Title

Social enterprise growth by design: Using design to incubate and accelerate social enterprises

Keywords

Social enterprise, Economic growth; Social impact, Design, Social enterprise ecosystem

Abstract

Purpose: The paper explores the roles and impact of design in incubating and accelerating social enterprises. It aims to understand design's influence on social enterprise ecosystems and in improving outcomes for social enterprises.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study used an exploratory, qualitative approach, utilising case-studies and interviews. The comparative case-study methodology was applied to evaluate the influence of design on the development of social enterprises in the UK and South Korea and identify critical issues in their utilisation of design. Empirical data included: in-depth case-studies of design utilisation practices (UK=6; South Korea=15) and design applications (UK=2; South Korea=2) for the growth of social enterprise and its ecosystem; 27 social enterprise/design experts (UK=17; South Korea=10); and 22 social enterprises (UK=12; South Korea= 10). Content and thematic analysis were utilised to synthesise the findings.

Findings: Findings demonstrate the differing influences of design on social enterprise, from improving products/services and business models to enhancing social enterprise ecosystem support and networks. Future directions are suggested for applying design for social enterprise growth, business stage development and systematising interactions between the social enterprise and design sectors.

Research limitations/implications: The research is based on case-studies from only two countries. Further, the adoption of working definitions of social enterprise in the countries may result in the research underestimating the heterogeneity of social enterprise.

Practical implications: The findings contribute to optimising efficient ecosystem development to improve social enterprise competitiveness and innovation.

Originality/value: This paper establishes a research foundation on design for social enterprise, offering theoretical and practical insights into its impact on growth.

Introduction

Social enterprises produce benefits across economic, social and environmental dimensions (Galera and Borzaga, 2009; Javed, Muhammad and Abdul, 2019; Summerfield, 2020). Consequently, many countries have recently introduced new legislation and strategies to diversify the business models of social enterprises and enter new territories (Borzaga et al., 2020). This has affected the emergence of various support structures enabling the establishment and operation of social enterprises by intermediaries from the social enterprise, academic, private and design sectors.

In particular, the design sector is showing a growing interest in the possibility of applying design to social enterprises, following the publication over the past decade of evidence of the role and impact of design on economic value creation and social change (Chou, 2018; Douglas, Rogers and Lorenzetto 2014; Kennedy and Sharp, 2015; Kuzmina et al., 2016; Selloni and Corubolo, 2017). Nonetheless, existing studies only narrowly consider design in the context of applying design thinking to social enterprise processes, activities or systems (mainly planning and organisational design) (Design Council, 2020a; DTUL, 2017) or examine its contribution to social innovation (Manzini, 2015; Pérez, Hands and McKeever, 2017). Namely, fragmented design disciplines in the social enterprise context suggest that utilisations and applications of design for social enterprises remain at an early stage. A dearth of studies on the comprehensive impact of design on social enterprise growth demonstrates research opportunities to address the role of design in the growth of social enterprise ecosystems and how to enhance them.

The research aimed to explore the influence of design on social enterprise growth, including understanding its key roles and essential elements for social enterprises. The exploration was

focused on two key aspects: design for (i) business growth of social enterprises, and (ii) development and improvement of social enterprise supporting activities and environment (the ecosystems surrounding them). The findings are principally used to demonstrate the functional roles and impact of design for social enterprises and their ecosystem.

The authors expect that the main findings of this research will contribute to a deepened understanding of design in the context of social enterprise development, including the different types of social enterprise support practices that design can deliver. For example, academics in social enterprise and design can use the key findings as foundations for theoretical underpinnings to develop new approaches, methods and tools for social enterprises by obtaining insights into design and its impact on competitiveness and economic growth. Furthermore, it could aid policymakers, social enterprise support bodies and design support bodies in developing an optimised social enterprise support system that integrates design to foster various types of social enterprise support practices.

Literature review

Social enterprise and social enterprise ecosystems

Globally, social enterprises are recognised as a growing part of the business sector, creating both economic and social value (SEUK, 2021). The acknowledgement of the importance of social enterprises in creating better economies and societies has spurred great interest and efforts from many governments, which are trying to develop various forms of support to facilitate the growth of social enterprises at the national level (Lyon, Stumbitz and Vickers, 2019). This has led to the emergence of the concept of social enterprise ecosystems in the academic literature in recent years, building on similar literature that conceptualised wider local economies as ecosystems (see Moore, 1993), figuratively drawing on the ecological and environmental literature to describe ecosystem development (Hazenberg et al., 2016a).

These conceptual models identify ecosystems as containing social enterprises (viewed metaphorically as living organisms), that adapt to and are shaped by the conditions prevalent in the ecosystem. These ecosystems are shaped by historical, cultural, political and socio-

economic factors, with a social enterprise's own success or demise being affected by these external conditions. Further, a social enterprise also interacts with its stakeholder networks and resource flows within the ecosystem, with its interactions with these wider factors being shaped by its own internal logics and structures (Hazenberg et al., 2016b; Roy and Hazenberg, 2019), and in particular the hybrid missions of the social enterprise (and the tensions that this can create) (Okuneviciute-Neverauskiene and Pranskeviciute, 2021).

Ecosystem thinking has begun to infiltrate the support provided by social enterprise support providers and even shaped work at the policy level (for an example, see the European Commission's EFESEIIS project). However, despite this growth in holistic models of support for social enterprise, design is not integral to social enterprise infrastructure support, which may be an underlying reason why design is not utilised strategically in this sector. Arguably, effectively introducing design into this sector will have to occur at both internal and external levels across the ecosystem. The role of design in the commercial sector will, therefore, be useful to pinpoint good practices that can be applied to social enterprise at both the organisational and ecosystem levels.

Design

The definitions and scope of design have evolved with the needs of businesses and societies; thus, design is used differently by individuals and organisations depending on their understanding of design (Henderson and Whicher, 2015). Design is distinguished by outcomes with the design process in service of meeting outcomes, including both technical (e.g. engineering for manufacture) and non-technical design (e.g. experience and identity) (Design Council, 2011). Moreover, the notions of design, such as problem-solving and creativity, can be comprehended by its characteristics for a coordinating and systematic activity that links innovation (Cox, 2005; Design Council, 2011; Mozota, 2003; Na, Choi and Harrison, 2017). Design is considered a strategic element in the innovation process of private companies and public bodies rather than simply providing form and styling (Manzini, 2015; Hands, 2018).

In particular, over the last three decades, design has played significant roles at the operational, tactical and strategic levels depending on the business challenges (Design Council, 2020a;

Hands, 2018; Holland and Lam, 2014) (see Table 1); thus, design has been recognised as an essential factor in business success (McKinsey Design, 2018) and has been utilised to improve business competence and innovation. This is pertinent for social enterprise, as it demonstrates the value that design can bring to social enterprise both at the local individual enterprise level, but also at the wider strategic level with regard to intermediaries and support organisations.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

As shown in Table 1, design today is therefore applied in a wide variety of business areas because it supports increased competitiveness and can improve the quality of products and/or services (D'lppolito, 2014). Further, design can add value to enterprises, increasing brand equity, implementing and strengthening a company's brands and delivering its value and uniqueness to the outside world (Design Council, 2018).

Social enterprise/social enterprise ecosystem and design

By observing the characteristics of social enterprise, its ecosystem and design, this research recognised that the expanding roles of design can enhance the capacity and effectiveness of social enterprises. This is because the broadening roles of design can intersect with the concept and features of social enterprise. Table 2 compares the characteristics of social enterprises and the expanding roles of design.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Although some scholars insist that the concept and definition of social enterprise does not fit traditional categories of private, public or non-profit organisations (Doherty et al., 2014), social enterprises are nevertheless a business model seeking to create profit similar to the principal purpose of traditional businesses (Thompson and Doherty, 2006; Peattie and Morley, 2008; Moizer and Tracey, 2010). They must also achieve financial sustainability to continue delivering social impact (Chell, 2007; Dees, 1998; Weerawardena et al., 2010; Alegre and Berbegal-Mirabent, 2016). Design input can increase the commercial sustainability of social

enterprises by increasing profits and improving brand development. According to the Design Council (2014), design can enhance value in all types of businesses and organisations. Design can also contribute by creating both tangible and intangible aspects of the experience provided by brands and by creating a consistent and memorable result for brand development (Holland and Lam, 2014). Mozota (2003) says design serves as a catalyst for generative approaches to ideas and imagination, enabling the creation of ideas at every stage of the innovation process. Bason (2016), in particular, maintains that design can provide a platform for solving social problems in social innovation and social entrepreneurship/social enterprise through cooperation with various fields, users and suppliers, thereby also providing a repeatable process. For instance, design can play a crucial role in setting up and achieving the social mission of social enterprises; it can be used as a process to identify environmental and social issues (Design Council, 2020a; Roy, 2010) while also serving as an effective tool to enhance the market competitiveness of existing or new products, services, and improving the organisational culture of social enterprises (Kwon et al., 2021). This ability to utilise design to combine problem identification and create effective tools to solve such problems, means that design can be utilised as a tool to enhance social value creation efficiency (Bason, 2016). This is an area that currently remains significantly under-utilised by both social enterprises and the wider social enterprise ecosystem.

This study aimed to examine the current state of design utilisation in social enterprises to better understand design in social enterprises, enabling exploration of design needs and the impact of design on these businesses. To do so, the research sought to clarify what design is and its applications in the business context. The research, therefore, considered design with reference to the design ladder proposed by the Danish Design Centre (2018) (see Figure 1), which is frequently used to typify the different types of design used in businesses (Hernandez et al., 2017; Nusem et al., 2017; Regeneris, H., 2021; Tether, B., 2005): (i) non-design or hardly using design (i.e. design is not applied systematically), (ii) designing (i.e. design is used as form-giving or the last finishing in new products or services), (iii) designing process (i.e. design is used as an integrated element in development processes) and (iv) design strategy (i.e. design is used a critical strategic element in business model).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

In utilising this model as the basis for understanding how design could support social enterprise ecosystem development, this study seeks to better understand how design principles are embedded both internally within social enterprises and externally in the wider ecosystem support factors that exist. As noted earlier, the authors believe that this exploration will contribute to a better understanding of the different types of social enterprise support practices that design can deliver.

Social enterprise/social enterprise ecosystem and design in the UK and South Korea

In practical settings for social enterprise/social enterprise ecosystem and design, the UK and South Korea share similarities and differences. The two countries exhibit similar levels of maturity in their social enterprise ecosystems, including long-term governmental support for social enterprises, various policies nurturing vibrant ecosystems (Agapitova, Sanchez and Tinsley 2017) and the understanding of design at the national level. For example, the national design support bodies in the two countries acknowledge design's leading role in innovation, corporate profitability and long-term performance (Design Council 2018; KIDP 2019).

Nonetheless, the two countries have adopted slightly different approaches to supporting social enterprises. For instance, the UK government has tended to focus on creating legal forms (i.e. the Community Interest Company), public service marketplaces and growing the social impact investment market rather than providing direct financial support to social enterprises (Andreadakis, 2022; Hazenberg and Hall, 2016; Mazzei and Roy, 2017; SEUK, 2022); while the South Korean government gives both national and local governments responsibility for cultivating new markets for social enterprises and providing them with direct financial support (Choi, Berry and Ghadimi 2020). Importantly, the two countries demonstrate different degrees of design utilisation in their business contexts. In the UK, design is often considered an essential component of business strategy (Design Council, 2020a; Innovate UK, 2020). In contrast, recognition of the impact of design remains low in South Korea, with 83% of Korean businesses never or rarely using it, and often they do it only as a 'final touch' (KIDP 2019). Therefore, comparing social enterprise/social enterprise ecosystems and design environments in these two countries provides a useful comparative

setting for understanding the potential of design for social enterprises in different practice settings.

Methodology

The research comprised three phases: (i) exploration, (ii) investigation and (iii) analysis (see Figure 2). The first phase consisted of an exploratory study examining the role of design in the growth of social enterprises, including how design supports social enterprises at the systemic (i.e. social enterprise ecosystems) and institutional (i.e. social enterprise support bodies and businesses) levels. This phase included a literature review, case-studies and exploratory interviews with social enterprise and design experts in the UK and South Korea. Exploratory interviews were employed to complement literature reviews by obtaining a greater depth of understanding of the research contexts (Na, 2016). For example, although the literature review and case-studies with the research developed a broader understanding of the research context, the existing research and data provided limited insight into the practical use of design to support social enterprise within the social enterprise ecosystems. Thus, to grasp the implications of design in the social enterprise context and address the knowledge gap, exploratory interviews were conducted with fourteen social enterprise experts (UK: n = 9; South Korea: n = 5) and eleven design experts (UK: n = 6; South Korea: n = 5) through purposive sampling, which involves selecting appropriate people or cases 'with purpose' given the focus and aims of the study (Matthews and Ross, 2010). The variation in the interview sample size between the UK and South Korea is attributed to challenges in identifying UK experts who comprehend and utilise design for the growth of social enterprises. Consequently, the research opted to conduct additional interviews with social enterprise experts in the UK in advance to examine their understanding of design.

The second phase involved an in-depth study of the phenomena identified during the first phase, including comparing the key findings for the UK and South Korea. A multi-case-study design was applied to investigate a situation (Crowe et al., 2011) of the current state of design among the UK and South Korean social enterprises, leading to the identification of twenty design utilisation practices (DUPs), which utilise various forms of design in businesses (UK: n = 6; South Korea: n = 14) and four design applications (DAs), which apply design to improve

social enterprise supporting activities and settings (UK: n = 2; South Korea: n = 2) based on the literature review and the exploratory interviews. This enabled a more systematic understanding of the various effects of design on social enterprise growth, demonstrating in particular how design can be used differentially for incubating and accelerating the growth of such enterprises. However, this research investigated a relatively small sample-size of DUP cases from the UK in comparison to those from South Korea. Due to the lack of design understanding among social enterprise support bodies and their limited involvement in supporting such enterprises, there was a paucity of DUP cases targeting social enterprises in the UK.

In the following step, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts from the social enterprise and design sectors in the UK (n = 15) and South Korea (n = 13) to investigate the observed DUPs and DAs and the impact of design on the growth of social enterprises. Regarding the UK, where fewer cases of DUPs were confirmed compared to South Korea, it was necessary to contact several different support bodies in the social enterprise and design sector in order to explore the potential of design utilisations. In contrast, in South Korea, a considerable number of social enterprises and design support bodies are utilising design. This made it possible to explore the difficulties and improvements in using design for social enterprises from a more practical perspective. The experts were chosen for their practical work experience in the social enterprise or design sectors, including social enterprise support bodies, design support bodies, design practitioners and design academics. A series of in-depth semi-structured interviews were also carried out with 22 social enterprises (UK: n = 12; South Korea: n = 10), enabling an examination of the current state of design utilisations among social enterprises and the impact of design on social enterprise growth, including key issues engendered by the use of design. The 22 social enterprises were selected as they fulfil the working definition of social enterprises (i.e., an organisation that aims to address social and/or environmental missions through economic activity). The participating social enterprises were assigned to one of two categories according to their experience in design: social enterprises with no design support experience (n=13 [UK: n=9; South Korea: n=4]) and social enterprises with design support experience (n=8 [UK: n=2; South Korea: n=7]). These two groups were expected to provide different perspectives on the research topic due to their diverse understandings of design according to their experience.

The third research phase entailed analysing and synthesising the key findings of the previous phases to evaluate the roles of design in social enterprise growth, especially the incubation and acceleration of social enterprises and the development of social enterprise ecosystems. For the analysis, the research applied a combination of content analysis, which involves the systematic and objective identification of specific characteristics (classes or categories) to draw inferences about the data (usually text) (Gray, 2014) and thematic analysis, which represents a valuable method for investigating the perspectives of multiple research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and summarising a large data set (Nowell et al., 2017). Particularly, the conventional content analysis approach, which derives coding categories directly from the data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) and the inductive thematic analysis approach, which allowed the data to determine themes, were applied to the selective coding and synthesis (based on response clusters) of the opinions and insights collected from different methods and experts.

The key objectives of data analysis were to explore the three key areas of research focus, namely: (a) the state of design understanding and utilisation in social enterprises and intermediary organisations, (b) challenges in using design in/for social enterprises, and (c) key considerations for improving design in/for social enterprises. The analysis consequently was able to (i) clarify essential design elements in the social enterprise context and (ii) extract key considerations for facilitating DAs in the social enterprise development process at the systemic and institutional levels, considering design element types, application and impact. This research closely follows Brunel University's 'Code of Ethics for Research' (BUL, 2013), and the Brunel Research Ethics Committee approved the data collection.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Principal Findings

The key research findings of this research reveal: (i) awareness of the utilisation of design in social enterprises, (ii) challenges of social enterprises in the use of design, (iii) the role of design in the growth of social enterprises, and (iv) role of design for the development of social

enterprise ecosystems. The following subsections detail the key findings in relation to these four themes, with exemplar quotes drawn from the data to provide illustrative evidence of these findings.

How social enterprises understand and utilise design

This research confirmed that design in the social enterprise context is not much different from general businesses and societies (explained above; see literature review section). The following quotations indicate how social enterprises use design.

> *"We use design to build the platform to make a social impact with very much commercial attitude […] design is used in developing the aesthetic feel of the brand, which is really important for us as we try to interact with people by showing what we are doing" (UK-SE 1).*

> *"Our design focuses on market research, which is researching competitiveness, asking people what kind of design they like and promoting the company by posting on social media; it allows us to engage customers" (UK-SE 4).*

> *"Although we don't develop uniquely designed products, we use design to develop the experience of the product, which contains the story of the product and represents the story with colours [...] Also, we do proto-typing tests by potential customers before launching products" (SK-SE 2).*

> *"For us, design not only helps us to establish the brand identity and gives opportunities to explore new business opportunities, as well as guides us to develop new services and influences internal culture development" (SK-SE 3).*

> *"We use design especially at the product planning stage, as design is useful to improve the designing process efficiently and the overall system of the company" (SK-SE 5).*

Design impacts both the economic and social aspects of social enterprises. Regarding the economic aspect, most participating social enterprises highlighted that design increases their commercial viability by increasing profits and improving brand development by understanding target customers, evaluating business models, establishing brand image and improving customer experiences. In the social aspect, it was emphasised that it is possible to develop various approaches and platforms to solve social and/or environmental problems using design, such as developing recycled materials, external collaboration and building knowledge resources.

However, design performed different roles in social enterprises in the UK and South Korea, depending on the level of design understanding and competence of social enterprises. For instance, social enterprises in the UK commonly use design as a strategy influencing business operation and development, as well as in the visual presentation of their products, services and brands to communicate with existing or potential customers and, frequently, shape or style products and services and as a critical element of business development and strategy (UK-SEs 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 11 and 12). According to UK-SE 6

> *"We use design to look at opportunity, positioning in the marketplace, engaging with customers and business planning. Design is the company's philosophy".*

Nevertheless, UK social enterprises rarely recognise the design process as effective and influential for end-users or for minimising risk (UK-SEs 2, 4 and 5). In contrast, social enterprises in South Korea frequently use design to develop existing or new products and services (SK-SEs 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10). Specifically, they utilise design for market or user research, prototyping and model development to improve their understanding of the end-user and increase time and cost efficiencies. Compared with UK social enterprises, current design utilisation as a strategy for business development is deficient among South Korean social enterprises (SK-SEs 1 and 4). In this regard, SK-SE 1 and 4 highlighted that

> *"Design is a quite new area for us, so it is quite difficult to access and understand" (SK-SE 1).*

"Because of the lack of design understanding, including knowledge and experience, most social enterprises cannot use design in a strategic way" (SK-SE 4).

These findings indicate that social enterprises in these two countries understand the potential impacts and benefits of design differently. They also suggest that it is crucial to minimise the differences in design understanding and competence among social enterprises by implementing various initiatives.

Challenges for social enterprises in the utilisation of design

Social enterprises in both countries experience a range of difficulties in implementing design practices, which are caused by either/both internal and external contexts. For example, the challenges faced by UK social enterprises can be classified into four categories: (i) limited time and resources for design utilisation (UK-SE 1), (ii) difficulties finding appropriate design experts (UK-SEs 1, 3 and 7), (iii) lack of design experience (UK-SEs 5 and 8) and (iv) difficulties communicating with design practitioners (UK-SEs 7 and 11). The difficulties are due primarily to the social enterprises lacking business and design capabilities. For instance, limitations on the time and resources available for design utilisation relate to an enterprise's business competencies. Most social enterprises in the UK feel that they cannot afford to invest time and financial resources in design, due to the small size of their business and their available human resources (UK-SEs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12). According to the UK-SE 1,

"Most social enterprises may have no plan to have design contracts because they often cannot afford it and have limited budget".

UK-SE 7 also pointed out that,

"Because most social enterprises do not have enough financial resources, they might spend less than 2% of their profits on design; This is even limited to few social enterprises that have a rich understanding of design and a strong desire for design applications".

Social enterprises in South Korea reported experiencing similar challenges around the use of design, including a lack of design understanding and competence. This is related to their lack of design experience and limited budgets for design, resembling the resource limitations and issues in communicating with design practitioners noted by their UK-based counterparts. These observations demonstrate why social enterprises cannot use design strategically. In particular, for some social enterprises, design is a relatively new area that is difficult to access and understand, meaning that they struggle with how to apply it to their product and service development (SK-SEs 3, 4, 8 and 9). In this regard, SK-SE 4 stressed,

> *"Most social enterprises have limited perception of design; thus, they have limited resources and skills".*

Meanwhile, the expenses associated with design development and implementation mentioned by South Korean social enterprises relate to their business competence. Like their UK counterparts, many social enterprises in South Korea reported having minimal capacity to invest time and financial resources in design due to the small size of their business and staff (SK- SEs 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9). These findings emphasise that the role of design for social enterprises should focus on business growth. Therefore, one objective involves demonstrating design's vast and practical impact on business growth, which might encourage social enterprises to use it.

Notably, the difficulties identified by UK social enterprises (such as finding appropriate design practitioners and lacking design experience) are connected and primarily result from a lack of design understanding and competence, which reflects the observations of South Korean social enterprises (SK-SEs 1, 5, 7, 8 and 10). Thus, it is crucial to develop and provide practical and relevant design education to enhance the understanding of design among social enterprises. Furthermore, South Korean social enterprises also highlighted difficulties in communicating with designers (SK-SEs 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10). According to SK-SEs 4,

> *"Social enterprises often lack understanding what support they should provide to designers when they ask them to conduct design work".*

It appears most frequently in the context of explaining the message that they want to deliver to customers or the desired direction of design. Although this is because most social enterprises lack an understanding of design, it also indicates that design practitioners do not fully comprehend the social value or impact that social enterprises are attempting to generate. Consequently, it demonstrates the need for design practitioners to improve their understanding of social enterprises, especially around issues of hybridity and the tensions that this can bring to social enterprises (Okuneviciute-Neverauskiene and Pranskeviciute, 2021).

How social enterprises can grow by design

This research established that the growth of social enterprises is influenced by the implementation of design in various ways to enhance competitiveness and sustainability and improve products and services at the organisational level. These design utilisations have primarily been supported by intermediary organisations (including social enterprise support bodies, design support bodies and universities). Twenty cases of DUPs were identified in the UK (n=6) and South Korea (n=14). Their examination revealed that design aiming to support the growth of social enterprises could be classified according to eighteen design elements categorised into four groups (Kwon et al., 2021): (i) designing, (ii) design process, (iii) design strategy, and (iv) design for systemic change and culture. The four categories represent areas in which design influences the growth of social enterprises. Table 3 illustrates the classification of these design elements in the 20 DUPs. Details for each group of design elements follow the table.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

(i)   ***Designing*** includes graphic and visual design, visual identity design, product design and online platform development and primarily focuses on visual elements (e.g. styling and form-giving) of the products and services provided by social enterprises. These design elements mostly support the start-up stages, in which social enterprises aim to launch a new product, brand or service. In particular, some design elements, such as visual identity design (Brand Identity/Corporate Identity) and

online platform development, help social enterprises to develop effective ways of communicating with their current and potential customers.

(ii) ***Design process*** contributes to both the incubation and acceleration of the growth of social enterprises by integrating design into the development of products and services. Here, design represents an approach (e.g. service design) and method for market or user research, existing product or service improvement, new product or service development and prototyping/model-development. For example, market and user research help social enterprises in the pre-start-up stage to explore complex problems to establish social and environmental missions before using service design and prototyping or model making at the start-up stage to launch a new product, service or brand. This is done by understanding the market and users and developing the concept of the new product, service or brand and the corresponding business model.

(iii) ***Design strategy*** influences the overall process of incubating and accelerating the growth of social enterprises. Although similar to the design process, design elements in this group primarily focus on the internal growth of and changes to social enterprises and contribute to the understanding of the external setting of social enterprises. Therefore, the design elements of marketing strategy, brand development, business strategy development, new business area and model development and design thinking are used in the design process to reconsider the business concept in relation to the business vision, desired area and future role in the value chain.

(iv) ***Design for systemic change and culture*** impacts social enterprises at all business stages. This is because these design elements (which include intellectual property of designs, design education, the introduction or recruitment of design agencies or experts and grants/funding/subsidies for design utilisation) contribute to enhancing the internal understanding and capacity of design and facilitating the comprehension and use of design by stakeholders in the social enterprise ecosystems. Thus, they correspond to the extended role and impact of design.

By classifying these design elements, this research also identified commonalities and distinguishing characteristics of DUPs in the context of social enterprise growth in the UK and

South Korea (Kwon et al., 2021). Commonalities include (i) a focus on design for brand development, the most common type of design element used for social enterprises, and (ii) a need for more focus on marketing strategy, design thinking, the protection of intellectual property and design education. This indicates that social enterprise support bodies and social enterprises are aware of the impact and importance of design for brand development. However, they have a minimal understanding of marketing strategy and design thinking, which influence brand development. Moreover, as design thinking and design education could influence their organisational culture and system development, and perhaps most of all, design intellectual property protection is crucial for the business asset and future.

The critical difference between DUPs in the two countries was that UK DUPs appeared to focus more on design processes and strategies that influence the long-term growth of social enterprises, whereas South Korean DUPs primarily concentrated on applying and developing design practices that impact the growth of social enterprises in the short term. For example, UK DUPs used design to explore and solve problems and access opportunities, helping participants to consider their end-users by educating them to use design tools such as persona, customer journey and stakeholder maps. Therefore, most UK DUPs were oriented toward the organisational mindset rather than hands-on design applications. Considering the design ladder here (Danish Design Centre, 2018), this tendency indicates that design in the UK DUPs is considered the combination of *'Design as process'*, which integrates design as an element in development processes and *'Design as strategy'*, in which design is applied as a key strategic element in the business model.

In contrast, most South Korean DUPs focused primarily on the designing stage, in which design serves as a tool for solving practical design issues (e.g. styling or form giving). Considering the design ladder here, design is considered *'Design as form-giving',* which is used as finish, form-giving or styling in new products and services. This characteristic of South Korean DUPs resulted in financial support in the form of, for example, grants and subsidies for design applications and assistance with hiring or contracting design experts. This ultimately influenced and promoted interactions between social enterprises and design fields regarding design for systemic change and culture. However, the financial support for design applications often led social enterprises to develop a narrow and limited perception of design

expenses as optional or unnecessary costs rather than essential investments in their business trajectory.

The classification of design elements and comparisons of the DUPs identified in the UK and South Korea demonstrates how the social enterprises in the UK and South Korea differently understand and use design for their businesses and how design influences the growth of social enterprises differently in terms of incubation and acceleration. Although this analysis of DUPs has revealed the lack of understanding of the impact of design on social enterprise growth among social enterprise support bodies and social enterprises in general, the findings indicate the potential for the integration of design to support the growth of social enterprises, alongside directions for pursuing this integration. For example, in the context of incubating social enterprise growth, design can facilitate internal development and changes in social enterprises by improving their understanding of design's capacity. Meanwhile, to accelerate social enterprise growth, design can help to recognise the possibilities offered by design in the external environment of social enterprises, such as by facilitating the understanding and use of design by stakeholders in the social enterprise ecosystems. In this way, design can act as a mechanism for allowing social enterprises to understand and shape their internal development, as well as the external ecosystem factors that they experience, enabling better survival and growth within the ecosystem itself (Hazenberg et al., 2016b; Roy and Hazenberg, 2019).

How social enterprise ecosystems can be improved by design

This study also showed that, in the broader context, social enterprise ecosystems can be developed by applying design, taking into account different aspects of the ecosystems to facilitate the growth of social enterprises and the social enterprise sector. This includes introducing different processes and solving existing challenges. Table 4 presents an overview of the DAs identified in the UK and South Korea. A discussion of these design elements follows.

[INSERT TABLE 4 HERE]

As shown in Table 4, some of the main design elements used are categorised under the design process DA, which integrates design into the development stage of social enterprises. For example, the case of UK-DA 1 demonstrated how financing and investment in the social enterprise ecosystem can be improved by utilising design elements, including service design, user-centred design, co-creation and prototyping. This is apparently the first such case, responding to several studies pointing out the need to effectively assist social enterprises and charitable organisations in obtaining social investment, by increasing knowledge and reducing information asymmetry in the marketplace (ACSI, 2015; Cabinet Office, 2015; SEUK, 2017; Hazenberg, Seddon and Denny, 2014). In particular, despite the UK government's encouragement, many social enterprises were dependent on grants and subsidies from the government or other institutions and had difficulty accessing financing; thus, the UK government conducted research in collaboration with the Design Council to identify solutions to provide better support to social enterprises and funders (Design Council, 2014).

A case-study was developed as a direct response to these studies, launching a digital platform to educate and guide social enterprises and charities towards appropriate investment opportunities (Snook, 2016). In this application, design provided a new perspective on the investment needs of social enterprises. According to Snook (2016, p. 7), *'Good Finance is the most developed design-led project in the sector to date, but there is huge potential to use the iterative, user-centred and collaborative approaches offered by design for a range of sector challenges'*. Its implementation has had a significant impact on the development of the social enterprise ecosystem, enhancing financial and investment opportunities for social enterprises by providing a platform for matching the latter with investors, offering information regarding appropriate social investors and advisors.

The UK-DA 2 case illustrated the benefits of the application of design elements (including co-design processes, design thinking and human-centred design), by a social enterprise support body, to address the challenges associated with an ageing society by combining social entrepreneurship and community action with design practice (Design Council, 2020b). This DA was particularly valuable because it involved multiple stakeholders in developing capabilities around its design work. Consequently, relevant stakeholders were able to improve their understanding and utilisation of design. The stakeholders participating in the

project highlighted internal changes, which included improving and developing their own role as a result of enhancing understanding and utilisation of design (UK-SEI 10 and 11). UK-SEI 11 stated they could adopt DA internally and externally as,

> *"We've started to adopt internally some design thinking frameworks that we can work with. We went through a design process to improve our application process to the organisation, and we're also going to apply design thinking principles when we look at what a new version of our support model looks like [...] All of that means that actually, there were a lot of things in design thinking that really could strengthen their ability to be able to think in a bit more of a practical not only about the work that they're doing but also how that might have an impact for others that might follow in their footsteps or the sectors that they're working in and how they can challenge some of those barriers".*

However, they argued that critical challenges remained, especially around becoming familiar with design approaches and enabling intermediaries to develop their ability to communicate how design can help social enterprises. This again highlights the issues caused by a lack of knowledge in the UK, as to how design can support social enterprises.

In the case of South Korea, two aspects of the social enterprise ecosystem were improved by designing and the design process. For instance, one South Korean initiative (SK-DA 1) used graphic and visual design (i.e. designing) to increase awareness of local social enterprises by providing infographic material, including detailed information about local social enterprises (Yang, 2017). The material was developed to contribute to the activation of social enterprises by analysing trends, changes in markets and products and links between related businesses. In particular, according to an interview with a local social enterprise support body (SK-SEE 4), this outcome will be used as primary data to establish policies to support social enterprises in the city in the future. Although this initiative did not contribute directly to the design of social enterprises, it affected, at a systemic level, the development of social enterprises by influencing government support. However, considering the statement from SK-SEE 4,

"We are planning to post the material onto our new website, but we are not sure whether it can be open source … but at least we should share the material with the local government, which provides financial support for the project".

Despite the potential impact of design applications and programme outcomes on the development of the social enterprise sector, detailed information regarding the processes and performance of SK-DA 1 appears to be available only to local authorities and the relevant support bodies. This restricted access to detailed information on SK-DA1 resulted in missed opportunities to provide practical examples that might encourage other social enterprise support bodies and government agencies to use design to bolster social enterprises and the development of the sector. Therefore, there needs to be better marketing and best practice knowledge exchange in order to raise awareness of the potential of design for social enterprises.

The design process (SK-DA 2), which utilised service design and co-design processes, was applied to revitalise the social economy, leading to income and job creation and urban regeneration. In 2017, the South Korean government announced its Social Economy Revitalisation Plan, which was designed to establish a support system tailored to the characteristics of each growth stage of social economy enterprises (including social enterprises) to improve the social enterprise ecosystem (Korean Government, 2017). This system includes not only public-private collaboration, but also a regional-led growth system. Therefore, the social enterprise–related policies promoted by each ministry began to be coordinated by the Ministry of Strategy and Finance, while cooperation between ministries to cultivate social enterprises was simultaneously encouraged (Korean Government, 2017).

Accordingly, in 2018, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport developed a project called the Urban Regeneration New Deal to discover regional–based business models and support specific plans (business/start-up, establishment of a regeneration project plan and derivation of regeneration issues). To this end, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Korea Land and Housing Corporation (affiliated with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport), the Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency and the Korea Institute of Design Promotion (Kim, 2018; Lee, 2018), establishing a systematic collaboration

utilising the unique roles and strengths of each public institution. This process has delivered various benefits: (i) the discovery and nurturing of social and economic actors with consequent synergistic effects, (ii) a model for creating jobs based on the local community by collaborating with relevant organisations, and (iii) the opportunity to create conditions for local income generation and the realisation of social value (Yoon, 2018).

By investigating these four cases, this study identified how design can be used to improve social enterprise ecosystems. For example, design contributes to increasing financing and investment for social enterprises and enhancing stakeholder support capabilities. The case of UK-DA 1, in particular, represents an opportunity for relevant stakeholders to recognise the benefits of the strategic use of design for developing effective ways of understanding the problems that social enterprises and ecosystems have to address. Meanwhile, the first South Korean case examined utilised design, especially graphic design, to improve awareness of local social enterprises among the general public, with the second case applying a service design approach to encourage social enterprises to contribute to urban regeneration. However, these DAs tend to be one-off programmes affecting only a limited number of enterprises. This is likely due to the lack of understanding and consideration of design as a key factor in the growth of social enterprises, as confirmed by the in-depth interviews with social enterprise experts in this study.

Discussion and recommendations

This research has identified that the business competence of social enterprises and social enterprise ecosystems could be strengthened by utilising design as a strategic approach. In using it as a strategic approach, multiple stakeholders of social enterprise ecosystems can develop their capabilities, influencing the evolution of the ecosystem to cultivate social enterprises by utilising co-design processes, design thinking and human-centred design implementations. This is certainly an area that other scholarly work (not focused on design) has promoted, with prior research demonstrating the value that coproduction processes bring to solving complex social problems (Shang and Chandra, 2023), especially in their involvement of the end-user to deliver bottom-up solutions (Syed et al., 2021). Meanwhile, products, services and the organisational level of the social enterprises can be improved via

various categories of design elements (e.g. designing, design process, design strategy and design for systemic change and culture). Table 5 summarises the design utilisations for social enterprises, including their applications and impact.

[INSERT TABLE 5 HERE]

However, the current role of design in social enterprise growth applies limited aspects of design rather than utilising design in an integrated and strategic manner. For example, the role of design in social enterprise ecosystems in the UK and South Korea shows the opposite tendency. Design in the UK social enterprise ecosystem focuses on the *'Design process'* and *'Design strategy'*, lacking consideration of *'Designing'* and *'Design for systemic change and culture'*, whereas design is applied as *'Designing'* and *'Design for systemic change and culture'* with minimal consideration of *'Design process'* and *'Design strategy'* in the social enterprise ecosystem in South Korea (Kwon et al., 2021). This results from the limited understanding of design capabilities among social enterprises and intermediary organisations (especially social enterprise support bodies) and the minimal grasp of the role of social enterprises among design practitioners, which complicates the use of design for business. These findings highlight several key strategic and operational considerations for enhancing the role of design in developing social enterprises.

At the strategic level, the findings indicate the necessity of facilitating DAs that improve the capabilities of key stakeholders in the social enterprise ecosystem, enabling it to evolve. In this respect, social enterprise support bodies must understand design as part of the support machinery of social enterprises. This research has exposed how design impacts the growth of social enterprises both internally and externally, providing a rationale for social enterprise support bodies to extend the range of their activities to support social enterprises. Social enterprise support bodies should thus recognise that design support bodies, practitioners and universities can act as partners in the provision of advanced support to social enterprises in terms of design, especially at the strategic level focused on design for sustainability, society and innovation (Holland and Lam, 2014).

Conversely, an improved understanding of social enterprises is needed among design practitioners. The social enterprise participants in this study reported having limited access to interactions with design practitioners. Consequently, they commonly struggled to find appropriate design practitioners capable of fully understanding the concept of their projects. Therefore, it is important to develop a systematic approach that encourages active interaction between social enterprises and design practitioners to improve each party's understanding of design and social enterprises. This requires paying attention to the potential for structural improvements to social enterprise support systems that can promote and facilitate interactions between social enterprises and design support bodies. Essentially, this is about improving the stakeholder networks within social enterprise ecosystems, in order to facilitate the flow of resources (such as knowledge exchange) and to build understanding between stakeholders (Hazenberg et al., 2016b).

At the operational level, the findings demonstrate the importance of improving the design understanding and competence of social enterprises. Although social enterprises have been found to use various types of design, this utilisation remains limited by inadequate design understanding and capability. Most social enterprises are aware of the importance of design, but do not fully understand how it can be used and when to apply it to their products, services, management or organisational development (Holland and Lam, 2014). Moreover, many social enterprise support bodies have a minimal understanding of design and a limited capacity to support the growth of social enterprises via design. Accordingly, the role of design for social enterprises should focus on business growth, and education in the use of design for social enterprises is necessary to facilitate access and understanding. This finding suggests that the essential design elements that can facilitate the growth of social enterprises concern: (i) how design can help enterprises achieve critical objectives at each business stage; and (ii) what design content should be provided given the desire to grow social enterprise ecosystems. Figure 3 shows the essential design elements, which were extracted and synthesised from all the data collection.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

There are four general business stages: (1) pre-start-up, (2) start-up, (3) growth and (4) maturity (Gorman and McCarthy, 2006). Each stage has one or several key objectives that

should be achieved to develop and operate the business. For example, at the pre-start-up stage, social enterprises primarily explore ideas to establish the fundamentals of the business. This may include the selection of the social/environmental mission, concept ideation and business development ideation. To do this, social enterprises can utilise certain design elements, such as market research, design thinking and design grants (to conduct prototypes, evaluate market opportunities or user research). Among these design elements, design thinking particularly allows leveraging capabilities overlooked by conventional problem-solving practices to integrate technology, innovative thinking, design processes, and available resources into the human desire to create new and innovative products or services (Chou, 2018), by emphasising observation, collaboration, fast learning, visualisation of ideas, rapid concept prototyping and concurrent business analysis (Lockwood, 2010).

At the start-up stage, social enterprises aim to launch a new product, service or brand and establish a research and development strategy and a business model. Various design elements can be used for this, including designing, design process, design strategy and design for systemic change and culture. For example, design briefs, service design, prototypes and UX design can be used as design processes (Bruce & Daly, 2007) to develop intangible and tangible results, including products, services, brands, and customer experience (Driskill, et al., 2015; Na, 2016). Meanwhile, graphic design (including visual identity design) and branding can be employed to create customer communication (Design Council, 2014). Critically, social enterprises should secure appropriate financial resources to apply design properly. This may entail seeking design grant opportunities from external channels or other grant funding opportunities focused on capacity-building that could be utilised for design work.

At the growth stage, businesses want to secure competitiveness and increase their market share by improving their research and development strategy. This can involve the use of design elements such as design process, design strategy and design for systemic change and culture. Design strategy, which manages design in a company, can be implemented more intensively as a strategic business tool (including branding strategy, marketing strategy and business strategy) (Design Council, 2014; Innovate UK, 2015). Its impact is not limited to 'design' activities; it also contributes to a company's innovation, as well as other processes

that use creativity, empathy and holistic and systematic thinking skills to improve efficiency, feasibility and collaboration (Topalian, 2013).

Finally, upon reaching maturity, social enterprises can focus on strengthening their business and competitiveness. At this stage, comprehensive design consultancy should be employed to develop a new organisational culture and system and assist top-level management. This includes contact with external design agencies or intensive evaluations by in-house designers. Because designers connect an organisation's internal strengths (what the organisation can do) and its external environment (what customers want) by introducing elements unanticipated by potential customers or end-users and developing concepts of meaningful value (Hands, 2018). Importantly, it is imperative to provide easy access to design education targeting social enterprises and information about design agencies or practitioners with experience in design work with social enterprises across business stages.

Conclusions and future research

This research examined the impact of design on social enterprise growth, considering different aspects of growth (e.g. business and support system levels). At the business level, design contributes to the development and improvement of products, services and business models of social enterprises; at the support system level, it helps to strengthen the stakeholders' support competence and network. However, some critical issues were also revealed regarding why design is not comprehensively and strategically used by/for social enterprises. These include the lack of design understanding and competencies among social enterprises and social enterprise support bodies and minimal interaction between the social enterprise and design sectors. On this basis, recommendations can be made for enhancing design utilisations by/for social enterprises: to develop a systematic approach encouraging active interaction between social enterprises and design practitioners to improve each party's understanding of design and social enterprises at the strategic level, with the essential design elements identified guiding the various types of design applications according to the business stages of social enterprises at the operational level.

This research makes notable theoretical and practical contributions. First, it considered design specifically for social enterprises, a topic that existing studies have rarely explored. Consequently, it can serve as a foundation for research on design for social enterprises and the development of social enterprise ecosystems. Second, it details the functional impact of design on the growth of social enterprises, enabling social enterprise support bodies and design support bodies (including practitioners and universities) to deepen their understanding of design in the context of social enterprise development, including the different types of social enterprise support practices that design can deliver. Consequently, the key findings of the study can guide relevant stakeholders interested in integrating design into social enterprise support systems or unaware of the role of design in social enterprise growth.

Further research is recommended to build a strategic approach (e.g. a framework) that can guide structural improvements to social enterprise support systems and enable broader support for and facilitation of the interaction between social enterprises and design support bodies, allowing for essential design applications to the growth of social enterprises. This would enable scholars and practitioners to overcome some of the limitations of this study, including the uniqueness of the UK and South Korean contexts, as well as the homogenous approach adopted towards the social enterprise definition in this paper. Further, identifying regional or country contexts where design might be more prevalent in models of support for social enterprises may also provide more contextual data around the value of design in supporting social enterprise development.

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