

Master/Bachelor Thesis

“Social Impact Measurement: Reconciling multiple visual perspectives.”

Background

Sustainable entrepreneurs seek to tackle social and environmental issues and create positive change in people's lives. This change is usually referred to as “social value” or more simply “*impact*” (Rawhouser et al., 2019). Despite being a central aspect of sustainable venture performance, previous research shows that sustainable entrepreneurs tend to eschew precise impact measurement and rather use partial at-hand information (Molecke & Pinkse, 2017), imperfect metrics (André et al. 2018), or heuristics (Argiolas et al., 2023) to make specific things more visible than others, guide sensemaking and develop strategies to maximize positive impact. Previous studies have looked at the processes used by entrepreneurs and ventures to simplify reality and develop impact accounts, yet the perspective of how other stakeholders, perceive and evaluate impact(s), and how this may diverge has been overlooked. This is surprising given the relevant role stakeholders play in shaping entrepreneurs'/venture-level aspirations for impact (Nason et al., 2018). This study seeks to discover how different perspectives of what *impact* is, co-exist within an impact-driven project, and how this multiplicity of perspectives may even influence the impact results. We empirically explore this in the context of mini-grid projects in rural areas, collecting mainly visual data and interviews from multiple actors. While *impact* is often described in visual terms, we currently do not understand how *impact* is understood by those who strive to create it (entrepreneurs, donors, investors...), those who operate to create it (technicians, employees...), and those who experience it (beneficiaries, customers...).

Introductory Readings

- André, K., Cho, C. H., & Laine, M. (2018). Reference points for measuring social performance: Case study of a social business venture. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 33(5), 660-678.
- Argiolas, A., Rawhouser, H. N., & Sydow, A. (2023). Social Enterprise in Contexts of Persistent and Overwhelming Need. An Approach to Avoid Impact Drift. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2023, No. 1, p. 18969). Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510: Academy of Management.
- Molecke, G., & Pinkse, J. (2017). Accountability for social impact: A bricolage perspective on impact measurement in social enterprises. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 32(5), 550-568.
- Rawhouser, H., Cummings, M., Newbert, S.L., 2019. Social Impact Measurement: Current Approaches and Future Directions for Social Entrepreneurship Research. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 43, 82–115.

Tasks and Goals

This master thesis is closely related to the current research of the chair, part of the TUM SEED Center. You will collect and analyze data in close collaboration with our research team. The main tasks are: 1) conducting a literature review regarding social impact measurement, visual data methodologies, and behavioral decision-making, 2) qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews and visual data collection in the global south, and 3) organizing, coding, and analyzing the data.

Requirements

- Excellent English skills and interest in entrepreneurship, development, and sustainable energies.
- Independent, reliable, and diligent working style with the ability to work in multi-cultural settings.
- Eagerness to travel to the Global South to collect data.
- Advanced Seminar Sustainable Entrepreneurship with a minimum grade of 2.0 (for Master Thesis)
- Course Corporate Sustainability with a minimum grade of 2.0 (for Bachelor Thesis)

Details

- Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Frank-Martin Belz and Dr. Alessia Argiolas.
- Start: Flexible / As of now.
- Working time: 6 months, with 4 weeks of fully-funded research stay in the Global South.

Contact.

If you are interested in writing your thesis at our chair or have questions about this topic, please contact Dr. Alessia Argiolas (alessia.argiolas@tum.de). To apply, send an email including your CV, and the current transcript of records (as one PDF file). We are looking forward to working together with you!