

Extended abstract

What is hope about ? Nurturing hope as a boundary condition for turning social identity development into entrepreneurial intentions

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Objectives

In a social & sustainable entrepreneurship course, reflective devices (reflective journals, lessons learned) should allow learners to make sense of “what” they have experienced, of those “with whom” they have experienced it, and of “why” this is important for them as members of the same collective (Solbreux et al. 2024). This process of meaning creation can support the development of a social identity anchored within different levels of collectives. For instance, learners make sense of their entrepreneurial experience as individual aspiring social entrepreneurs as well as a member of an entrepreneurial team (Wagenschwanz, 2021). Likewise, they can develop a social identity as members of an ecosystem (Radu-Lefevbre et al. 2021) and, in the case of social or sustainable entrepreneurs, as members of the community that fights against a given social or environmental injustice (Smith & Woodworth, 2012).

However, this process of identity development will not necessarily lead to a higher entrepreneurial intention. In particular, eco-anxiety – approached here in the form of despair about the future of the planet – is a probable obstacle which would prevent the learners from projecting themselves into a future where entrepreneurial action is not in vain. Its counterpart, Hope, has been presented as a key lever for keeping the good fight in social and sustainable entrepreneurship (Miller et al. 2012). Likewise, the literature in collective action already provides evidence that Hope interacts with social identity and efficacy to influence the participation in collective action (see Thomas et al. 2016). In this work, our goal is thus to better understand whether learners develop socially anchored identities through their experience in a social & sustainable entrepreneurship course, the impact of identity development on entrepreneurial intention formation, as well as the role that Hope plays in this process.

Literature review

Social identity has emerged as an important topic in Social Entrepreneurship Education (SEE). In initial SEE conversations (see Solbreux et al. 2022 for a literature review), identity was framed as a duality, such as the “commercial” vs. “social” enterprises (Smith et al. 2008) or

even the professional vs. personal identity (Pache & Chowdhury 2012) of the social entrepreneurs. It slowly turned to a more complex understanding of the social entrepreneur's identity, which is based on a continuum of personal moral values, beliefs and sense of ethics in a professional situation (Plaskoff 2012). Researchers such as Jensen (2014) or Zhu et al. (2016) called for the exploration of social identity theory (see Tajfel, Turner, Austin & Worchel 1979) and self-categorization theory (see Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell 1987) to better understand how students are making sense of their entrepreneurial experiences, notably via reflective thinking. Through the lens of social identity theory, SEE invites students to (re)define themselves as social entrepreneurs and to perceive their social entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Halberstadt, Timm, Kraus, & Gundolf, 2019; Hockerts, 2018; Parris & McInnis-Bowers, 2017). For instance, Smith and Woodworth (2012) articulated social identity and self-efficacy to support students' self-confidence in their ability to bring positive social change and identify as social entrepreneurs. They suggest consolidating learning from social psychology where "*the aim has been to help students discover their identity as social entrepreneurs/innovators and develop self-efficacy related to impacting the world for the better*" (Smith & Woodworth, 2012: 391). Indeed, beyond understanding the mechanisms of identity development, it is also about having impactful courses: developing learning tools that nudge students towards a stronger SE identity and towards higher social entrepreneurial intentions.

Extant research in SEE will thus focus on self-efficacy as a key driver of entrepreneurial intention. Likewise, empathy (Bacq & Alt 2018; Tiwari, Bhat & Tikoria 2020) has emerged as a specific antecedent. While empathy is an important skill for all entrepreneurs, it also acts as an emotional driver of intention in social entrepreneurship. For instance, Hockerts (2017) shows how social entrepreneurial intention is highly related to emotions lived through their social entrepreneurial experiences and to the way entrepreneurs develop their empathy and sense of moral obligation towards their project's stakeholders. Accordingly, by making sense of those emotions and developing a "social" – socially anchored – entrepreneurial identity, learners can develop higher levels of SE intentions. Entrepreneurial intentions are therefore ways of instantiating what is expected of entrepreneurs as members of those collectives, as well as ways to actively contribute to the collective they identify with.

Yet, few research looks at the interplay between emotion and social identity when developing social entrepreneurial intentions. To shed light on this puzzle, SEE scholars can turn to the research developments related to collective action in social psychology. For instance, the EMSICA framework, developed by Thomas, Mavor, and McGarty (2012, see also Thomas,

Zubielevitch, Sibley, and Osborne 2020), articulates collective efficacy, social identity, and outrage towards a given injustice as determinants of collective action. Building on their work, Wlodarczyk et al. (2017) identify hope as a more salient prosocial emotion, which can be fuelled by anger. As aspiring social entrepreneurs witness the struggle of fellow humans and animal species, they can turn hope into action and address the sources of injustice. As such, our goal is to contribute to SEE by deepening our understanding of entrepreneurial intention formation, as well as its interplay with social identity, collective efficacy, and hope. We do so by building on the EMSICA model and, especially, its extension by Wlodarczyk et al. (2017), which includes the positive prosocial emotion of Hope. The following research questions are thus: “In a reflexive-based teaching context, can the development of social (entrepreneurial) identities leads to enhanced entrepreneurial intention? And to what extents is this process moderated by hope?”

Approach/Method

Our research takes place in a French-speaking business school in Belgium, where a social & sustainable entrepreneurship course is conducted in English. Targeted towards Master's students enrolled in a six-course elective on Corporate Sustainable Management, the social & sustainable entrepreneurship course requires students to work in teams of three to five to develop entrepreneurial projects addressing social and/or environmental injustices. Upon completion of the course, students are required to submit a report detailing the business model they developed and tested. Throughout the weeks, students are also invited to reflect on their entrepreneurial experience by writing individual and collective narratives in the context of their project. Indeed, writing biographies of social entrepreneurs can foster identity work by deepening students' identity repertoire (Smith & Woodworth, 2012). Narrative practices encourage students to identify the salient attributes that characterize the members of the community and to build a prototypical vision of it as a social category. In doing so, students can consider how their entrepreneurial encounters have transformed their lives, careers and opinions about both SE itself and the project of becoming a social entrepreneur.

In order to capture the change in social identity and in social entrepreneurial intention, we invited all students enrolled in the course to fill in the same survey twice: a first time after the very first week of the course (T1) and a second time twelve weeks later, once every course deliverable is delivered (T2). The survey was initially tested in a pilot study with the 2020 group, followed by the systematic implementation of the repeated surveys with the 2021, 2022 and 2023 cohorts. Because the participation to the survey is not mandatory, not all students

participated in it. Likewise, some students only filled in the T1 or the T2 survey. Still, the final sample represents 85 % of the total number of students who were enrolled in the courses and were thus invited to join the research. The analysis is based on a sample of 234 students who fully answered the repeated surveys (at the beginning and at the end of the course).

In line with Thomas et al. (2016), social identity was measured as a three-dimensional construct (Cameron, 2004) made of Ingroup Ties (e.a. “I have a lot in common with the other member of this group”), Ingroup affect (e.a. “In general, I’m glad to be a member of this group”) and Identity Centrality (e.a. “In general, being a member of this group is an important part of my self-image”). Social identity was measured for different levels of collective: the community of resisters fighting against the injustice, the social & sustainable entrepreneurship class, and the entrepreneurial team. Because the identity of social entrepreneurs is often approached through the construct of self-efficacy (see Solbreux et al. 2022), and in line with Thomas and al. (2016), we also measured self-efficacy, team efficacy, as well as the class efficacy using vocabulary from the social entrepreneurial self-efficacy scale developed by Hockerts (2017) in the context of SEE.

Because of the importance of that scale for emerging research on sustainability and climate activism, and based on Frumkin (2022), we measured Hope with a reversed, condensed (6-items) version of Beck Hopelessness Scale (e.a. “The future of humanity and the planet seems dark to me”; “I have great faith in a sustainable and socially fair future”). In line with the two items provided as examples, Frumkin (2022) suggests that Hope and Hopelessness are the two sides of the same coin.

Finally, the dependent variable, social entrepreneurial intention, is based on Hockerts (2017), on a 5 points Scale.

Control variables include gender, experience as a volunteer, a dummy variable representing the the injustice they address in their project, as well as anger as a negative prosocial emotion. The later was measured through the Outrage towards the Perceived Injustice scale adapted from Thomas and al. (2016). We measured two different anger variables: outrage towards the injustice they decided to fight against in their project (e.a. “When I think of situations caused by my chosen topic, I feel angry”) and outrage in general against social and environmental injustices (e.a. “When I think of social inequalities and environment degradation, I feel angry”).

Building on Thomas et al. (2016), most items were measured on an 11-point Likert-type scale anchored 1 (strongly disagree) to 11 (strongly agree). Hockerts' scale of efficacy and social entrepreneurial intention are based on a 5-point Likert scales.

When analysing the data, we first compared the mean of each construct with their counterpart in the repeated survey. Then, we computed their differences and entered those differences as the main variables in a moderation process model. Indeed, our goal is about understanding the variations at stake in the social & sustainable entrepreneurship course: the underlying identity development and its influence on entrepreneurial intention. We used SPSS and Hayes MACRO PROCESS as a way to qualify the interaction, including bootstrapping analysis for a floodlight understanding of the interaction effect. We performed four different models, each focusing on a specific identity variable as the main independent variable (IV), see Figure 1 below. The dependent variable (DV), variation in social entrepreneurial intention, is the same in the four models. The moderator (M), the variation in Hope, is also the same in the four models. The outputs are available in appendix. We apologize in advance to our reader for the bad formatting of those outputs, which are copied-pasted from SPSS because of a lack of time before the submission.

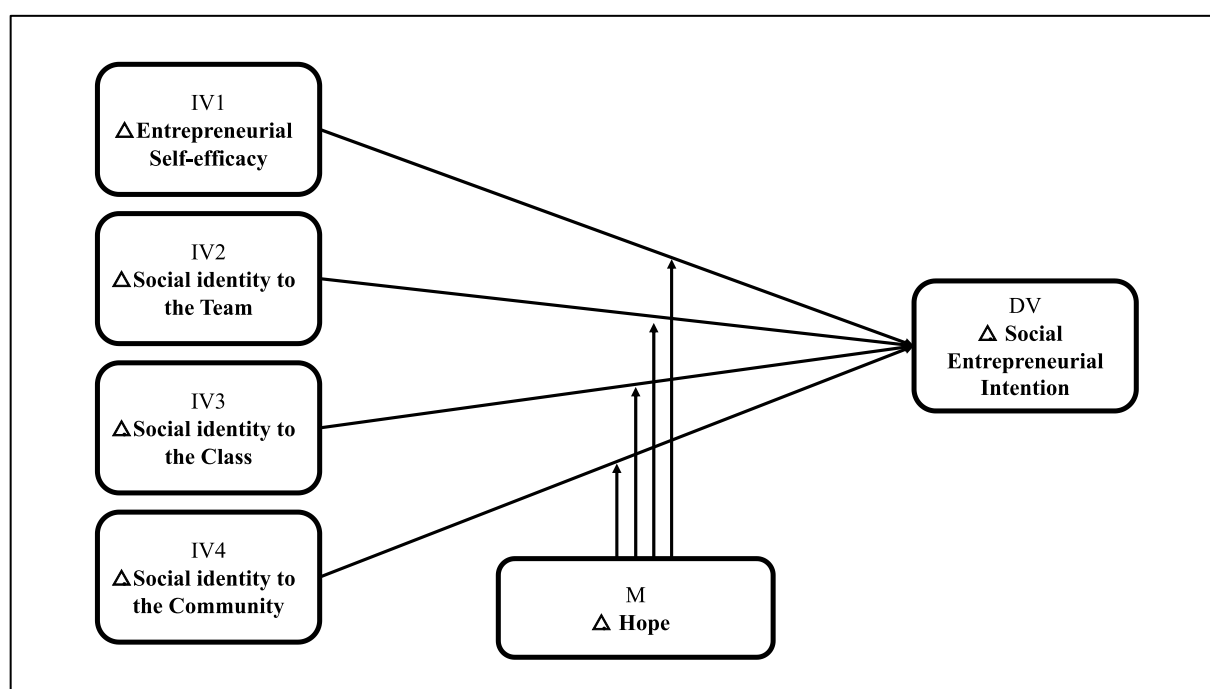


Figure 1 The effect of identity development on the formation of social entrepreneurial intention, moderated by nurtured Hope

Findings

In terms of difference in means, we find that all variables of interest are significantly higher in T2 compared to T1. The only exceptions are our two “outrage” constructs, which show no

significant differences between T1 and T2. Next, we turn to the analysis of a moderated process of intention development.

In terms of self-efficacy, we find that identity development will be conducive to the development of entrepreneurial intention only if we nourish hope at the same time. The development of hope becomes a necessary condition for changes in self-efficacy to translate into additional entrepreneurial intentions.

Regarding social identity to the team, we do not find any indication supporting a main effect on the development of entrepreneurial intention. Whether hope is nourished or not, belonging to the team does not directly influence the change in student's entrepreneurial intention.

Regarding social identity development to the class, we find that, all other things being equal, the more you develop your social identity to the class, the higher the formation of entrepreneurial intention. This result is stable across the four models, suggesting a key role of the “class” to explain the formation of entrepreneurial intention. Additionally, we find a weak interaction with the formation of hope. The bootstrapping analysis shows that the main effect might not hold for learners who are concurrently losing hopes for the future. Thus, the preservation of hope is a necessary condition for changes in identity to the class to translate into additional entrepreneurial intentions.

For the identity linked to the community of those resisting the injustice, the results are more surprising. We show that, in a situation of stable hope or even nourished hope, identity development at the level of the resistance community does not influence entrepreneurial intention. On the other hand, if the learners lose hope, then identity development will be associated with a reduction in the intention to engage in social entrepreneurship in the future – *what's the point in fighting, we are doomed!*

In terms of control variables, we find no significant effect of gender, variation in anger or volunteering experience on the variation of entrepreneurial intention. Finally, if we look at the effects in absolute value (the level of self-efficacy or hope, on the level of entrepreneurial intention), we see a significant effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intention but no effect of hope as such.

Value and Implications

Our research contributes to the literature on SEE by presenting hope as a key boundary condition when developing socially anchored identities of social entrepreneurs and turning

them into higher entrepreneurial intentions. It suggests that a social entrepreneurship course, supported by a narrative device, makes it possible to develop entrepreneurial intention, which is explained by a stronger social identity towards the class of social entrepreneurship and an enhanced sense of self-efficacy, with higher hopes as a necessary condition. We also show that developing a social identity to the community of resisters can have a negative effect on entrepreneurial intention formation when learners develop such identity at the same time as losing hope for the future. Fortunately, we provide evidence that, in average, “hope” increases significantly between T1 and T2 for our students.

While this research sheds light on the interplay between social identity, hope, and entrepreneurial intention formation in the context of social entrepreneurship education, it has some limitations. Firstly, the study is confined to a single business school in Belgium, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, while the research provides preliminary cues about a transformational effect of the course, its research design does not demonstrate causality. Maybe the identity development that is captured through the surveys is related to unmeasured causes, such as the overall program, the concurrent win of the local football team, or any other event that happened between T1 and T2. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported surveys may introduce bias, and further qualitative research could provide deeper insights into the mechanisms at play. Future research could also explore longitudinal studies across diverse cultural contexts to validate and extend these findings, as well as incorporate Structural Equation Modelling analysis to capture the nuances of identity formation and intention development more comprehensively.

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Appendix: 4 moderated process models explaining social entrepreneurial intention

(1) A moderated-process analysis, focusing on self-efficacy variation as the main variable (X) and hope variation as the moderator (M)

Model = 1

Y = Dif_SEI

X = Dif_SE

M = Dif_Hope

Statistical Controls:

CONTROL= Gender1_s_Hope2 VXP1 Dif_SI_Class Dif_SITeam Dif_PITo Dif_SI_Com

Sample size

234

Outcome: Dif_SEI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	F	df1	df2	p
,3131	,0980	2,4241	10,0000	223,0000	,0093

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	,3708	,2588	1,4328	,1533	-,1392	,8807
Dif_Hope	,0543	,0472	1,1497	,2515	-,0388	,1473
Dif_SE	,0241	,0350	,6882	,4920	-,0449	,0930
int_1	,0533	,0249	2,1458	,0330	,0044	,1023
Gender	-,1455	,1046	-1,3913	,1655	-,3515	,0606
s_Hope2	-,0039	,0297	-,1322	,8949	-,0624	,0545
VXP1	-,0020	,0018	-1,1403	,2554	-,0055	,0015
Dif_SI_Class.	,1547	,0545	2,8379	,0050	,0473	,2621
Dif_SI_Team	-,0446	,0591	-,7557	,4506	-,1610	,0718

Dif_PITo	-,0028	,0205	-,1358	,8921	-,0432	,0376
Dif_SI_Com	-,0576	,0687	-,8378	,4030	-,1930	,0779

Interactions:

int_1 Dif_SE X Dif_Hope

R-square increase due to interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
int_1	,0186	4,6043	1,0000	223,0000	,0330

Conditional effect of X on Y at values of the moderator(s)

Dif_Hope	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-,9145	-,0247	,0495	-,4987	,6185	-,1223	,0729
,3910	,0449	,0318	1,4114	,1595	-,0178	,1077
1,6966	,1145	,0410	2,7954	,0056	,0338	,1953

Values for quantitative moderators are the mean and plus/minus one SD from mean

(2) A moderated-process analysis, focusing on social identity to the Team variation as the main variable (X) and hope variation as the moderator (M)

Model = 1

Y = Dif_SEI

X = Dif_SI_Team

M = Dif_Hope

Statistical Controls:

CONTROL= Gender1_s_Hope2 VXP1 Dif_SI_Class Dif_SE Dif_PITo Dif_SI_Com

Sample size

234

Outcome: Dif_SEI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	F	df1	df2	p
,2916	,0850	2,0717	10,0000	223,0000	,0278.

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	,3105	,2591	1,1985	,2320	-,2001	,8211
Dif_Hope	,0989	,0443	2,2324	,0266	,0116	,1861
Dif_SI_Team.	-,0323	,0618	-,5228	,6016	-,1542	,0895
int_1	-,0426	,0365	-1,1661	,2448	-,1146	,0294
Gender1	-,1530	,1053	-1,4533	,1475	-,3605	,0545
s_Hope2	,0079	,0296	,2666	,7900	-,0504	,0661
VXP1	-,0022	,0018	-1,2316	,2194	-,0057	,0013
Dif_SI_Class	,1467	,0548	2,6780	,0080	,0388	,2547
Dif_SE	,0558	,0315	1,7689	,0783	-,0064	,1179
Dif_PITo	-,0049	,0208	-,2360	,8136	-,0458	,0360
Dif_SI_Com	-,0606	,0694	-,8732	,3835	-,1974	,0762

Interactions:

int_1 Dif_SI_Team X Dif_Hope

R-square increase due to interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
int_1	,0056	1,3599	1,0000	223,0000	,2448

(3) A moderated-process analysis, focusing on social identity to the Class variation as the main variable (X) and hope variation as the moderator (M)

Model = 1

Y = Dif_SEI

X = Dif_SI_Class

M = Dif_Hope

Statistical Controls:

CONTROL= Gender1_s_Hope2 VXP1 Dif_SITeam Dif_SE Dif_PITo Dif_SI_Com

Sample size

234

Outcome: Dif_SEI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	F	df1	df2	p
,3026	,0916	2,2480	10,0000	223,0000	,0162

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	,3322	,2585	1,2853	,2000	-,1771	,8416
Dif_Hope	,0912	,0438	2,0815	,0385	,0049	,1776
Dif_SI_Class	,284	,0557	2,3059	,0220	,0187	,2381
int_1	,0641	,0371	1,7272	,0855	-,0090	,1372
Gender1_s_Hope2	-,1436	,1050	-1,3676	,1728	-,3505	,0633
VXP1	-,0022	,0018	-1,2555	,2106	-,0058	,0013
Dif_SITeam	-,0536	,0592	-,9058	,3660	-,1702	,0630
Dif_SE	,0599	,0314	1,9063	,0579	-,0020	,1218
Dif_PITo	-,0007	,0206	-,0338	,9731	-,0413	,0399
Dif_SI_com	-,0545	,0690	-,7905	,4301	-,1904	,0814

Interactions:

int_1 Dif_SI_Class X Dif_Hope

R-square increase due to interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
int_1	,0122	2,9832	1,0000	223,0000	,0855

Conditional effect of X on Y at values of the moderator(s)

Dif_Hope	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-,9145	,0698	,0706	,9879	,3242	-,0694	,2089
,3910	,1534	,0547	2,8038	,0055	,0456	,2612
1,6966	,2371	,0755	3,1420	,0019	,0884	,3858

Values for quantitative moderators are the mean and plus/minus one SD from mean

(4) A moderated-process analysis, focusing on social identity to the Resisters' community variation as the main variable (X) and hope variation as the moderator (M)

Model = 1

Y = Dif_SEI

X = Dif_SI_com

M = Dif_Hope

Statistical Controls:

CONTROL= Gender1_s_Hope2 VXP1 Dif_SI_Class Dif_SITeam Dif_SE Dif_PITo

Sample size

234

Outcome: Dif_SEI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	F	df1	df2	p
,3216	,1035	2,5732	10,0000	223,0000	,0058

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	,3069	,2565	1,1965	,2328	-,1985	,8123
Dif_Hope	,0844	,0437	1,9331	,0545	-,0016	,1705
Dif_SI_com	-,0872	,0698	-1,2490	,2130	-,2248	,0504
int_1	,0956	,0391	2,4447	,0153	,0185	,1727
Gender1_	-,1348	,1044	-1,2905	,1982	-,3406	,0710
s_Hope2	,0001	,0293	,0026	,9979	-,0577	,0579
VXP1	-,0020	,0018	-1,1066	,2697	-,0055	,0015
Dif_SI_Class	,1451	,0542	2,6743	,0080	,0382	,2520
Dif_SITeam	-,0488	,0588	-,8304	,4072	-,1647	,0670
Dif_SE	,0562	,0312	1,8018	,0729	-,0053	,1176
Dif_PITo	,0044	,0206	,2152	,8298	-,0362	,0451

Interactions:

int_1 Dif_SI_com X Dif_Hope

R-square increase due to interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
int_1	,0240	5,9764	1,0000	223,0000	,0153

Conditional effect of X on Y at values of the moderator(s)

Dif_Hope	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-,9145	-,1747	,0843	-2,0714	,0395	-,3408	-,0085
,3910	-,0498	,0685	-,7264	,4683	-,1849	,0853
1,6966	,0751	,0866	,8667	,3870	-,0956	,2458

Values for quantitative moderators are the mean and plus/minus one SD from mean

