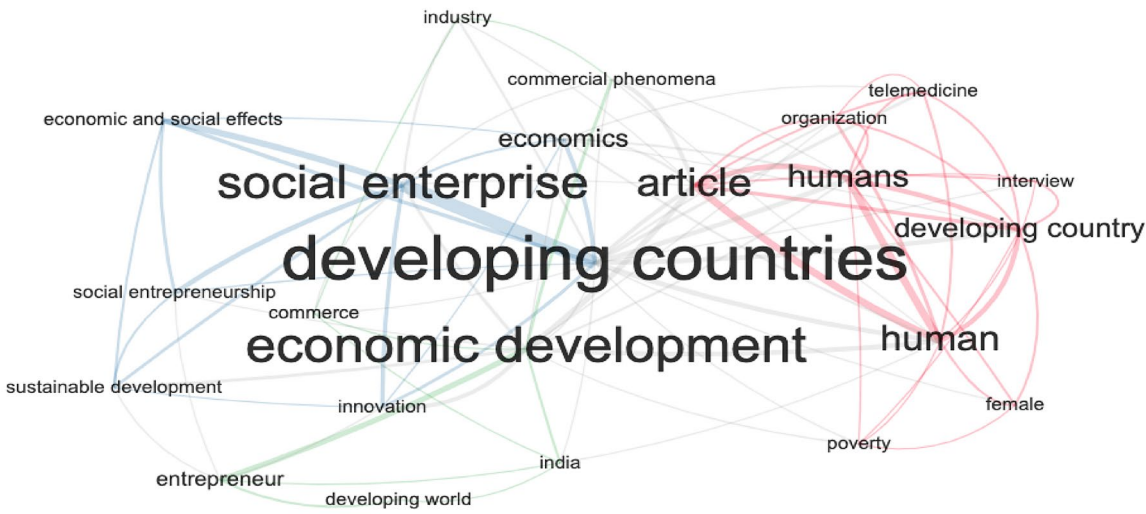
**Table 5.** Institutional network.

Organization	Number of publications	% Participation	Country
University of Toronto	5	2,05%	Canada
Arizona State University	4	1,64%	United States
Pennsylvania State University	3	1,23%	United States
Santa Clara University	3	1,23%	United States
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg	3	1,23%	South Africa
Auckland University of Technology	3	1,23%	New Zealand
University of Technology Sydney	3	1,23%	Australia
University of Portsmouth	3	1,23%	United Kingdom
University of Oxford	3	1,23%	United States
Cape Breton University	3	1,23%	Canada

### Word Cloud

The following illustration indicates the words that have an involvement within the work conducted. Each word is related to the development of the topic (“social enterprise” and “developing countries” or “economic development”). The words that have the most importance within the text are “Developing Countries”, “Economic Development” and “Social Enterprise”, words that in this research are the main axis for the outcome of the SEs. This information has been extracted from reliable sources such as Scopus and Bibliometrix.

Figure 2. Word concurrence.

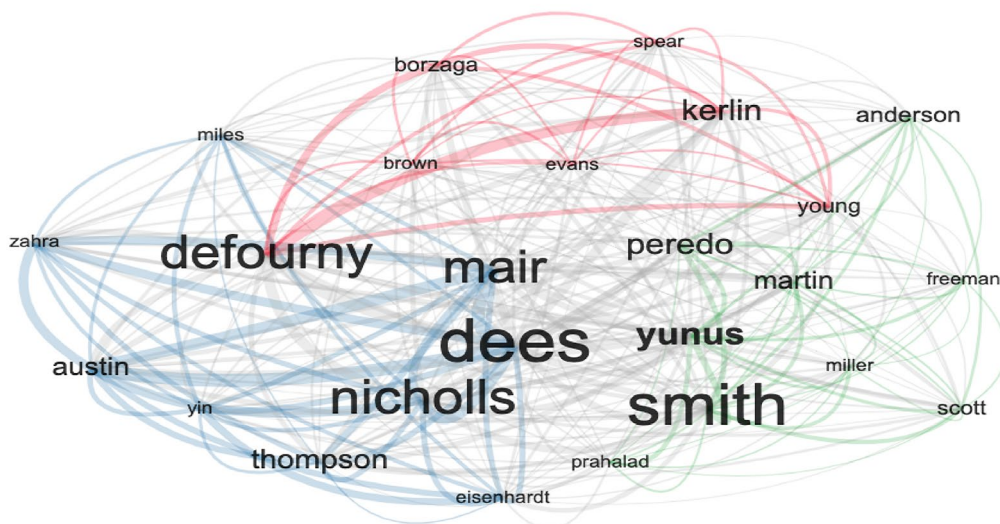


### Collaboration Amongst Authors

Figure 3 shows the relationship between authors who contribute the most to the subject matter. It is important to highlight that many of these authors are economists who base the development of their consultations on the criteria of “large-scale enterprises and social welfare”, considered within the SE in countries that are economically developing Yunus is a great example, a Nobel Peace Prize winner for the creation of the Grameen Bank who focused on supporting SE and microfinance credit development. Yunus is highly cited in

his publications as he provides information of interest to other entrepreneurs and has several collaborative works with Smith, who is also a scholar in the researched area.

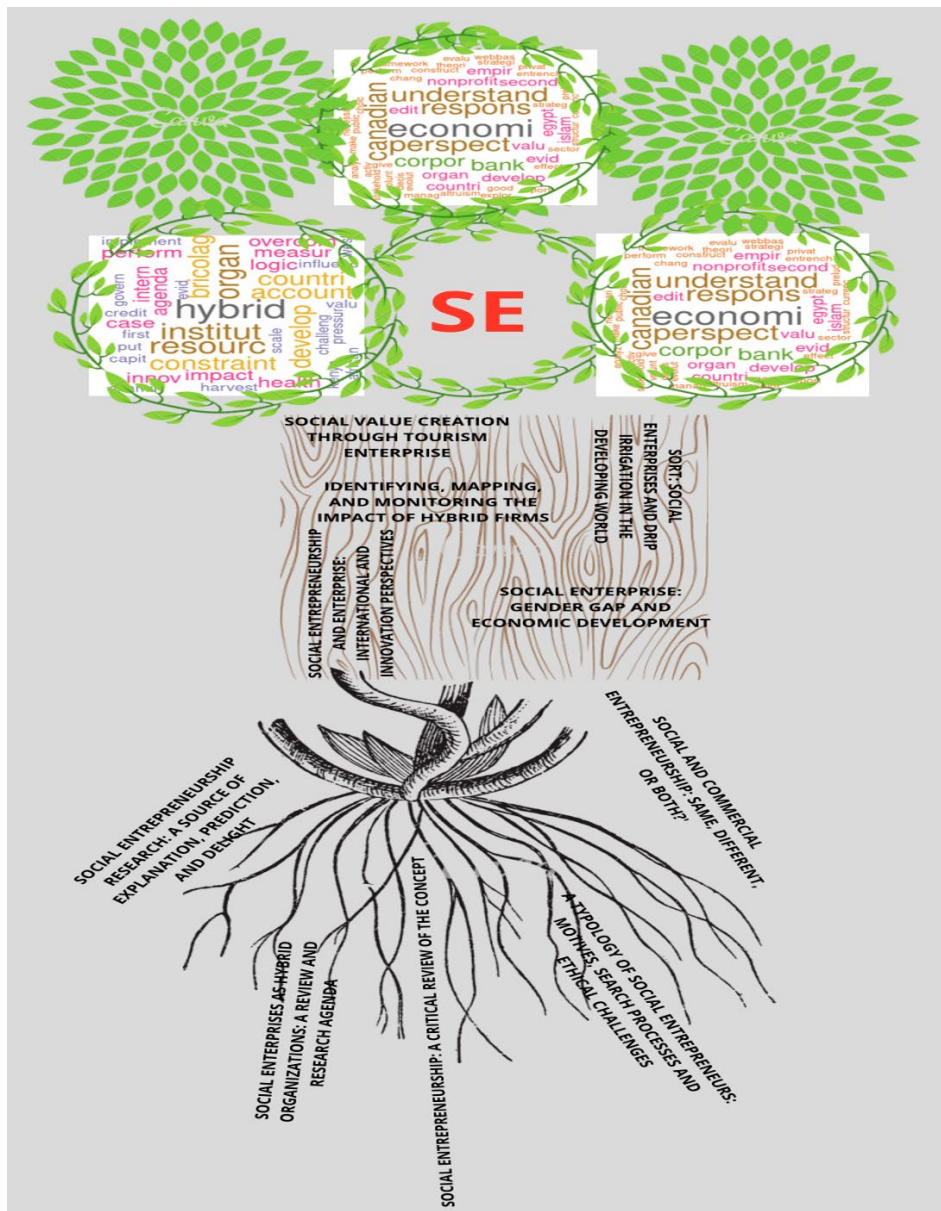
**Figure 3.** Authors' concurrence.



## Network Analysis

This analysis allowed for the identification of the most relevant documents and to select five classic articles and five structural articles. The main ideas and the most relevant information of each article were then compared. The results of this analysis are depicted through the representation of a tree.

Figure 4. Network analysis - tree metaphor.





## The Roots (Classics).

The articles addressed to develop the root (classics) of the research clarify the different doubts about the concepts used in the area of knowledge from the perspective of SEs, therefore providing a strong basis for understanding the publications made by the different authors. This opens the possibility for future professionals to analyze and create new research documents to expand this branch of knowledge, with the purpose of providing changes in the political, social and economic systems of different countries and regions.

It is important to clarify that the concepts 'social enterprise' and 'social entrepreneurship' are often compared, however, as suggested by Peredo and Maclean (2006), they are different terms. The same is true for the concepts of 'social businessmen' and 'social entrepreneurs'. In either case, in both circumstances, for companies and individuals, research acknowledges that talks between people and organizations or establishments that practice or make a social contribution. These people or organizations strategically allocate their resources toward financing social projects, resulting in significant contributions toward fostering social and environmental transformations.

Despite this conceptual similarity, it is clear that there are different ways of contributing to social change when dealing with SEs or social entrepreneurship. In the long term, these enterprises gather their efforts and common work to make special investments with changes to health, education, housing and culture, among other services. Such contributions in the long run bring benefits to achieve economic growth (Austin et al., 2006). Although many SEs do not make a profit, they do have a fundamental role in the social and economic change of a country. The social interventions carried out are generally accompanied by economic support with approaches that transform voices and lives. Mair and Martí (2006) suggest that there is a high content of social literature focused on solving problems through SEs.

All studies agree that SEs and social entrepreneurships around the world have introduced innovative models with commercial potential and approach them from a social problem perspective. Different agencies coordinate to propose solutions, even between governmental and non-governmental organizations. Similarly, studies coincide that in many underdeveloped countries, corruption conceals the needs of people in different local territories. In general, businessmen or social entrepreneurs have played a fundamental role for social and economic growth in these countries while also making visible improvements in all systems where social interventions have been developed (Zahra et al., 2009).

From this perspective, SEs look for social and governmental shortcomings and intend to solve problems through permanent changes. These changes provide development in all sectors benefiting communities living within the surrounding areas. Clear examples of this are agricultural companies where different landowners come together to create social value and constitute social enterprises. In addition, there are companies which secure resources through business models and a large part of their profits are used to benefit social projects. This type of business model is even becoming an attraction for many consumers who understand that the product is contributing to social changes and, therefore, to a more equitable development. It is social sensitivity and support for a social cause (Doherty et al., 2014).

### **The Trunk (structural).**

For people who have immersed themselves into this kind of initiative, SEs have been very useful. This situation is influenced by external factors such as global unemployment, but also by internal factors associated with the limited job opportunities within the local community. These situations have been the incentive for SEs to be viewed as a mitigating tool of the bad economic situation of certain countries, as SEs not only create new jobs, but also employ people who other companies may not hire due to their level of education or a disability. (Nicolás & Rubio, 2016).

Following the social contribution approach, recent research makes a distinction between SE with a gender focus. It is argued that females have entered the entrepreneurial world in a positive way, which can be explained by the fact that more business ideas emerge in countries with a lower level of development (Holt & Littlewood, 2015).

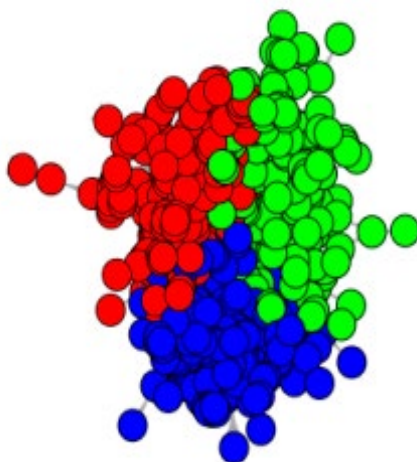
Recent studies also agree, stating that from SE it is necessary to study approaches on how the company can address innovative social solutions alongside economic development (Altinay et al., 2016). From the perspective of social innovation, the most recent research also covers environmental problems and, in general, comparisons are made between the private capitalist companies with the SEs. When integrating the community, from the point of view of environmental problems and social interventions as part of the solution there are many similarities. (Chell et al., 2010)

Another perspective of the most recent research is associated with new facets of development, such as agricultural solutions from the social perspective. One

of these solutions is the integrated drip irrigation system, which is much more effective in the long run for farmers who are innovative in terms of technology (Venot, 2016). However, considering the company as a social creation and contribution, it depicts a promising future when associating it with the current poverty and lack of resources, social problems typical of sectors in poverty and social inequality. Most of the research on the drip irrigation system has encouraged the development of new ideas that contribute to agricultural development. These pioneering projects may guarantee the improvement of shelf life and allow more product freshness, but as mentioned above, regarding the companies from a social perspective.

### Sheets (emerging categories).

**Figure 5.** Sheets (emerging categories).



**Figure 6. Perspective 1.** Development, evolution, and limitations of social enterprises.



Overtime new business ideas emerge and many SEs are seeking to get off the ground. Despite this, it has been shown that around 45% of them fail largely due to inadequate management of resources or because they do not meet the needs of the market. Another factor to keep in mind is that they are not innovative enough, or they do not advance hand in hand with the needs of the environment. However, these limiting situations have not prevented more and more people from entering this business field (Zahra et al., 2009). Today, the SEs become an alternative for overcoming these problems when they work cooperatively with their stakeholders.

As mentioned above, gender-sensitive SEs have gained strength. What was once an advantage for males has now become an equality in the business and development field. From the female perspective, even though SEs have certain limitations such as cultural restrictions, gender inequality and few opportunities, women have been able to overcome these issues and make a change. This development is a positive aspect to highlight in this research and it goes hand in

hand with social issues of gender equality. According to one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there are several studies that ensure women adapt and lead companies more easily, which transforms SE with gender approach into social innovation and a great contribution to the development of people (Rosca et al., 2020).

Therefore, SEs show a significant evolution due to economic demand. Internal factors, such as the unemployment rate, and external factors, *e.i* economic downturns, are incentives to opt for entrepreneurship and mitigate the consequences. They also contribute to the development of a territory from the perspective of SEs (Piot-Lepetit & Nzongang, 2021).

In relation to competencies from the administrative discipline, some research has shown that in entrepreneurial processes applicants show lack in knowledge related to financial aspects. A sample of this is described and suggested by Arifin et al (2020) in a study conducted in Indonesia. 46% of village staff were awarded financial tools; however, only 5% used them, concluding that there was a lack of knowledge in economics.

**Figure 7. Perspective 2.** Procurement of financial resources and organizational structure.



SEs face a critical situation to overcome several financial barriers as well as those related to their own social purpose. The attainment or mobilization of financial resources must be taken into account, otherwise, SEs would be forced to close down. However, there are different supporting and financing systems to ensure that SEs are productive and can meet the needs that are not being met due to forgetfulness, or perhaps negligence by many governments.

An example of how SEs are financed takes place in the Middle East with Islamic banks that allocate significant resources to support or finance social projects led by SEs in order to meet common needs such as education, health, decent work, etc. These banks take on high financial risks, even more in countries where they bet on agricultural production. These motivating measures that do not allow SEs to decline also consider the common good, if social entrepreneurs do well, it will start to go well for many people whose lives can be changed (Kotb et al., 2021). In addition, they can also take advantage of government resources, as some generate economic and financial policies to promote them because they meet the needs which the government does not. This is one area where SEs are economically stronger while at the same time developing their social purpose (Li et al., 2020).

It is also important to note that financing of SE is done in practice through internal management that obeys to the administrative management form itself and with the formation to productive, commercial and industrial models and sectors, generally in agricultural industries. This practice stems economic growth so that they can quickly reach a break-even point and do not have to depend on external financing sources. Innovation becomes fundamental, if SEs are not innovative in their products or services, they will not be attractive to new clients, and they will not be able to internationalize easily.

In relation to professional work there are myths that SE is usually not very attractive as its financial reward is relatively low due to philanthropic thoughts (Li et al., 2020). If these companies were to think differently, they could obtain higher financial returns in developed countries and then apply them in developing countries.— where the target audience is generally located — the greatest shortages and needs for social change exist, the greatest social problems are centered and, in many cases, famine, scarce resources, lack of education and opportunities and precarious health; problems that the SE address (Mersland et al., 2020). Therefore, it is also clear that the best financing possibilities are in developed countries yet the greatest social problems that these types of companies solve are in developing countries.

With regard to receiving financing resources for SE, Desa and Basu (2013) suggest that social enterprises must break down barriers and adapt to hybrid models. They should consider the application of optimization and bricolage,

two main methods for pooling resources. Optimization in all respects is the sourcing of raw materials, manufacturing and resource management without losing quality and making products more expensive. Bricolage is the use of the resources available within the area, sometimes they are not adequately valued and combined, but they can be a bonus for the growth of these companies. Under this hybrid model, special care must be taken to ensure that profits are not used for social advances. Companies must be able to provide equity in seemingly conflicting issues such as commercial income and the distribution of profits in social benefits. Because of this, it is said that SEs are to reconcile and internalize new political and governmental changes, since these companies have legitimacy and recognition from their communities (Persaud et al., 2021). In this regard, Doherty et al. (2014) also state that adapting hybrid models is very easy, but there is a risk of changing their social goal and losing any progress made.

Other authors mention the potential of SEs in new economic trends such as circular economy. As SEs are a focus for growth and financial sustainability like recycling companies, jobs can be created providing economic stability to families as well as providing environmental impact and, of course, the intrinsic social purposes of these types of organizations are generally followed (Lekan et al., 2021). In sectors such as energy and agriculture, there are large SEs that account for a 53% of them (Kummitha, 2018). In Africa, Mckague and Harrison (2019) found a SE with significant advances in the health sector. They began by educating the population and then hiring, for the most part, women in hospitals and health positions, reducing gender inequality and also providing social welfare to millions of people.

In specific areas such as financing, it can be seen how every day there is more investment and support for SEs. Due to its organizational form and the efficiency with which they manage all the resources, both financial and human, it was evident that in 2020 the investment capital increased from 400 billion USD to 1 trillion USD in SEs and non-profit companies. However, these investments expect financial returns, this capital is much higher than philanthropic contributions, but it should be noted that it is still not enough to encourage the growth of many SEs. At the same time, getting investment capital is complex, since investors cannot perform adequate risk analysis and do not know what the rate of return on capital would be, notwithstanding the fact that these are high-risk investments (Phillips & Johnson, 2021).

**Figure 8. Perspective 3.** Social enterprises (SEs) and their corporate social responsibility.



Social enterprises (SEs) can make important advances in the economic and social development of developing countries. The thinking, social purpose and organizational form of SEs are closely linked to corporate social responsibility therefore they will have an optimistic future view for the consumer. SEs have been a potential driving force for environmental sustainability and for global social growth (Carroll, 2021). SEs focus on assisting their “stakeholders” (customers, suppliers, employees), and other groups that help the company grow. Many of these new SEs are focused on innovations on basic needs of health, education, famine, etc., and also on companies that reduce the environmental impact caused by mankind in different countries around the world.

When SEs are established in certain communities, they are crucial for the development of that region. They are community agents that promote social welfare and progress of the people whom they interact with. They also provide education, basic goods and services, and help reduce unemployment. Moreover, they expect to have social and economic rewards in the medium and long term.



(Quarter et al., 2017). In developing countries, such as Canada, important initiatives have been carried out to create SEs. Policies and laws have been established to foster the creation and growth of these companies providing public resources to contribute to an overall stability and sustainability. (Mook & Quarter, 2019).

Today, the philosophy of many companies is changing, therefore special attention must be paid to all their stakeholders. This means that both private and public companies, and in general, all non-profit companies, have become tough competitors for SEs. For this reason, SEs must demonstrate their social functions as a competitive advantage over other companies by showing that they are not solely something new, but they are driver for growth and social responsibility. For example, Islamic banks are clearly identified as SEs and provide unconditional support for their maintenance. Throughout the years, they have reduced environmental impacts while contributing to the social growth of their region. These banks are socially responsible for their communities by indirectly forming corporate social responsibility (Kotb et al., 2021).

## Conclusions

This study reveals how the SE concept has been the object of study and a motivation for the creation of companies in developing countries. These companies are a crucial factor in mitigating social problems such as unemployment, famine, access to basic services, health, and education that governments have neglected. The investments these companies make also demonstrate a significant progress in combating social inequality.

The analysis is based on relevant information from each of the authors included, with a timeline from 2000 to 2021. The information was obtained from Scopus and the scientific papers of authors with an extensive trajectory in the area of knowledge.

The first decade of the research timeline, from 2000 to 2010, saw an average of 2.5 papers published per year, while the second decade saw an increase to 19.6. This suggests the importance of the topic.

The United States and the United Kingdom account for the majority of contributions to the subject, with significant participation rates of 19.7% and 18.9%, respectively. A remarkable aspect is that these developed countries value the importance of SE for the economic growth of any country. These countries also have the most important journals on the subject, with a contribution to the theoretical knowledge of the authors. This demonstrates the awareness on these issues and the close relationship to the fulfillment of the SDGs with respect to

poverty, food, health, education, gender equity, drinking water and sanitation, reduction of inequalities, employment, responsible consumption, and, in general, a solution for the associated environmental problems.

Social enterprises play an important role in meeting the existing needs in developing countries, for this reason more and more resources channeled by these organizations are used to reach the populations that require these services. Technological advances favor the creation of socially responsible enterprises that actively contribute to communities with potential for economic growth. Through collaborative work, it is possible to achieve a better economic and social evolution of a particular region. Since most of the SEs belong to the health, education, public services, and agriculture sectors, among others. In addition, more recently other sectors, such as industry and joint ventures, commercially speaking, have incorporated SEs without neglecting their corporate purpose.

The SE has been the main incentive for the foundation of new social entrepreneurship with the purpose of promoting economic growth through formal employment and new job opportunities. This is to reduce the economic limitations of the country, which are mainly the unemployment rate and labor informality. This type of business occupation has also benefited from increased female involvement, which has gradually drawn closer to that of males. According to the literature, females outperform males in leadership positions, while males outperform females in their capacity to discuss the business.

In conclusion, in order to integrate, grow, remain, and achieve sustainability social enterprises must address three critical areas. Firstly, these enterprises focus on the search for opportunities in which specific sectors of the economy and regions can be developed to achieve their goals. Secondly, philanthropic and governmental support is sought to obtain already scarce resources and finally, their economic purpose is pursued. The majority of these companies are hybrids with a commercial role and are appealing to customers because of their corporate names. The structure of the organization is crucial to avoid falling into corruption, which is denounced at all levels of society. The SEs serve as models for different companies, both public and private, that want to become socially responsible because of their importance in the current economy. In the future, topics such as corporate social responsibility will acquire the importance they deserve.

## **Limitations**

Although scientific methods were used for this bibliometric review, biases and different opinions were evident due to the number of authors included as well as using Scopus as

the single database. This led to excluding many other important scientific articles in this area of knowledge. The timeline also limited the inclusion of studies published before the year 2000. Perhaps the essence or the emergence of the topic could be used as data that may be included in future research using different methodologies to expand knowledge about SE (Kotb et al., 2021).

## Future Research Agenda

**Table 6.** Future Research Agenda.

Cluster/ perspective	Topic	Reference
Development, evolution, and limitations of social enterprises	In the current health context, social enterprises have great opportunities in supply chains. They are crucial in the commercial business.	(Sodhi y Knuckles, 2021)
	The level of education is a key factor in the financial progress of society because, in some countries and populations, there is a significant deficit in the management of resources, especially when entering the business world. Social enterprises play a significant role in this circumstance, and their solid knowledge and structure in the financial sector are decisive.	(Arifin et al., 2020)
Procurement of financial resources and organizational structure	Expansion of the dimensions covered by SEs in future research and how they can be applied, for example, to industries or other economic sectors.	(Li et al., 2020)
	Although the GINI coefficient is a measure to evaluate how social investments impact the growth of countries, it still deserves deep research, in addition to the net gains that can be generated from investments in social growth.	(Phillips y Johnson, 2021)

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	In the future, corporate social responsibility will be an even more important factor for companies than it is today. Its guarantee of sustainability and optimism are key concepts for present and future companies.	(Carroll, 2021)
Social enterprises (SEs) and their corporate social responsibility	To deepen through research and support to countries that have recently been of great help for economic development, taking into account social responsibility, which has been a good contribution to its evolution.	(Quarter et al., 2017; McKague y Harrison, 2019)
	New developments in the care of social and corporate responsibility in developing countries that, through resources from banks, establish a timeline for the topic's advancements.	(Kotb et al., 2021)

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