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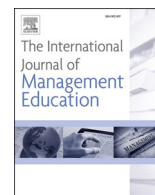
Extracurricular activities and social entrepreneurial leadership of graduating youth in universities from the Middle East

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ABSTRACT

We examine the role that extracurricular activities and student-led activity clubs at institutions of higher education play in the development of social entrepreneurial competences of the graduating youth in emerging market settings. Relying on a single case study approach, we adopt a narrative inquiry into the journey of an undergraduate student in the UAE who longed to build a sense of community at his university aimed at generating positive social spillovers. Our study demonstrates the critical role that the sanction-free university environment plays in the activation of social entrepreneurial behaviors and intentions of students in the UAE. Decision makers are urged to reconceptualize the educational institution as a place of not just learning, but also practicing the entrepreneurial skills of the future generation of social leaders. Students who get exposed to practical activities during their studies have an edge in the labor market due to greater employability skills. Universities that invest in social entrepreneurship education contribute to the development of social leaders of tomorrow and also attract more scholarships through their strengthened network of alumni. Our qualitative inquiry seeks to stimulate more scholarly interest in conducting culturally relevant research on student-led social entrepreneurship endeavors in the context of Middle Eastern universities.

1. Introduction

Social innovation and entrepreneurship refer to the process of generating new ideas that provide social benefits and drive value for the society, including individuals, businesses, and governmental institutions. Currently, most authors espouse a broader view of social innovation by encouraging an organization-wide commitment to finding innovative solutions to on-going problems that have broader implications (Gandhi & Raina, 2018; Spraggon & Bodolica, 2018). From a business standpoint, social innovation can contribute to the enhancement of the company's bottom line, while engendering positive social spillovers. Recognizing the importance of individual passion, Osburg and Schmidpeter (2013) point to three key enablers of social entrepreneurship. These refer to building credibility and confidence in the social entrepreneur's idea that can be facilitated by authority figures' endorsements, developing an easy-to-execute value proposition, and securing adequate resources for the implementation of the socially-driven idea.

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Social innovation and entrepreneurship can also occur beyond corporate boundaries. An institution of higher education offers an enabling environment that empowers students to innovate and serve a greater social purpose (Ghazzawi et al., 2020; Hockerts, 2018). Typically, universities provide students with a range of extracurricular activities that help in the development of their entrepreneurial capabilities and social leadership skills (Walsh & Powell, 2018). Unlike the business world, universities offer a sanction-free environment for trial and error, experimentation and innovation (Howorth et al., 2012), without having to fear about the negative consequences of practical failure. To take their ideas forward, however, social entrepreneurs in university settings – students – require the same resources as social innovators in real organizational contexts (Osburg & Schmidpeter, 2013). They necessitate mentoring from experienced figures, such as professors and student association leaders, who could promote their socially-motivated projects. They need to pitch a convincing value proposition for securing promoters' support to subsequently focus on raising adequate funding and attracting motivated student workforce to turn their idea into reality (Bodolica & Spraggon, 2021).

Over the past decade, we started to witness an increasing scholarly interest in the topic of social entrepreneurship in educational settings (Garcia-Morales et al., 2020; Kwong et al., 2012). Yet, the vast majority of extant research focuses on the cultivation of relevant students' skills through the inclusion of social entrepreneurship and innovation courses in the academic programs and curricula (Weber, 2012; Wu et al., 2013). The important role that extracurricular activities at universities play in the initiation of student-led social endeavors and the development of social leadership competences of the graduating youth did not receive sufficient consideration. Also, worth noting is that most studies are conducted on samples of American students (Barton et al., 2018), with little empirical evidence on educational institutions located in emerging markets. Countries from the Middle East that are recognized for their unique demographics due to the prevalence of the young generation (Berger et al., 2019) would particularly benefit from a deeper exploration of this topic in their academic domain.

The purpose of this paper is to both bridge these gaps in the specialized literature and contribute to extant discussions and debates in the field of entrepreneurship education. More calls are being made to widen views and perspectives, explore different contexts and synergies, and approach the subject in a more relevant and practical way to nurture creativity and innovative thinking for the development of an entrepreneurial mindset in the youth of today (Ratten & Jones, 2020). In particular, our emphasis is placed on the extent to which students' involvement in extracurricular activities during their years of study foster the development of their competencies in the area of social entrepreneurship and innovation. Relying on a single case study approach, we follow the journey of an undergraduate student in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) who longed to build a stronger sense of community and belonging at his university. Drawing on his passion for sports and active participation in various student activity clubs, he could conceive and initiate his entrepreneurial idea with the potential of producing positive social spillovers.

The results of our narrative inquiry demonstrate the crucial role that the sanction-free university environment plays in the activation of social entrepreneurial orientation of students in the UAE. Hence, we make a call for decision makers to view the institution of higher education as a place of not just learning, but also practicing the entrepreneurial skills of the future generation of social leaders. In the longer run, student-led extracurricular activities may contribute to the growth of social enterprises in the Middle East, which is lagging behind in the creation of this form of organization compared to other regions of the world.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. A brief literature review (Bodolica & Spraggon, 2018) of the concept of social entrepreneurship and its application in educational settings is performed in the next section. We continue by narrating the story of a socially-active student on his way of building a stronger sense of university community and discussing our case study findings in light of the extant literature. The contributions, implications and limitations of our study and suggestions for future research follow. The concluding remarks are presented in the final section of our paper.

2. Literature review

2.1. An overview of social entrepreneurship

The conceptualization of social entrepreneurship dates back to eighteenth century, when several business owners started expressing their concern about the wellbeing of their employees with the purpose of improving their professional, socio-economic, and cultural lives and experiences (Shaw & Carter, 2007). The concept is commonly defined as the process of addressing the unmet needs of the society aimed at social value creation within and across fields, including nonprofit, government, and business sectors (Austin et al., 2006). Gandhi and Raina (2018) argue that social enterprises differ from their non-social counterparts in that they place social purpose, such as transformational progress and societal pressure reliefs, at the center of their founding mission to achieve sustainable development. By giving *"the money making a heart and a noble social cause"* (Gandhi & Raina, 2018, p. 1), these enterprises contribute to advancing the topical debate on civic commitment and volunteerism in today's performance-driven corporate world.

According to Certo and Miller (2008), social entrepreneurship benefits from the combination of elements from both the business and volunteer sectors, but is also exposed to a number of challenges that stem from this merge. The most typical tensions arise from the inability to balance the logic of charity with analytical reasoning that results in resource sacrificing rather resource investment narratives, and the difficulty of institutionalizing social problems simultaneously with a number of pressing organizational issues (Dees, 2012). While social entrepreneurs are usually viewed as 'social engineers' who strive to achieve revolutionary change by focusing their attention on a well-defined social cause (Dacin et al., 2010; Ghazzawi et al., 2020), some authors suggest that their goals and intentions are not always exclusively social. Contrary to the widely-held belief that social entrepreneurship is confined to the not-for-profit sector, Peredo and McLean (2006) argue that social ventures should not be discerned for seeking profit. If an organization is capable of achieving its social goals, controlling its costs and creating a margin for profit, it should be considered and treated as a social enterprise.

Despite its increasing popularity over the past decade, social entrepreneurship remains underexplored in empirical settings. The

most common strand of research focuses on the examination of social entrepreneurs' ethics in light of their underlying motives of addressing and improving upon neglected social needs. For instance, Chell et al. (2016) discuss whether falling under the social umbrella equates to ethical business practices, while Mort et al. (2003) maintain that the behaviors that social leaders exhibit in their organizations need to be aligned with some moral virtues. Other researchers aim to uncover the relationship between the level of moral intensity and ethical considerations of social entrepreneurs and their decision to expand the presence and visibility of their social venture. In particular, Smith et al. (2016) find that a heightened sense of obligation toward moral actions and social goals induces leaders to scale up their enterprise through the deployment of open measures that speed up the process of product or service dissemination.

2.2. Social entrepreneurship in educational settings

Because universities play a critical role in shaping the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of future generations of corporate leaders (Marachly et al., 2020), social entrepreneurship started to be explored within educational settings (Howorth et al., 2012). It is commonly agreed nowadays that successful social entrepreneurship education requires collective effort and the involvement of multiple parties, such as university, professional community, and students (Roslan et al., 2019). According to Arroyo-Vazquez et al. (2010), despite the intricacies and complexities surrounding the relationships among various university stakeholders, all of them are equally responsible for providing actionable guidance and support processes for business development. One of the key objectives of educational institutions is to act as catalysts and promoters of social innovation through the formation, growth, and development of social leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, universities should design relevant academic programs and curricula that would constitute the backbone of a vibrant learning ecosystem that would encourage social action through the creation of a social enterprise (Weber, 2012).

Almost half of the specialized literature focuses on identifying best practice advice that can assist universities in becoming entrepreneurial organizations. Among those practices, Clark (2004) highlights seeking diversified sources of funding, having a strong administrative function spanning through the entire university, cultivating entrepreneurial departments, and tracing processes that support sustainable transformation. To legitimize their social entrepreneurship processes, institutions of higher education can follow a three-phase framework (Cinar, 2019). It starts with the assessment and comparison of the university's internal values with those of a broader social system. The framework continues with actions taken to unify the internal values and communicate with organizational members for implementing the change, and concludes with the dissemination of the changed values to external stakeholders. According to Benneworth and Cunha (2015), the legitimacy of social entrepreneurship practices in an educational context can be established via 'third-mission activities' pursued for boosting university's engagement with external stakeholders who can contribute to various social causes.

Other half of the literature aims to uncover the effect of social entrepreneurship education, most commonly through the deployment of experiential learning projects (Brock & Steiner, 2009), on students behavior and motivation. Kwong et al. (2012) show that social business plan-based teaching develops students' awareness of the ongoing social issues and improves their understanding of how to manage a social enterprise. Enrolling in a social entrepreneurship course positively impacts students' intention of engaging in a social enterprise, but does not significantly increase their empathy for social causes (Hockerts, 2018). In a survey of 201 students in a business start-up course, Garcia-Morales et al. (2020) find that actively using Web 2.0 technologies encourages the development of absorptive capacity in students, which translates into higher likelihood of social entrepreneurial action. Ghazzawi et al. (2020) report that a program based on social projects run by a student-led non-profit organization satisfies the service-learning criteria and that the mean scores of participating students, on variables such as cooperation and satisfaction, are higher than for students from normative data banks.

Our study, in particular, seeks to demonstrate how students' involvement in extracurricular activities may contribute to the development of their social entrepreneurial competences. While these activities are not commonly inscribed in the formal entrepreneurship education, they form an integrative part of the vibrant university-led ecosystem that aims to expose its members to a broad variety of learning experiences and opportunities for engagement. Thus, Igwe et al. (2019) highlight the importance of learning not only 'in the' but also 'beyond' the curriculum, that may induce change in students' thinking, attitudes, and action and foster their social learning, enabling universities to create a stronger future workforce. Almeida et al. (2019) focus on a specific example of 'learning beyond the curriculum' by examining how participating in junior enterprises influence the entrepreneurial intentions of university students in Portugal. Finding that such extracurricular activities play a critical role in students' managerial skills' formation, the authors conclude that these activities should be viewed as an effective complementor of entrepreneurship education.

3. Methods

We employed a qualitative case study methodology which is commonly used in prior research in the field of management education (Awaysheh & Bonfiglio, 2017; Nwagwu, 2020). The adoption of a single case study design is deemed highly relevant under the condition of contextual knowledge dearth on the topic of inquiry, when little empirical evidence is available within a specific cultural and organizational setting (Siggelkow, 2007). The experience of a student at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) was used as a revelatory case to allow for a rich and thick description of actors, behaviors and situations to emerge from the field (Bodolica et al., 2015). Most data were gathered through multiple in-depth interviews with the main protagonist of the case, which lasted between 30 min and 1 h. Nonetheless, informal conversations with other students involved in extracurricular activities were also performed to corroborate opinions and perspectives. These data were triangulated with the information available on the university website, media releases and student publications (Yin, 2009).

We drew on the narrative method, because it is particularly suitable for providing embedded descriptions of individual experiences and is very popular with entrepreneurship scholars (Ahl, 2007; Bodolica & Spraggon, 2015). Narratives are stories composed of a set of interrelated happenings that occur in a sequence and whose unpredictable consequences are affected by people's actions, subjective meanings, and other intervening variables from the environment (Abell, 2004). This approach allowed us to narrate the story and recount events as they have actually unfolded in real life, thus avoiding the risk of misrepresenting reality and making sure that actors' voices are being heard throughout the case narrative. By relying on the detailed accounts of university-based entrepreneurial activities of our informants, we could reconstruct past occurrences, establish cause-effect relationships, elucidate taken-for-granted assumptions (Ahl, 2007), and identify emergent meanings to offer explanations of future actions and outcomes. Below, we proceed with narrating the rich story that forms the basis of our case study, to elucidate how an undergraduate student's participation in extracurricular activities ignited the idea of building a stronger sense of community at his university, by drawing on multiple quotes extracted from interviews conducted with the key protagonist.

4. Case study

4.1. Buzzing student life on campus

As the youngest of his three siblings who belonged to the Pashtun tribe of Yousafzai in the Northern region of Pakistan, Hussam was born and raised in the city of Al Ain located in the UAE. He grew up with a strong support system consisting of his family, friends, and school teachers who instilled in him the value of social relatedness and belonging. Being an expatriate in the UAE and an occasional visitor to his home country (Spraggon & Bodolica, 2014a), he always longed for a sense of community and a place where he could feel like he truly belonged. As the time came for Hussam to make a decision about where to pursue his undergraduate studies, he did not hesitate. AUS stood out to him as he found this institution to have a rich array of student activities and clubs that he could be part of to practice his interpersonal skills and expand his circle of acquittances.

Student-led extracurricular activities at AUS fell under two main institutional pillars, namely the Office of Student Affairs (with its five sub-branches) and the four academic colleges and schools (see Table 1). There were 96 different student associations, that were subdivided in 54 interest-oriented clubs and 42 cultural clubs, and one Student Council, with all of them reporting to a specific department under the Office of Student Affairs. One of the largest student organizations was the Leopards Association, which was responsible for boosting students' interest in athletics and active lifestyle by offering training sessions in various types of sports and organizing matches, games, and other sporting events. Each academic college housed discipline-based clubs focused on preparing its members to overcome the challenges of the labor market and offered them opportunities to meet with working professionals during field trips, to secure relevant internship offers, and to expand their social networks. Each student-led association was managed by a team composed of president, vice-president, executive assistant, treasurer, and several coordinators of activities, sports, media, and

Table 1
Structure of student extracurricular activities at AUS.

Pillars	Institutional branches	Student-led associations
Office of Student Affairs	• Student Development and Organization Department • Student Leadership Program • Student Athletics and Recreation Department • Community Services • Student Residential Life Association	• Student Council • 54 interest-oriented clubs (e.g., AUS Debating Society, Leopards Association with specific sports clubs such as university cricket team, basketball team, volleyball team, football team) • 42 cultural clubs (e.g., Emirati Cultural Club, Pakistani Cultural Club, Saudi Cultural Club, Kuwaiti Cultural Club, Palestinian Cultural Club)
Academic Colleges and Schools	• School of Business Administration	• Dean's Business Team • Beta Gama Sigma Society • The Management Initiative • The Finance Executives • The Marketing & Management Information Systems Society • The Accounting Society • The Student Economics Association
	• College of Engineering	• Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers • American Institute of Chemical Engineers • Institute of Industrial Systems Engineers • Society of Petroleum Engineers
	• College of Arts and Sciences	• AUS Model United Nations • International Studies Student Association • College Dean's Team
	• College of Architecture, Art and Design	• American Institute of Architecture Students

Source: Authors' work based on collected data

public relations.

Throughout the academic year, AUS hosted several events and promotional campaigns to encourage freshmen to join different clubs, sports teams, volunteer communities, and other activity groups. The bi-annual Club Fair was a two-day event that showcased all the student associations that fell under the Office of Student Affairs. Managed by the Student Council, the Sports Day took place every spring semester allowing participants to engage in and experience various indoor and outdoor games and sports in a friendly atmosphere. Undoubtedly, the biggest event of the year was the Global Day – a two-day festival when Cultural Clubs installed their pavilions to exhibit ethnic arts and crafts, sell merchandise, and perform dance routines that represented their culture (Nami et al., 2018). It was an anxiously awaited festival because it contributed significantly to the decision of which club would receive the award for the 'Best Cultural Club of the Year', along with other acknowledgements for the 'Best Performance' and the 'Best Pavilion' at the Global Day. Each academic year concluded with a 'Student Appreciation Dinner' to recognize the individual and collective efforts and achievements of active students with specific prizes and awards.

4.2. Joining extracurricular activity clubs

Hussam was determined to make the most out of his four years of studies at AUS and explore all the different possibilities he had to engage in extracurricular activities. During his first semester, he was already exposed to an extremely diverse range of options that were featured at the Club Fair. As Hussam walked into the Student Center where the event was held, he was overwhelmed by *"the buzzing energy that reigned throughout that space dedicated to recreation, relaxation, and fun."* Students from all cultural backgrounds, academic levels, and areas of specialization *"gathered around booths, interacted with each other, played ethnic music and shared culinary treats,"* and registered into different clubs based on their individual preferences.

Two clubs attracted Hussam's attention: the AUS Debating Society and the Leopards Association. To quench his passion for public speaking, he signed up for the Debating Society and later became the Activities' Coordinator for this group. The Leopards Association was recruiting students for various sports teams at AUS, such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball. Having successfully passed the required tryouts, he became a member of the university cricket team. Hussam also found interest in the Performing Arts Program under the School of Arts and Sciences, which strived to showcase student talent with one major theater production per semester. Having registered in this program, Hussam managed to secure the role of the Robot Primus in the production of Rossum's Universal Robots. Furthermore, he had occasionally contributed to the ideation of cultural performances for the Pakistani Cultural Club.

Finding great pleasure and satisfaction in all these activities and leadership roles, Hussam also ambitioned to obtain a remunerated position that would enable him to cover his minor student expenses. He applied for some on-campus jobs and was soon selected to be a tutor at the Math Learning Center. Among all the responsibilities he assumed as a student at AUS, one in particular gave Hussam the power to spread the sense of community he desired to build. It was the role of a peer leader *"that went far beyond the mere process of assisting and instructing new joiners on how to register into courses and showing them the buildings around campus."* He believed the major duty of peer leaders involved *"instilling this sense of community in the freshly joining students and sparking interest in them to participate in various activities and clubs that AUS had to offer,"* by leading and educating them but also by simply sharing these experiences with them.

As Hussam progressed in his studies at AUS, he continued to take on more responsibilities and benefit from additional opportunities for personal development, such as travelling abroad for competitions with his cricket team. Having competed both locally and internationally, most notably at sport events in Malaysia, England and the UAE, his team won over 73% of all the matches played securing a title in each of these countries. In his senior year at the university, he became the Executive Assistant of the Leopards Association. He was also elected as President of the Debating Society to pursue the mission of rebranding this club and attracting student talent to participate in on- and off-campus debating events, contests, and performances.

4.3. Sense of community: the eureka moment

Although Hussam invested a great amount of his personal time in those extracurricular activities, he believed that a *"unified sense of community among students was still lacking"*. He noticed that *"the different events organized by the Debating Society were always attended by the same audience, both in terms of size and composition."* Despite the aggressive advertising pursued to boost the attendance levels and enrich the heterogeneity of participants, it was mostly the same group of students and club members who showed up to every event. He also realized that *"the fan base for the cricket team, and most of the other AUS sports clubs, was very small and limited to students who were already members of those clubs."* While athletes bonded well with each other, creating a powerful team spirit among themselves, they struggled with instilling the same spirit through the entire student body at AUS.

Hussam pondered on how *"unique and engaging student-led events could become if various stakeholders undertook the initiative of cultivating a strong sense of union, ownership, and identity"* across the university. What set the AUS students apart was their openness to innovative ideas and ways of thinking, and their eagerness to leave the comfort zone in order to embrace new challenges and live entirely new experiences. Hussam was convinced that his fellow colleagues, due to their unconditional commitment to excelling in extracurricular activities, could make a real difference by taking charge and pioneering in the building of a true and all-encompassing sense of community of their own (Bodolica & Spraggon, 2015).

It was not until his fourth year of studies that Hussam had a lightbulb moment. During his summer break, he got the opportunity to travel to the United Stated to enroll in a five-week long leadership program of Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. Recognized for its dynamic and competitive sports life, Lehigh University regularly hosted interuniversity games and homecoming matches on its fields. During a softball match played against Kansas State University, Hussam was astonished to notice that the benches for both competing teams were enterely full; *"the spectators and fans dressed in their university jerseys, wore foam fingers in their team's colors, and chanted in*

unison their cheers.” The spirit of pride, unity, and togetherness that the audience had displayed in support for their respective home teams was impressive and unwavering. It did not take long for Hussam to uncover one striking similarity between the two competing teams, supporters, and universities that they all took an extreme pride in – a mascot!

When he returned from his trip, he could not stop appreciating *“that special feeling that rushed through him during these matches”* and he wanted all the students at AUS to be able to experience that same feeling. He had one semester before he was due for graduation and he took it upon him to create that distinctive sense of community that could make students feel they truly belonged. Hussam got inspired by the mascot idea and started planning how to bring an AUS mascot to life. He was aware that no university throughout the UAE embodied itself through a mascot and was ready to overcome the multiple challenges that were likely to emerge on his road.

4.4. Bringing it all together

Hussam sensed that *“team sports had a natural way of getting the adrenaline of the audience going”* and was a good place to start. He only needed to *“find a way to draw the crowd to the court and the sport would do its magic.”* To make the experience enjoyable and make the crowd stay, he had to bring entertainment into the game. This meant music, singing, and dancing. As AUS Cultural Clubs had a massive following, he could persuade them to perform some dances at the opening and at half time. To play music, lead the crowd chants and enliven the atmosphere, he thought to call in a DJ from the PowerHit Radio Club on campus. A lively AUS mascot – a true game-changer in the UAE university culture – would add an element of novelty. A team of cameramen could capture players, coaches and members of the audience in a post-event movie to be used as a marketing tool to showcase past events and advertise the new ones.

All of a sudden, the different elements converged into an unifying whole; *“a homecoming game would certainly bring everyone together”* and serve as a first step toward *“building a broader sense of community.”* To start on a smaller scale, Hussam wanted to use an indoor court for this game. Considering the strength of the AUS basketball team and their constant rivalry with the American University of Dubai team, the big event could be a basketball match against them. Hussam outlined the list of all stakeholders that would be involved in the process of his idea implementation, from the Student Athletics and Recreation Department to the Student Council and sports teams. The thought of pitching his idea to each of these stakeholders did not intimidate him, as he had a good relationship with them through his involvement in the different activity clubs.

Due to his credibility and a convincing pitch, Hussam was able to get the administrative approvals and secure the collaboration of sports teams and cultural clubs. He was granted access to the basketball court on the day when the interuniversity match was to be hosted. With AED 5000 of approved budget in hand, Hussam met with clubs' members to *“ideate a mascot that would embody the unifying spirit”* that he wanted to create. Since the mascot had to resonate primarily with the sports community at AUS, they opted for a leopard that was used as a logo in their matches and games. The mascot was named Fahd, which in Arabic meant ‘leopard’, and had *“a welcoming but assertive face that reflected the competitive temperament of AUS athletes.”* Having considered two design options, Fahd's costume featured a burgundy t-shirt, which was the colour of AUS team jerseys, that had the AUS leopard's logo on it. Fahd had a body covered with spots and wore white-burgundy sneakers. A reputable vendor was found that produced a gladiator mascot for a regional Pakistani cricket team, using high quality fabric with a ventilation fan inside for cooling and comfort. Simultaneously, an open application process was launched in search for students who would wear the mascot in exchange for a modest honorarium.

Aiming to engage everyone at AUS, Hussam spoke to his business professors requesting them to bring to the match their family members and friends from the other schools. He also began looking for volunteers to assist with tasks, such as *“making face paintings and designing advertising content, suggesting a common university chant, and ushering spectators to their seats.”* With a strong media presence during the event, he ambitioned to give a tremendous external exposure to the university, both within and outside the UAE (Jamali et al., 2018). Having thought through all the details, Hussam was left with finalizing a suitable date for the interuniversity basketball game to be hosted on campus. He was hopeful that all the current and future students could buy into his vision and enthusiastically commit to pursuing the journey he had initiated of building a stronger sense of community at AUS and bringing about this sustainable social change.

5. Discussion

The case study discussed in this paper offers a novel inquiry into student-initiated entrepreneurial undertakings aimed at inducing positive social spillovers in institutions of higher education within emerging market contexts (Bodolica et al., 2019). In particular, by showcasing Hussam's attempt of building a sustainable community spirit at his university located in the UAE, we seek to expand extant empirical knowledge on sustainability, and social entrepreneurship and innovation beyond industry boundaries and national settings. For Hussam's entrepreneurial idea to be sustained in the long run and deliver on the promise of benefiting the wider society, it needs to permeate through different structural layers and be deeply rooted in the institutional values and beliefs of the university. Galphin et al. (2015) suggest that an organizational commitment to sustainability is evidenced in its mission statement, strategic direction, and projected outcomes that form the basis of a strong corporate culture. Without the support of various departments, activity clubs and individuals that embrace the internal culture of AUS, students would not be able to sustain the value from the pursued social innovation. Consistent with Cinar's (2019) argument for a tighter values' alignment across all levels, Hussam's endeavor is well inscribed in the university's mission that celebrates diversity, nurtures a sense of belonging, promotes civic responsibility, and fosters opportunities for social engagement.

The successful implementation of a social entrepreneurial idea requires the contribution and active collaboration of all affected stakeholders (Arroyo-Vazquez et al., 2010). It is with the constant encouragement and invaluable support of university leaders, coaches, student associations and professors that Hussam was able to transform his ideas from abstract thoughts into tangible

outcomes. By resorting to the help of a broad diversity of stakeholders who possess decision making authority in various fields, he could secure the required permissions, access to the venue, financial resources, and clubs' participation. As argued in the specialized literature, both institutional and individual considerations come into play when a social entrepreneur seeks to achieve the pursued goal (Gandhi & Raina, 2018; Peredo & McLean, 2006). At the institutional level, student-led initiatives can succeed in the presence of a strong administrative backbone that spans across the entire university (Clark, 2004). Regarding the individual characteristics, a high level of moral intensity allowed Hussam to expand his sense of belonging idea beyond the sports clubs to include members from all over the institution (Smith et al., 2016).

An educational institution offers a wide, integrated community that allows its students to practice their networking and communication skills by interacting with different members across the organization, who can provide support and direction for different activities (Roslan et al., 2019). As the case of Hussam demonstrates, he initiated an important social cause for the benefit of all the members, while simultaneously developing himself on the educational, social and professional levels. He ambitioned to build a stronger culture of ownership and nurture a feeling of extended family at AUS, making use of his stakeholder management abilities to connect students, professors, administrators and associations for the sake of a common cause. By contacting some external parties, namely the mascot manufacturer and the sports team from a university in Dubai, Hussam also contributed to 'third-mission activities' at his institution (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015). When successfully implemented, students' endeavors may act as an engine for the creation of collective knowledge and institutional memory that can be accessed by future generations (Spraggon and Bodolica, 2012, 2017).

An essential feature of social entrepreneurial ideas is their capacity to produce positive spillovers for the largest number of stakeholders (Shaw & Carter, 2007). Hussam's initiative has the potential to generate beneficial outcomes on several fronts. The interaction with AUS athletes could encourage members of the community to adopt a healthy lifestyle and make the Sports Complex a regularly visited spot. Over time, the athletic spirit of never giving up, being ready for a challenge, and learning from defeats to secure future wins could translate into a higher quality of students' academic work and their commitment to making difficult ideas possible. On financial front, a strong culture of sports could attract many scholarships from sponsors that are looking to identify promising individual players and teams that can compete on the regional level. Athletes would be allowed to travel more to represent their affiliation in various competitions, while the university would be enabled to hire more coaches to further develop certain sports. This example may inspire other universities in the Middle East (Bodolica et al., 2020) to follow suit by giving students a real chance to pursue their preferred sport as a profession upon graduation. Another benefit AUS could gain relates to the strengthening of its network of alumni. When students graduate with a strong sense of belonging, they tend to carry that into their post-university lives and careers. The university could, thus, capitalize on the opportunity of receiving generous endowment funds from its professionally over-achieving alumni.

5.1. Contributions and implications

Drawing upon extant research findings on social entrepreneurship and innovation, the case study presented in this paper provides a number of practical and theoretical contributions to the literature in the field. The evidence provided in our study demonstrates that educational institutions play a critical role in providing a fruitful platform for igniting students' social entrepreneurial and leadership skills. Contrary to the business world where failure is not tolerated (Ghalwash et al., 2017), the extracurricular activities that universities offer can be viewed as a safe haven for trial and error on the way of accomplishing future entrepreneurial goals. Prior literature highlights the importance of individuals' psychological safety (Spraggon & Bodolica, 2014b) throughout the process of learning and acquiring the skills needed to deal with the challenges of the social entrepreneurs' world (Howorth et al., 2012). Since in educational settings practical failures do not result in irreparable consequences, students can enjoy the opportunity to experiment with the initiation of social change and derive valuable lessons from their experience. Our research makes a renewed call for universities to install a sanction-free environment in which students can freely practice and develop their social entrepreneurship and innovation qualities and skills.

Many industry leaders have voiced their concerns about the real capacity of educational institutions to prepare workforce-ready graduates by equipping them with practical knowledge that is required for effectively dealing with day-to-day pressures of today's business world. To respond to this criticism, universities have commonly modified their curricula to incorporate a credited semester-long work placement experience as a prerequisite for graduation (Griffin & Coelhoso, 2019). While internships represent a viable way for exposing students to factual problems in organizations, we argue that their active involvement in extracurricular events can also contribute to the development of their employability skills. These university-sponsored activities should be considered as fruitful opportunities for students to utilize, right here and right now, what they have learned in their courses. They can practice a wide range of competences, such as communication, innovation, planning and teamworking, during their learning experience itself to become successful (social) leaders of tomorrow.

Extant research underlines the advantages of work-based learning in social entrepreneurship through heightened chances of employability upon graduation (Huq & Gilbert, 2013). This finding implies that students who get more exposure to practical activities during their academic years have an edge in the graduate labor market because they possess what employers are looking for in their job candidates. In the same vein, many scholars have drawn the public attention to the importance of experiential training and hands-on experience in the improvement of university education in the area of social entrepreneurship and innovation (Awaysheh & Bonfiglio, 2017; Chang et al., 2014; Hockerts, 2018). The results of our narrative inquiry into the story of a socially-active student indicate that universities should consider revising their curricula to offer a balanced instruction that would mix instructor-led lectures with field studies and other out-of-class projects.

Most importantly, the key contribution of our case study lies in its specific emerging market focus through the exploration of the educational sector in the UAE. Due to its unprecedented growth and rapid economic development, the UAE attracted significant attention from researchers, particularly in the fields of strategy, leadership and innovation (Abou Soueid et al., 2017; Bodolica et al., 2018). Very little analysis has been conducted to date on universities that are located in the UAE and the broader Middle Eastern region. Among those few context-specific research attempts there is the study by ElKaleh (2019) who analyzed leadership curricula in UAE business programs to conclude that they are dominated by Western principles rather than Islamic values and models. The UAE and other countries from the Arab world constitute very opportune settings for the exploration of student-led entrepreneurial activities due to the unique-in-the-world prevalence of the youth that represents over 35% of the total population (Berger et al., 2019). Therefore, our paper aims to stimulate more interest in conducting culturally relevant social entrepreneurship research in the specific context of universities in the Middle East.

Drawing on the above discussion, we advance a conceptual framework that allows both visually capturing the specific contributions of our study to the literature and better positioning future research endeavors in the field. As shown in Fig. 1 below, the framework highlights the importance of students' learning not only 'in the' curriculum but also 'beyond the curriculum'. In the specific case of social entrepreneurship education, extracurricular activities are placed at the core of students' learning outside the classroom, because they offer greater opportunities for interaction and networking with a larger and more diversified body of community representatives. To be successful, this tighter integration of extracurricular activities within the broader agenda of social entrepreneurship education needs to benefit from the support of various stakeholders, such as regulators, practitioners, instructors, and university administrators. Ultimately, the expected outcomes may materialize at both the micro level, in terms of improved students' skills and competences in the field, and the macro level through an increased number of social entrepreneurial venture creation in the country and the entire region.

5.2. Limitations and future research

As is typical in case study research, the key limitations of our paper relate to its small sample size and narrow contextual focus. We explored a single case within one institution of higher education in a specific emerging market setting – aspects that limit the generalizability of our empirical findings. Nonetheless, the limitations of our investigation can be effectively addressed in the future generation of studies in the field. Additional qualitative inquiries are needed to shed more light on the intricacies surrounding the initiation and delivery of students' innovative ideas that have the potential to generate positive social spillovers. Increasing the size of the sample to include multiple case studies (Spraggon & Bodolica, 2008) could permit to uncover deeply rooted meanings and offer fruitful insights into the process of social innovation from the perspective of the young population. These methodological variations would provide extensive opportunities for conducting comparative analyses across different educational institutions.

The discipline is in need of deeper and more diversified empirical evidence on student-led social initiatives to be enabled to offer viable guidance and advice to decision makers in university settings. Of particular relevance is the examination of social entrepreneurial behaviors of future leaders in the context of Middle Eastern markets with the purpose of assessing the influence of Islamic principles and business models (Ghalwash et al., 2017). Cross-country comparisons within the Middle Eastern region may also reveal whether student attitudes are shaped mainly by cultural or institutional factors. Considering the highly competitive nature of the industry of higher education, additional research may be initiated to reveal how social entrepreneurship orientation is reflected in profitability levels of the academic institution (Roslan et al., 2019). Among other spillovers that may be considered are the university's brand image, reputational effects, standing in the business community, and morale and sense of belonging of students, faculty and
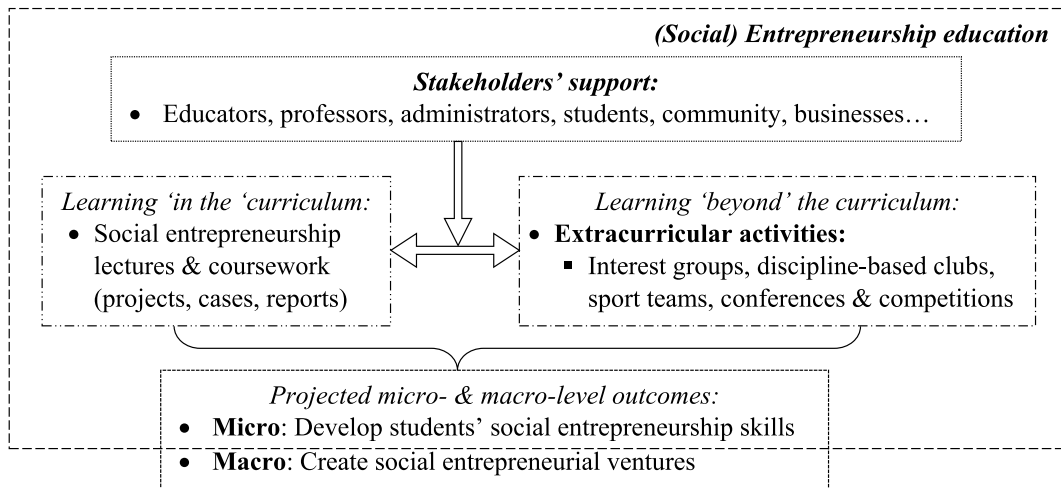

Fig. 1. Extracurricular activities and social entrepreneurship education.
Source: Authors' work

staff.

With regard to social entrepreneurship and innovation courses incorporated in academic curricula, an avenue for further inquiry constitutes the analysis of the differential impact that these courses may produce on the enrolled versus non-enrolled students (Garcia-Morales et al., 2020). Future research may assess how external stakeholders, such as the government and private sector players, can contribute to and get more involved in the social entrepreneurship education in local universities. Studies that evaluate the impact of student-led programs and organizations on the general development and learning experience of the students involved would be of high practical value. Whether the interest of students in such programs and social causes extends beyond their years in university or is confined to only that timeframe remains an open question that is worthy of additional exploration (Ghazzawi et al., 2020). Therefore, future empirical studies could examine the extent to which extracurricular activities affect students' career motives and their intensions of launching a social enterprise upon graduation.

6. Conclusion

Our paper adds to the literature by elucidating the concept of social entrepreneurship in an educational emerging market setting. In particular, we offer an in-depth discussion of a hands-on social initiative by a student in a UAE-based university that has the potential of yielding positive community spillovers. The discussed case study seeks to reconceptualize the institution of higher education as a place of not just learning, but also experimenting, growing and acting through the development of entrepreneurial skills of the future generation of social leaders. The university context, with its extracurricular activities, represents a sanction-free environment that provides the unique opportunity for students to experience social entrepreneurship and innovation without fearing the consequences of practical failure. In sum, we aim to encourage researchers to delve deeper into the question of the role that academic institutions should play under the current market conditions and the specific value proposition they should offer their most important stakeholders.

Author statement

We confirm that the article titled "Extracurricular activities and social entrepreneurial leadership of graduating youth in universities from the Middle East" is submitted solely to the International Journal of Management Education for publication consideration.

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