Exploring the emancipatory role of entrepreneurship in a developing context

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the study is to examine the role of contextual embeddedness in the entrepreneurial process that informs the individual's emancipatory acts. Context is important in shaping the entrepreneurial action, particularly in a developing region, as it expounds its emancipatory role. At the same time emancipatory acts can affect context as well.

Design/Methodology approach: The study employs an inductive research design, applying an open-ended exploratory research and conversation analysis, to elicit the stories of 25 entrepreneurs who are challenging their status quo.

Findings: Acts of emancipation were observed through a dynamic process centred around entrepreneurs' abilities to respond to policy debates. These debates introduced an individual level actions toward social and institutional change. The findings present a model of entrepreneurial acts as an enabler in a socially constrained and challenging context.

Originality/value: Through contextual embeddedness, this study captured the entrepreneur's abilities to re-perform and negotiation with their context towards actions of emancipation. The study aims to capture individuals' narratives to enhance our understanding of the contextual and embedded factors that shape the entrepreneurial process toward emancipation. The study presents a model that theorises these narratives and actions.

Keywords: emancipation; entrepreneurship, developing countries, social change

Introduction

The contribution of entrepreneurship to economic and social development has been widely recognised, but its role as a means of emancipation has only recently become part of the discussion. According to Rindova et al. (2009), the emancipation perspective considers entrepreneurship through the lens of change-creating actions through which people seek to break free from existing constraints within their economic, social, technological, cultural and/or institutional environments. Furthermore, Rindova et al. (2009) introduced the term “entrepreneurship” to reflect the role of “doing” in entrepreneurship and to bring more attention to the actions and processes that constitute the field of entrepreneurship by shifting the focus onto the transformational role of entrepreneurship (Steyaert, 2007). The “social turn” points to how entrepreneurship can help achieve more equal society by including more people in the entrepreneurial activity and reducing poverty. Thus, entrepreneurship turns into an act of liberation from different constraints, bringing the “social mission” of entrepreneurship to the fore of research (Alkhaled, and Berglund, 2018). This assumption calls for a critical approach to examine the individual practices and the role of formal institutions and policy interventions in achieving these changes.

Studies on entrepreneurship as a means of emancipation have considered different contexts, from developed countries (Jennings et al., 2016) to developing ones (Al Matroushi et al., 2021; Chandra, 2017; Al-Dajani et al., 2015). However, when it comes to developing countries, much remains to be studied about how entrepreneurs achieve emancipation from social norms. Studying this issue permits us to better understand one of the most formidable barriers to economic and social development. The study aims to focus on the contextual embeddedness through which entrepreneurs re-perform cultural, macro-cultural and policy discourses (Steyaert, 2007). We adopt Laine and Kilber's (2020) conceptualisation of “emancipation from”, through which individuals make action prevail over constraints, and “emancipation to”,

which imposes change on society in a broader sense. These two concepts are used as theoretical points of understanding the contextual and embedded factors that cause individuals to disrupt the status quo and change their positions in the social order. We examine these acts in an empirical study in the context of a Middle Eastern country. The question guiding this study is: How do individuals overcome social challenges through entrepreneurship in developing contexts?

In this study, entrepreneurial acts are defined as those that aim to alter deeply ingrained social patterns; we examined such acts among a sample of 25 entrepreneurs in Jordan, a country with a high rate of youth unemployment, limited prospects and a social network system, known as "wasta", that regulates access to limited opportunities. The study thus contributes to the growing literature on the role of entrepreneurship in developing economies (Al-Dajani et al., 2019; Yousafzai et al., 2015). While entrepreneurship in developed economies is typically associated with individual agencies and control (Hollenbeck et al., 2006), we argue that in developing economies individual entities are challenged by social practices and institutional constraints (Al-Dajani et al., 2019; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Khoury and Prasad, 2016), hence the importance of the emancipatory scope of entrepreneuring (Rindova et al., 2009).

The findings captured the contextual embeddedness within which the entrepreneurs have renegotiated their social order in a culture of social constraints. First, acts of emancipation oscillated between individual and policy level motivations through a reciprocal relationship between the individual's aspirations and policy-level interventions. Within this relationship, acts of empowerment can be defined as overcoming social constraints, which can be described as "what they believed they could not do or be" and a lack of awareness of the opportunities available to them as individuals due to the social structure of what in Jordan, the research

context, is known as "wasta" (belonging to social elitism). Entrepreneurship (Rindova et al., 2009) can be viewed in this perspective as a tool for the integration of marginalised minorities. Second, the acts of "emancipation from and emancipation to" are centred around the entrepreneur as an individual for whom entrepreneurship provided the mechanism of empowerment for social and institutional change. The research highlights the bi-directional relationship between entrepreneurship and institutions (Elert and Henrekson, 2017): the latter affect entrepreneurial acts and be affected by them.

Finally, entrepreneurship as a mechanism for development is presented as a process or an outcome. In this study, the role of entrepreneurship in development is both a consequence and a precursor of the entrepreneurs' actions. Specifically, we find individual narratives leading to acts of emancipation through awareness are a pre-entrepreneurial activity: realising opportunities and dreams brings about change toward what is possible, leading to social change as a result of action. The findings contribute to the field of research on contextual embeddedness and emancipation.

The study is organised as follows: the introduction is followed by the research context, literature review, research methodology, analysis and results. The results are then discussed, followed by the introduction of the overall conclusion, contribution and suggestions for future research.

Theoretical background

The seminal work of Rindova et al. (2009), through which emancipatory entrepreneurship was presented as a theoretical stance, aims to understand the factors that empower individuals to disrupt the status quo and change their position in the social order they are positioned in. Rindova et al. (2009) expanded the scope of their research by considering entrepreneurial dreams and efforts to create change in the world, which can help us fully understand the

processes of discovery, change, value-creating and, ultimately, wealth creation. Critical to this understanding is Steyaert's (2007, p. 472) conceptualisation of entrepreneuring through "contextual embeddedness" as one of the entry points into social ontology. According to Steyaert (2007), contextual embeddedness allows for stories to be conceived of, not as individual expressions of entrepreneurship, but as re-performances of cultural metaphors (Dodd, 2002), macro-cultural discourses (Lawrence and Phillips, 2004) and political discourses (Perren and Jennings, 2005). Through these metaphors and discourses, individuals' words lead to enactment, i.e. "entrepreneurs talk and act" towards a proposed future (Steyaert, 2007, p. 460). Thus, entrepreneurship is seen as a process of storytelling through which individuals are part of an ongoing plot development and in which actors and networks are continuously connected and disconnected (Davies and Harre, 1990). It is through their narratives of the contextual and embedded understanding that the entrepreneurial process is understood (Steyaert, 1997; Rae, 2004). With that in mind, this study uses contextual embeddedness as a lens through which to examine entrepreneurship as an emancipatory act in a developing setting. Entrepreneurship in developing economies has traditionally concentrated on the possibility of realising the potential to gain greater functional freedom and human well-being (Naude, 2010, 2013). Therefore, emancipation is a theme that is central to eliciting change at the individual and community levels. Yet, how entrepreneurs envision these acts to be re-performed requires further research. These performances allow for both theoretical and practical discovery by positioning the entrepreneur as a beneficiary of the predominant social arrangement that promotes emancipation (Laine and Kibler, 2020).

To capture these performances, we use Laine and Kibler's (2020) conceptualisation of "emancipation to" and "emancipation from" (Berlin, 1969). These concepts introduce the emancipation of the entrepreneuring subject *from* prevailing constraints to action, which

involves the entrepreneur pursuing opportunities to break free by changing their position in the social order (Rindova et al., 2009). Hence, entrepreneuring is perceived as a transformative socioeconomic practice towards potentially achieving a better life (Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018; Shepherd et al., 2020). The second concept is the entrepreneurial emancipation *to* enact changes in society in a broader sense of emancipation. As a result, researchers have viewed the role of entrepreneurship as a mechanism for social change on a scale beyond the direct impact of entrepreneurs (Calas et al., 2009), presenting the benefits of entrepreneurship to individuals through theories of socialisation of the economy (Schumpeter, 1942) and positioning entrepreneurship as a “pro-social force” in society (Daskalaki et al., 2015; Farney et al., 2019). Within the context of developing countries, the emancipatory role of entrepreneurship requires individual awareness of the possibilities presented in their environment to be able to realise the potential of the entrepreneurial activity, hence the emphasis on the role of contextual embeddedness and the individual’s ability to negotiate changes in networks and institutions to achieve these acts. At the same time emancipatory entrepreneurship may involve some degree of contextual disembeddedness/re-embeddedness, contributing to social change and a renewed social order (Elert and Henrekson, 2017). Embeddedness enables entrepreneurship, yet may also lead to cognitive lock-in and/or inhibit action: “Entrepreneurship therefore requires an element of provocation, misfit or tension with the established norms, practices and routines of the context(s) (Berglund, Gaddefors, and Lindgren 2016). Second, the entrepreneurial act, while relying on embeddedness, inevitably alters the fabric of the context.” (Wigren-Kristofersen et al., 2019, p. 1012). The study focuses on the acts of emancipation and the contextual embeddedness/re-embeddedness within which entrepreneurship occurs and captures bottom-up behaviours, developing a higher level of understanding to present the complex forms of interactions and mechanisms in the cognitive world of entrepreneurs (Barandiaran et al., 2009).

Research background and study approach

Research context:

Jordan, a developing country located in the Middle East, serves as the backdrop for this study, thus responding to calls for perspectives from other than Western and developed economies (e.g. Acs and Lippi, 2019). Jordan's culture is collectivist, paternalistic, patriarchal and tribal, with religion playing a significant role in societal governance. Jordan, like the rest of the MENA region, is largely Islamic, with Christians constituting only 2.5% of the population (Ikehata, 2017). In recent years, scholars in Jordan have focused on entrepreneurship and start-up ventures for females, concentrating on entrepreneurship as a means of emancipation and empowerment for women (Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Caputo et al., 2016; Mehtap et al., 2017). Following the country's growth in the information and communication technologies (ICT) industry, the encouragement of entrepreneurship has become a high priority on the national agenda (Caputo et al., 2016; Mehtap, 2016). To facilitate the transition to a knowledge-based economy, the government has launched a series of significant reform initiatives, with a particular emphasis on the promotion of entrepreneurial activity (Mehtap et al., 2017). This has led to a growth in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which are recognised as the future engine of economic growth and employment potential (UNDP, Jordan Poverty National Strategy, 2013). In addition, Jordan has developed a National Microfinance Strategy to support these activities with seed funding (Al-Maaitah, 2019). The recently established Angel Investment Network, for example, seeks to provide financing to entrepreneurs. While these activities are encouraging, the region is well known for its centralisation of power (economic and political) and tight control by the governing regimes (Malik and Awadallah, 2013), encouraging the social practice of “wasta”. Despite support for entrepreneurship in Jordan at the policy level, social factors, such as social networks and social capital, continue to

have a particularly strong influence. The social network-based system in Jordan known as “wasta” exemplifies the strikingly personalised approach to social, economic and political life (El-Said and Harrigan, 2009). While these networks have their important role, they also have a negative impact by distorting the provision of opportunities based on favouritism and nepotism (El-Said et al., 2009). In addition, regional conflicts have led to an influx of more than a million Iraqi and Syrian refugees, presenting great challenges in the country, including competition over the limited opportunities (UNHCR, 2015). Overall, the social and economic divide in Jordan is increasing because of a changing demography and unresponsive economic structure, presenting further challenges to its youthful population (Malik and Awadallah, 2013).

Entrepreneurship has been identified as encompassing multiple facets for transformational change, including social and institutional aspects (Rindova et al., 2009). This study discusses the multi-dimensional role of entrepreneurship in addressing aspects of poverty beyond the economic factors, including capability deprivation, marginalisation and discrimination (Khoury and Prasad, 2016), and extends the role of entrepreneurship into a non-economic role that contributes to improving the welfare of individuals and communities by introducing social change to positively influence lives (Sutter et al., 2019).

Methodology

This study adopts an interpretive research method to capture the entrepreneurs’ experiences. The interpretive research tradition is guided by three assumptions. First, it assumes the phenomenological notion of life-world, which indicates that individuals and their worlds are correlated by their lived experiences of the world (Husserl, 1970). Therefore, a human world is an experienced world that cannot be described separately from the individual or their engagement with it. Second, human reality is socially constructed through individual actions,

negotiations and agreements (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), which means that our understandings of reality are formed through ongoing social interaction (Crotty, 1998). The third assumption stipulates those human actions and activities are based on the individual's understanding of reality; how people act is determined by how they understand their reality (Sandberg and Targama, 2007). Following the interpretive research tradition, we aim to capture the acts of emancipation that are underpinned by how individuals understand their social context. Within the interpretive research tradition, we employ the grounded theory as the methodology to investigate the entrepreneur's experiences within a world of social interactions in order to construct theories from observations of reality within the context of individuals' everyday lives (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Data Collection

Potential interviewees were identified from the entrepreneurs listed in Jordan's main business incubators, such as Oasis 500, Zinc and Orange Grow. These business incubators are sponsored by major telecommunication companies in Jordan and accommodate many entrepreneurs at different stages. They also provide boot camps and training activities for entrepreneurs on how to engage with the market and investors. Entrepreneurs from these lists were contacted by email to introduce the research and to get their approval and consent to participate in our study. This led to 25 entrepreneurs agreeing to participate in the study. The purposively selected sample (Patton, 2002) had sufficient experience of the phenomena to provide in-depth insights and rich data. The sample was composed of participants from different business incubators, different start-up stages and a mix of genders to achieve the greatest possible variation in the sample so that the collected data reflects a wide range of understandings. The sample had participants with various levels of experience; some had previous entrepreneurial experience and experience as employees while others were at the nascent stage, which also results in a wide

range of perspectives. In terms of sample size, there are no fixed rules in qualitative research (Kvale, 1996) regarding this. In this research, the sample yielded sufficient outcomes for a robust discussion of the findings.

The primary data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews (Deterding and Waters, 2021), comprising open and semi-structured questions that sought to understand the entrepreneurial environment in Jordan. The interviews share the same objective as other interpretive methodologies, namely, trying to elicit individual meanings, and were thus dialogue-based — rather than structured — to allow room for the full articulation of experiences and the development of a rich understanding. We did ask participants several questions aimed at gathering general information about their activities and understanding their journey, such as *Tell us about your journey as an entrepreneur? How did you start? What motivated you to become an entrepreneur?* These questions were part of the story told by the entrepreneurs and were in the participants' language (Arabic). Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, and each was recorded, transcribed and translated from Arabic to English. The final transcripts were shared with the participants to confirm their responses and to make sure that the process of translation captured the meanings they expressed in the interview.

<insert table 1 here>

Data analysis

The collected interview data were analysed using Conversation Analysis (CA) (Hoey and Kendrick, 2017) as an inductive, micro-analytic method appropriate for understanding the social interactions between the entrepreneurs and their context. As such, the interviews aimed to capture the everyday experiences and acts of emancipation (Steyaert and Katz, 2004). The

approach to analysis was applied, proceeding from single-case to within-case to cross-case analysis (Gibbs 2007). This process allowed the interviews to be analysed individually, followed by the results being compared across the group of individuals, then across patterns and outcomes. CA differs from other methods because it focuses on language as a resource for social action, basing the analyses on the details of individuals' behaviour (Hoey and Kendrick, 2017). We started the process of analysis by assessing the answers to the question, 'What motivated you to pursue entrepreneurship?' to build the sequence and capture the phenomena. This was followed by 'How do you feel now about being an entrepreneur, and what drives you to continue on this journey?' to capture a richer set of meanings regarding the activity and understand the entrepreneurial action. The interviews focused particularly on the entrepreneurs' understandings by capturing their stories. Data collected from the interviews were coded to identify emerging patterns or themes using NVivo software. The process of analysis was guided by the entrepreneurs' understanding of what formed or influenced their decisions.

<insert table 2 here>

Findings and interpretations were discussed among the authors to ensure consistency and reliability (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Since the process started with the single-case and within-case, this was the first step to familiarise ourselves with the data, while the process of identifying cross-case patterns took the analysis beyond the initial impressions (Gibbs, 2007). This was followed by the process of cross-checking the coding and interpretation of concepts of emancipation and data, using several iterative steps of revisiting and refining the interpretations. During the process of extracting quotes, we asked the two questions suggested by Bowden (1994): 'What does this quote tell me about the way the interviewee understands

the phenomenon of interest?’ and ‘How must the interviewee perceive the phenomenon of interest if they are saying this or that?’ We identified patterns and outcomes of the interrelations between acts of “emancipation from” and “emancipation to” as a dynamic interaction leading toward social change. We further proceeded to understand variations in these patterns and outcomes and introduced the entrepreneurs’ acts to present the social transformation and the influences within their context. In addition to interviews, a journal was kept throughout the process to reflect on the impressions of each interviewee, the context and any observations that were relevant after the interviews. These notes amounted to approximately 50 pages of text.

The coding process focused on the words and phrases that seemed to be important to the individuals in terms of their actions, interactions and beliefs regarding the emancipatory role of entrepreneurship. Through their descriptions, we were able to gather the processes of transformation by focusing on the terms used by the interviewees in describing their interactions and how these interactions introduced a change in their social situations. After the first-order codes were generated (Van Maanen, 1979), the common understanding of the codes and their meanings was revisited (Locke, 2001) to look for links between the categories to aggregate the second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2013) that were different from the theoretical themes. For example, in the first-order codes, phrases about self, presented in phrases such as “employee”, “entrepreneur”, “family of employees” and not having a “wasta”, related in the second-order codes to the process of changing identity. We endeavoured to present the themes at an abstract theoretical level by using the original phrases used by the interviewees. Finally, we organised the themes emerging from the second-order codes into the two overarching themes of “emancipation from” and “emancipation to” as a base for developing a theoretical framework (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). These themes emerged from a three-step coding process: 1) open coding to generate first-order categories related to the entrepreneurs’ experiences in becoming entrepreneurs; 2) axial coding to generate second-order themes from

the first-order categories; and 3) aggregating and abstracting from second-order themes into overarching dimensions, in accordance with Gioia et al. (2013). As a result, we introduced the acts of emancipation as the process of transformation based on the themes that emerged from the second-order themes coding process. For example, the process captured the changes entrepreneurs experienced at a personal level in relation to their identity, defying social norms and stereotypes. We felt that these themes were personal reflections of the individuals' journeys of empowerment, hence they were listed under "emancipation from" as overcoming the challenges (Berlin, 1969). The second category was "emancipation to", which was influenced by their interactions with formal structures and how entrepreneurship was introduced, encouraged and used by the policy agenda to introduce broader social change. In this category, entrepreneurship is seen as not only a method of attaining economic growth but also a social mechanism for development and collective change.

< insert Figure (1) here >

Findings

The aim of the study was to capture the acts of emancipation among a group of entrepreneurs in Jordan, a developing country, through the examination of their contextual and embedded understanding of the entrepreneurial process. We conceptualised the acts of emancipation through the themes of "emancipation from", which is the entrepreneurs' ability to overcome constraints, and "emancipation to", which is the ability to enact changes in the broader society (Berlin, 1969). These actions presented a mechanism for enhanced awareness that informed the development of social change, introducing acts of emancipation to overcome social and institutional challenges. Figure (1) illustrates the data structure that emerged by introducing the first-order codes, second-order themes and the overarching dimensions to the data structure. The acts of emancipation were then introduced as processes illustrating the data structure as a

bridge from data to emergent theory (Nag et al., 2007). Figure (2) illustrates the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

< insert Figure (2) here>

The following sections develop and report on these emergent findings, followed by the presentation of the theoretical model.

Awareness leading to changes in identity and social order:

The most common themes underlying the role of entrepreneurship in developing regions are social challenges, access to resources and discrimination (Amorós and Cristi, 2011). Entrepreneurs in Jordan are faced with social challenges that make them believe they cannot change their future and they cannot act entrepreneurially because they do not have a social network to support them. They identified themselves and their families as ‘employees’ through generations, and they believed that becoming an entrepreneur was a dream, since owning a business requires strong “wasta”, which they do not have. As explained by AAE3:

For me as an entrepreneur, I spent all of my time as an employee. I had no idea, at the beginning I didn’t think it was possible for somebody who has no relative or no relations with the government. I don’t have [wasta], and my father and family are not businessmen. We are all employees living on limited income, so it was a dream to start my own company, but I started.

Wasta, an influential informal social network, plays a role in providing opportunities for entrepreneurship based on who you know and what they can do for you. Wasta is an old and wide-spread source of social capital in Jordan, yet in recent years it has also been identified as

a contributor to social inequality and poverty, as it is based on favouritism, nepotism and reciprocity among members of, usually elite, social networks (El-Said and Harrigan, 2009). Our research, however, reveals that entrepreneurs are challenging this tradition and aspiring for a better future.

The role of social factors in the context of dealing with failure was also discussed as a form of individuation, as explained by MIE8:

We need to have a paradigm shift, we will see the impact after five to ten years when people see that it is not a major issue for a person to leave their work and start their business, even if they fail and go back to being an employee again, once they see that people can survive these experiences. My family wasn't taking me seriously until my story was covered in the newspaper. I became the hero.

Despite the social stigma associated with failure, they called for a change in thinking about entrepreneurs and failure since close networks, such as family, still do not take entrepreneurship seriously. Celebrating entrepreneurship is an important way of encouraging this (Kolti, 2016).

Overcoming stereotypes:

The entrepreneur who is quoted below (OIE12) articulated the social pressure of being different and not understood:

As an entrepreneur I am doing something different, I revolted against the normal way of going through academia and career advancement. I haven't done my bachelor's degree, and I took that decision consciously. So, I have always been the rebel and the guy that doesn't know what he is doing.

Being labelled as ‘the guy who doesn’t know what he is doing’ reflects the social view on his identity as an entrepreneur. It also reveals how entrepreneurs in this category are defying and challenging the social expectations of going to university and having a job. They are transforming their identity from who they were known as and accepted as in the past to what they aspire to be in the future. Furthermore, they are influencing the social structure and challenging the stereotypes and traditions within society.

Overcoming Discrimination:

Individuals also defy discrimination and stereotypes through entrepreneurship. Christians are a minority in Jordan, but one entrepreneur (JSHE5) recounted how a focus on the individual’s talents and skills has enabled the incorporation of diversity within the team, overcoming this social discrimination:

We didn’t realise that we didn’t have enough diversity (Christians and Muslims) in the team. All this discrimination makes it hard to find good people and build a good culture. [We want] people with a mentality of progress who want to make a difference; we don’t care about discrimination, we don’t judge people or label them, we see people without discrimination.

Religion plays an important social role in Jordan and in the Middle East in general. Furthermore, the Arab Spring and the rise of the Islamic State led to Christians starting to feel discriminated against in the workplace, and this is affecting their identity and preventing them from accessing equal opportunities. Entrepreneurs aspire for a change in the culture by valuing individuals’ talents, skills and abilities instead of focusing on the stereotypes. By acting entrepreneurially, entrepreneurs have defied the social norms and challenged the stereotypes.

Calls for inclusivity of the entrepreneurial activity:

Part of the emancipatory role of entrepreneurship is the importance of inclusivity in entrepreneurship. Currently, individuals in Jordan feel that only rich people with “wasta” can be entrepreneurs. They feel that only rich and influential people can survive if they fail. As AAE22 explains:

We need to have people, such as successful businesspeople, the wealthy and the government officials, to put up some capital for investing in start-ups, other than that we will continue to be in the same whirlpool, and we will continue to see entrepreneurship sustained and maintained only among the elite people. Those who can afford to fail once and twice and survive.

Furthermore, entrepreneurs feel that they are not getting the necessary support from the government and that there needs to be more to help them survive. As WAE07 explains:

When I consider the policies and regulations and the cost of the start-up and how they are not supportive to my enterprise, that doesn't make me just want to leave but to run away from doing business in the country.

There used to be collaboration between the government and the private sector to support start-ups, which has since stopped. This has implications on an entrepreneur's survival and ability to continue unless the individual is wealthy and can handle the loss or has “wasta” to support their activity.

Change in social reference:

The emancipatory role of entrepreneurship has been evident through the sense of community. Individuals feel that they have a collective influence by being a community, as explained by SSHE04:

When I deal with our community, it is booming our community, and it is a small community, everyone knows everyone. It kind of gives me comfort to see other people suffering, (laugh) but I see that there is a level of understanding and that makes me comfortable.

The ability to feel that they belong to a wider group of individuals who share the same dreams and aspirations provides a sense of empowerment SSHE04.

For me as an entrepreneur it means the ecosystem that I am having here, the ecosystem, the interaction with other start-ups. If you asked me how to summarise this in two or three words, I will say two things: the access to learning new stuff, which is not easy to find in any place, and the ability to keep upgrading your mind. The different factors that impact your business at different levels, whether it is the learning, applying, interaction and networking. So it is different layers of different things, it is the entrepreneurship-at-large ecosystem in Jordan, whether it's a start-up or a business, or whatever. This is what it means to me as an entrepreneur.

The feeling goes beyond the country's borders; they feel they are part of an international movement that encourages entrepreneurship around the world, as WEDE02 explains:

As start-ups in general, I believe now, not only in Jordan but in the world, that entrepreneurship, in general, is booming: the current situation in the country,

from the environment around us to local suppliers, government regulations, competition, etc.

The sense of empowerment through community is evident among this group of entrepreneurs, showing the potential of a “pro-social force” in society (Farny et al., 2019).

Imperative policy support to achieve broader social change through entrepreneurship:

Structures may be envisaged as assets of tangible and intangible resources. For the meaning of “tangible” we refer to Sewell’s (1992) definition of resources as materials in the form of sets of laws, regulations and institutions, while intangible structures are items such as knowledge and stimuli within the environment (Hannah et al., 2019). We captured how entrepreneurs combine both types of structures to achieve a process of transformation, but also how structures impact entrepreneurs’ actions and outcomes. In this dimension, entrepreneurs contextualise their activity around the knowledge and stimuli within their structures, a process that transforms them into entrepreneurs. IHE20 explains:

The role of the programs is to provide a blueprint for the businesses, and it is based on the trainers’ experience in setting up and explaining the context for us.

The training programs and boot camps that were provided by the business incubator, therefore, created a positive stimulus for entrepreneurs to engage and transform.

Entrepreneurs were also influenced by the presence of programmes, training and funding opportunities, since these encouraged them to take the opportunity to become entrepreneurs, as explained by OSE16:

If there wasn't the buzz that happened between 2010 and 2011 to support entrepreneurs and to have the training, to have the bootcamp and to have the seed fund, which was very important at that time, I wouldn't have had the courage to leave my job and be dedicated to starting my own company.

Entrepreneurs also utilised the knowledge provided through the structure and institutions in their environment to support entrepreneurship and transform themselves. These resources have changed their perspectives and encouraged them to become entrepreneurs. The resources available were identified as enabling them. They witnessed the successes and failures of others that have been part of the ecosystem as well, as ZBE18 explained:

The business ecosystem, angel investment and venture capital has flourished in the past five years since Oasis 500. Oasis played a big role in the growth of the ecosystem because since then lots of things have happened; a lot of initiatives, VC funds came to Jordan, and people outside Jordan heard about Jordan; missions from Silicon Valley came to Jordan, books and reports were written and companies were established. Naturally, some grew, some failed, some stagnated, and some are on hold. Part of the natural cycle, so this is what I mean by ecosystem.

For this group of entrepreneurs, the structures were identified as enablers for their activity. The stimuli within their environment and the available resources and knowledge shaped their transformation into entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs expressed their concerns about the lack of support and demanded more support from the government. As stated by SNE15:

The government is not supporting anymore. Three to four years ago there was a great hype around entrepreneurs and support from different entities. Now

everything is frozen and not moving. When the government started the hype of entrepreneurship the private sector helped but then it all stopped.

Entrepreneurs feel they are part of a policy level agenda to drive entrepreneurship for political reasons, to generate economic growth and address unemployment, thereby mitigating the impact of the Arab Spring on Jordan, as explained by MSHE19:

As everybody knows, in the last five years, entrepreneurship has been one of the top topics on the table both at the official side and at the private sector side. There are many reasons: the unemployment, the economic growth and the reaction to the Arab Spring to give some freedom and some space for young people to innovate and to implement and dream of their future. So my understanding of the context in Jordan is that it was overrated at the beginning and it was tackled without a proper plan that is normalised across all stakeholder parties.

Entrepreneurs responded to the stimuli provided by the policy agenda and felt that the resources were there to support their activities. A few years later, however, they realised that, while the policy level agenda encourages entrepreneurship, the legal, regulatory and investment structures are not at the expected level. This is why the structure has been identified as both an enabler and constraint, as AAE3 explained:

They used the youth who were enthusiastic about the idea and the dream and went far with their ideas. They used us to sell the idea of the Western or American entrepreneurship. They didn't take into consideration the reality of our local context here in terms of market size, appetite for investment or how ready our country is to deal with such transactions, i.e. for a company that started small to then get sold for hundreds of times its assets. This concept is not there in the

regulations in our country, so we were oversold the idea of entrepreneurship, it wasn't really relevant to our context.

This group of entrepreneurs further elaborated on processes, work conduct and ethics. There is a disconnect between the entrepreneurs' need to conduct their activities and the systems in place for that. Currently, it seems that the systems are hindering their activities, and the entrepreneurs are therefore asking for a change. As MSHE19 explains:

The current context is tough, not only the people; it's the process more than the people. Because if you have a stable process, you will only bring qualified people and everything will go smoothly because they bring the knowledge and the knowhow, the actual progress. Our problem is with the process itself, the infrastructure. We have so much energy, all the entrepreneurs have a lot of energy, but there are a lot of processes and people who shut you down. So unless you have a long breath, you will not succeed. So when you tell me context, I would say process and the people. But process more than the people.

Although the individual will is there to carry out the activity, entrepreneurs feel that the systems are not supporting their activities, which provides challenges in addition to the social challenges that they overcame.

Discussion

The findings highlight the importance of context in the entrepreneurial activity, responding to a call for research in this field (Welter, 2011). The Author discusses how "There is growing recognition in entrepreneurship research that economic behavior can be better understood within its historical, temporal, institutional, spatial, and social

contexts, as these contexts provide individuals with opportunities and set boundaries for their actions. Context can be an asset and a liability for the nature and extent of entrepreneurship, but entrepreneurship can also impact contexts.” (ibid. p.165). This research, in addressing contextual embeddedness of entrepreneurship, also shows the reciprocal relations between context and entrepreneurship (Elter and Henrekson, 2017). The entrepreneurs’ ability to re-perform and debate with deeply rooted cultural metaphors within their context were evident. In this section, we explore the narratives that captured the context and embedded actions i.e. how do individuals talk and act towards achieving emancipation (Steyaert 2007). We viewed these acts through two conceptions of emancipation. The first concept is the emancipation of the entrepreneuring subject *from* prevailing constraints to action (Berlin, 1969). Entrepreneurs narratives and stories were presented through their ability to dream of another potential and to pursue opportunities (Rindova et al. 2009). Entrepreneurs became aware of the potential of what these opportunities can offer, the awareness introduced the power to break free from restraints that would have held them back. This was evident in the entrepreneurs’ ability to overcome the social restrictions of “wasta”, discrimination, changing family views and perceptions and calling for inclusivity of entrepreneurship as an activity for all. Furthermore, individuals had a new social reference that they belonged to through their community of entrepreneurs in Jordan and as part of an international movement. This introduced social and economic empowerment, leading to changes in their position in the social order (Rindova et al., 2009). In this section, the conceptualisation of emancipation *from*, shed light on the contextual features and entrepreneurship reforming institutional

contexts (Castellanza 2022), presenting individual actions in changing the social context as antecedent and outcome.

The second concept is entrepreneurial emancipation *to* cause changes in society in a broader sense (Berlin, 1969). This is evident in the policy level movement and the encouragement for individuals to act. The changes were on a scale beyond the direct impact of entrepreneurs as individuals. For example, the government has promoted entrepreneurship through training, mentoring, bootcamps and venture capital funding, and it has driven the entrepreneurship agenda to address social and political issues. At the same time, entrepreneurs felt that entrepreneurship was overpromised in terms of what it can achieve. The concept of “emancipation to” has achieved a broader social change in terms of creating a positive and optimistic future for a society that suffers from high unemployment among its youth, notwithstanding the mentioned overpromising.

<insert Figure (3) here>

Consistent with the cognitive interactions through acts of emancipation, the model in Figure (3) incorporates an assessment of inter-dependent means, both of individuals acting entrepreneurially towards social change and policy level interaction presenting what can be done as a result of formal institutionalised interactions. These interactions show the narratives of the entrepreneurs’ contextual embeddedness that triggered a process of social empowerment and transformation. In their narratives, the level of awareness of the limitations and the potential of the entrepreneurial activity led to acts of emancipation. Entrepreneurs have re-performed and negotiated with social, cultural and political discourse to achieve their vision of the future. As a result, entrepreneurs were empowered to act and overcome social norms, which

were inhibiting and limiting their potential because they did not belong to a social network or because of their religion. Entrepreneurship provided a means through which they challenged these obstacles and became aware of their potential. The process of change included defying and driving social change, changing identities and roles from being employees to entrepreneurs and changing perceptions and stereotypes of what society approves or disapproves. These changes introduced a collective outcome for a community that supports and encourages each other.

The study extends the debate as to whether and when entrepreneurship can lead to emancipation (Rindova et al. 2009). Indeed, when individuals are faced with informal institutional constraints, usually based on gender, ethnicity, family history or religion and dictating the systems of social exchange, those constraints can limit individuals and as a result, the autonomy of the entrepreneur is undermined (Khoury and Prasad, 2016). Marginalised groups who engage in entrepreneurship can influence discriminatory societal norms (Scott et al. 2012). Yet, the emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship reports different results depending on contexts and the evolving interdependencies between entrepreneurs and contexts through which individuals mediate the influence of social structures and expectations on individual behaviour (Castellanza 2022). Although institutional support could trigger entrepreneurs to act, this is more likely to occur when entrepreneurs are embedded in networks of relationships that provide specific resources (Khoury and Prasad, 2016). For example, despite support for entrepreneurship at the policy level in Jordan, informal institutions such as social networks and social capital continue to have a particularly strong influence, impeding the progress of entrepreneurs (Malik and Awadallah, 2013). Quite clearly, within the context of social and structural challenges, the emancipatory scope of entrepreneurship is achieved by enabling entrepreneuring. Therefore, the most dominant theme between entrepreneurship and international development that emerges relates to the opportunity to realise the potential to

enable freedom of functionality and human well-being (Al-Dajan et al., 2015). This argument also connects with Rindova et al. (2009) on the conceptualisation of emancipatory entrepreneuring, arguing that individuals with limited resources can introduce socioeconomic change through acts of entrepreneuring by seeking autonomy by breaking free from the authority of another through a process of creating change by allowing themselves and others to pursue change. The findings also expand on the antecedents and consequences of the collective entrepreneurship that facilitate removal of social constraints and create a sense of community.

This study has important implications for the way in which to account for the motivation toward entrepreneurial action in a socially restrictive environment. The study investigated the entrepreneurial actions and outcomes of empowerment within this environment: the process of transforming identities and the collective agentic capabilities that result in change. Overall, this study extends the field of research in the following ways.

Previous research projects on capabilities and empowerment have been focused on women and the providing of resources (Al-Dajani et al., 2010; 2015). Through the processes of emancipation, entrepreneurs' identities have changed, and they have formed a collective force of action toward achieving outcomes of social change. This study's questions that within a context of developing countries the social transformation leads to the desired economic growth among entrepreneurs. The study provides a nuanced picture of the emancipation process in which the removal of social constraints of "wasta" might not lead to the desired economic growth due to policy overpromising of the entrepreneurial activity.

Furthermore, the study extends the role of entrepreneurship as a cognitive process leading to individual transformation (Pontikes and Rindova 2020). Following a micro-analysis of the entrepreneurs' interactions, our findings identified two connected forms of entrepreneurial

activity. The process of transformation shows the mental process through which entrepreneurs engage in different ways to relate to their present context (Pontikes and Rindova, 2020). Through this process, the agentic capabilities can influence the transformative capacities of agents as well as the content of their transformative agendas (Pontikes and Rindova, 2020), thus encapsulating the collective organisation through which entrepreneurs mobilise and transform the structural properties of social and institutional systems. Through these interactions, entrepreneurs serve as action repertoires and interactive agents. Thus, by introducing the transformative agent, the collective behaviour of entrepreneurs proactively informs and guides the institutional change. This process involved inner-directed cognitive processes that served to craft an empowered individuated self; a self-reflective process that orients cognition away from representing and acting upon the external environment and toward the self (Gavetti and Porac, 2018). This can be viewed as an outcome of being empowered and acting entrepreneurially, and it is part of the dynamic interaction and contextualisation of factors that entrepreneurs deal with in their environment. Although the entrepreneurs in our sample found these contextual factors in their environment challenging, in particular the lack of social and institutional support, they were able to draw on their knowledge and experiences to apply both their individual and collective agency to influence change in a constraining context.

The findings contribute to the understanding of entrepreneurship as more dynamic and far-reaching than occurring in general management because it must deal with the constant uncertainty that pervades entrepreneurial conditions (Alvarez and Barney, 2007). These interactions broaden our understanding of the important dynamics in entrepreneurial activity. These dynamics are active and are translated by what entrepreneurs know and perceive and how they understand and experience these influences in their environment. Furthermore, we contribute to the field by studying the role of entrepreneurship and the process of

transformation that entrepreneurs in developing economies must deal with, noting that these processes have usually gone unnoticed and are under-researched (Al-Dajani et al., 2013). We open the door to further empirical research investigating the micro-processes of the entrepreneurs' ability to transform and change contingencies. Through the application of context-agency relations in a limiting environment, the study illustrates the multi-agentic capabilities entrepreneurs exhibit and the process of their direct actions that leads to outcomes of change. With this illustration, we seek to illuminate future empirical opportunities to leverage these theoretical perspectives and apply them in understudied settings.

Conclusion

This research aims to examine entrepreneurs' contextual embeddedness and the role of entrepreneurial emancipation and how it influences societal transformation in a developing region. Entrepreneurs' efforts exemplified entrepreneurship's emancipatory role in facing tough social and institutional concerns. The authors recognise that to develop research on entrepreneurship's emancipatory potential, contextual and social change issues should be explored further. The study was informed by pertinent literature and serves as a foundation for themes concerning agency, institutions and development, as well as emancipatory entrepreneurship and the developmental outcomes of these interactions. These interactions shed light on entrepreneurs' emancipatory actions in the context of a developing country. As such, we address claims about the insular approach to entrepreneurship theory in this paper by extending the research context into a developing context.

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Table (1): Sample characteristics:

Participants	
Male	18
Female	7
Non-binary	0
Age group	28-53
Activity stage	
Early-stage start-ups	8
Growth	10
Scale-up	7
Total participants	25

Table 2: coding process:

Codes	Representing quote
Releasing the limitation and the potential	<p>Me as an entrepreneur I spent all of my time as an employee I had no idea, at the beginning, I didn't think it is possible for somebody who has no relative or no relations with the government, I don't have "wasta" and my father and family are not businesspeople. We are all employees living on a limited income, so it was a dream to start my own company, but I started.</p> <p>they used the youth who were enthusiastic about the idea and the dream and went far with their ideas. They used us to sell the idea of western or American entrepreneurship. They didn't take into consideration the reality of our local context here, in terms of market size, appetite for investment, or how ready our country is to deal with such transactions, for a company to start small then get sold by hundreds of times fold of its assets. These concepts in our regulations in our country is not there, so we were oversold the idea of entrepreneurship, it wasn't really relevant to our context.</p>
Government led awareness	<p>if there wasn't the buzz that happened in 2010-2011 to support entrepreneurs and to have the training, to have the boot camp and to have the seed fund which was very important at that time. I wouldn't have the courage to leave my job and be dedicated to start my own company, I would have started my company on the side and grow it slowly.</p> <p>The idea of fast-growing companies and the investment and series of investments and exit strategy of selling your shares of your own company it wasn't also in my awareness or background. I didn't know that it was possible to start a company and exit and be wealthy without keep running it, I mean for long term.</p> <p>The buzz that was created about entrepreneurship for the young people to start their business and the training that I attended and the knowledge that acquired has made a paradigm shift and that was very important to me to leap from an employee to be an entrepreneur.</p> <p>Some of the government officials are people who were from the entrepreneurial sector, which is good. For example the current minister of ICT was one of my mentors, so they know what we are going through and together we are achieving things slowly, hopefully that soon we will see changes.</p>
Changing perceptions	<p>in my opinion, is the only way to create a successful ecosystem for entrepreneurship, is to have entrepreneurs who are successful or even who failed, who started one company after the other, and who had experiences and based on that we can establish the context, laws and regulations based on the findings that the wave of entrepreneurship has experienced in the region.</p> <p>I think we are on the right track, earlier we were dreaming a lot, and we were scrambling with ideas imported from abroad (the silicon valley type of</p>

	<p>entrepreneurship) and we were trying to implement it here because we don't have any experience, we learned from it and we are on the right track.</p>
	<p>we need to have a paradigm shift, we will see the impact after 5-10 years when people see that it is not a major issue for a person to leave their work and start their business, even if they failed, they went back to become an employee. Once they see that people can survive these experiences.</p> <p>My family wasn't taking me seriously until my story was covered in the newspaper, I became the hero. It is changing, despite the frustration the majority of the start ups have reached the point of real investment that will allow them to learn. We need to learn the hard way, which needs acceptance from our society even if the person fails, we need a paradigm shift in our thinking</p> <p>as an entrepreneur I am doing something different, I revolted against the normal way of going through academic and career advancement. I haven't done my bachelor's degree, consciously I took that decision. So, I have always been the rebel and the guy that doesn't know what he is doing.</p>
Raising the need for an inclusive entrepreneurship	<p>We need to have people, such as the successful businesspeople, the wealthy and the government officials to put some capital for investing in start-ups, other than that we will continue to be in the same whirlpool and we will continue to see entrepreneurship sustained and maintained only among the elite people. Those who can afford to fail once and twice and survive.</p> <p>When I consider the policies and regulations and the cost of the start up and how they are not supportive to my enterprise, that doesn't make just want to leave, but to run away from doing business in the country.</p> <p>The government is not supporting any more, before 3-4 years ago there was a great hype around entrepreneurs and support from different entities. Now everything is frozen and not moving. When the government started the hype of entrepreneurship the private sector helped but then it all stopped.</p>
Realising and overcoming discrimination	<p>we didn't realize that we didn't have enough diversity (Christians and Muslims in the team) on another hand that the team regardless of their background the team is much better and people look as this in our culture, and this thing wasn't there although it was daunting from a statistics point of view (Christians being a minority).</p> <p>All this discrimination is not clear finding the good people and building a good culture people with a mentality of progress who wants to make a difference we don't care about discrimination, by context we don't judge people or label them, we see people as part of a context without discrimination.</p>
Sense of belonging to a community	<p>when I deal with our community, it is booming our community, and it is a small community, everyone knows everyone. It's kind of gives me comfort to see other people suffering, (laugh) but I see that there is a level of understanding and that makes me comfortable. “</p>
	<p>For me as an entrepreneur it means the ecosystem that I am having here, the ecosystem the interaction with other start-ups. If you asked me how to summarize this in two or three words, I will say two things: the access to</p>

	learning new stuff, this is not easy to find in any place, and the ability to keep upgrading your mind.
	the different factors that impacting your business at different levels whether it is the learning, applying, interaction and networking. So it is different layers of different things
	<p>it is the entrepreneurship at large ecosystem in Jordan, whether it's a start up or a business, or whatever, this is what means to me as an entrepreneur.</p> <p>as start up in general, I believe now, not only in Jordan but in the world, that entrepreneurship in general is booming, the current situation in the country from environment around us, local suppliers, government regulations, competition, etc</p>
Addressing many challenges through entrepreneurship	<p>As everybody knows in the last five years entrepreneurship is one of the top topics on the table at the official side and at the private sector side because of many reasons, the unemployment, the economic growth and the reaction of the Arab spring to give some freedom and some space for young people to innovate and to implement and dream of their future.</p> <p>my understanding of the entrepreneurship context in Jordan that, it was overrated at the beginning and it was tackled without a proper plan that is normalized across all stakeholder parties.</p>

Figure (1) theme coding process:

Figure (2) Acts of Emancipation

Figure (3) process of transformation and outcomes

Dr Rana Zayadin is an active Researcher in Entrepreneurship, she is part of the Research and Innovation Development team at Anglia Ruskin University. Dr Zayadin is an active committee member for the Institute of Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) Special Interest Group (SIG) on Entrepreneurship and Minorities. Nominated “for best paper award at ISBE Conference 2019. Her research interests include entrepreneurship and context and contextualisation; entrepreneurship and developing economies.

Antonella Zucchella is professor of Marketing at the University of Pavia in Italy. Her research interests are in international business, marketing and international entrepreneurship, small business management and entrepreneurship, global value chains and sustainability. She published several articles in international journals and is also author of books on entrepreneurship. She has been awarded by International Business Review for the best article in 2018, received the Emerald literati award for most outstanding paper in Multinational Business Review in 2017, twice awarded for the best paper in the International Business conference AIB-UK and best paper of the track at EIBA conference 2016. She has been keynote speaker in several international conferences.

Dr. Amitabh Anand is Associate Professor at Excelia Business School, La Rochelle, France. His research focuses primarily on Knowledge Management, SMEs, Entrepreneurship, and virtues, He has won several scholarship and awards for his research and peer review. His works have been published at Journal of Business Venturing, Journal of Knowledge Management, Computers in Human Behaviour, Management International and Journal of Knowledge Economy. He is also editorial board member of Management Decision, Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies and Guest Editor for Information System Frontiers.