Intentions Are All We Need: Towards Sustainable Collective Intentionality in Community Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Master of Science in Technology Entrepreneurship

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This study develops an ontology of "community" to clarify what is meant when we refer to concepts like "community entrepreneurship" and "community enterprises." It addresses the need for a more precise and processual understanding of how communities emerge, act, and sustain themselves as collective agents in entrepreneurial contexts. Focusing on urban environments, where community boundaries are fluid and often emergent, the study challenges the dominant framing of entrepreneurship as an individual pursuit.

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, the research investigates the practices of community entrepreneurs in Singapore. It finds that communities capable of sustained collective entrepreneurial action can be deliberately constructed—not merely inherited from pre-existing social ties—through specific practices. These practices allow for the orchestration of both individual agency and collective coordination, making collective action possible even in the absence of formal structures.

The study identifies three interrelated practices that underlie this capacity: opportunity co-discovery, where individuals pursue personal interests that align with others; opportunity co-construction, where members create new possibilities through collective action; and community governance, which manages the dynamic between personal autonomy and collective responsibility. To conceptualize how these communities navigate the inherent tension between individual and collective orientations, the study introduces the notion of sustainable collective intentionality—a balance between "I-community" and "We-community" orientations.

By offering a micro-processual framework of community formation and maintenance, this study contributes to a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of community entrepreneurship. It provides tools for rethinking how communities are formed and act entrepreneurially in urban contexts, emphasizing that effective community does not preexist collective action, but is created through it.

Keywords: community entrepreneurship, collective intentionality, entrepreneurship-as-practice, urban communities, collective action, community formation

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Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

"Whatever the problem, community is the answer"
— Margaret Wheatley

What comes to mind when you think of an entrepreneur? The dominant narrative presents a lone hero—a young startup founder who assembles a team and after navigating numerous challenges ultimately achieves the dream of becoming a startup unicorn. This individualistic story of entrepreneurship has become so institutionalized that even academic programs, including this very master's in technology entrepreneurship, are designed to perpetuate it.

Long before the rise of venture-funded startups, cooperatives demonstrated the power of collective entrepreneurial action. Yet this history has been largely forgotten or overlooked in contemporary discussions. Nevertheless, in recent years, we are witnessing the rise of hybrid organizations such as community enterprises, platform cooperatives, and decentralized autonomous organizations that blur the lines between social movements, business and communities. Entrepreneurship scholarship is beginning to pay more attention to this re-emergence of collective approaches towards entrepreneurship, challenging the dominant narrative of the lone hero and increasingly recognizing entrepreneurship as a collective action for social good (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2024).

Community entrepreneurship—a form of entrepreneurship as collective action—can be understood through two complementary lenses. The first lens is analytical, viewing entrepreneurship as inherently collective rather than individual, regardless of how it is organized or branded. The second lens is normative, describing a specific approach to entrepreneurship that is deliberately organized in more democratic, communal ways—entrepreneurial action by the community, for the community. While these perspectives may appear distinct, they are interconnected: the analytical understanding reveals the collective nature underlying all entrepreneurship, while the normative understanding applies this insight to create more inclusive and democratic entrepreneurial forms. This study employs the analytical lens to better understand and contribute to the development of the normative approach. Despite appearing novel, this "emerging" form of entrepreneurship has deep roots in cooperative business traditions that have been obscured by innovation amnesia (Schneider, 2024).

Towards conceptualizing entrepreneurship as collective action, scholars have called for research to identify common features across heterogeneous entrepreneurial collective endeavors (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2024). This study proposes that the community

itself—specifically, a community that engages in collective action—is that common feature. While research has established that communities can be powerful entrepreneurial change agents (Bacq et al., 2022), existing literature has two significant limitations. First, studies have often conflated community with formal organization, failing to capture how communities can exist before or beyond organizational boundaries. Secondly, even research that does distinguish between communities and organizations has predominantly focused on rural or culturally homogeneous settings where community boundaries are relatively well-defined. This neglects the dynamics of community formation in urban contexts, where communities may emerge through shared interests and entrepreneurial action rather than pre-exist from geographic or cultural ties.

These distinct limitations are evident in how most studies examine community entrepreneurship through case studies of organizations long after they have been established (Cucchi et al., 2022). This approach perpetuates the misconception that communities are internally homogeneous and have stable boundaries (Eversole, 2011) and overlooks intra-community conflict and resistance to opportunity exploitation (Meyer, 2020). In reality, communities are fluid entities with dynamic boundaries. They can exist before formal organizations are established, evolve independently of organizational structures, and form through shared interests rather than traditional social bonds, especially in urban contexts. Understanding how communities form, evolve, and redefine their boundaries during entrepreneurial action in such settings is essential for advancing research in community entrepreneurship.

1.1 Research Questions

This leads to the central question of this study: **What constitutes a community that engages in collective action, and how are such communities formed and sustained?**

By examining these questions, this study aims to move beyond both the current focus on organizations and the assumption of static community boundaries in the literature on community entrepreneurship. Instead, it offers a micro-processual understanding of community as an antecedent enabling collective entrepreneurial action that continuously evolves through entrepreneurial practice.

This understanding is crucial not only for advancing scholarly knowledge but also for supporting the development of more truly community-oriented forms of entrepreneurship in urban environments where community boundaries are fluid and emergent rather than predetermined.

1.2 Paper Outline

The rest of the paper is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review, exploring existing scholarship on community entrepreneurship. It examines the historical context, key research streams, theoretical perspectives, and identifies research opportunities that this study addresses.

Chapter 3 details the methodology employed in this research. It explains the constructivist grounded theory approach, data collection through semi-structured interviews with community entrepreneurs in Singapore, and the analytical process that integrated collective intentionality theory as an interpretive framework.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, introducing three key practices that enable sustained collective action: opportunity co-discovery, opportunity co-construction, and community governance. This chapter also introduces the theoretical framework of sustainable collective intentionality, explaining how communities balance individual and collective orientations.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the research findings, situating them within the broader context of community entrepreneurship and collective action theory. This chapter outlines the theoretical contributions to collective intentionality theory and community entrepreneurship literature, practical implications for community builders, and acknowledges the limitations while suggesting directions for future research.

Finally, chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarizing the key insights and contributions of the research, emphasizing how the concept of sustainable collective intentionality advances our understanding of how communities form and sustain collective action in contemporary urban contexts.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Historical Context of Community in Entrepreneurship

The relationship between entrepreneurship and community emerged as a subject of scholarly inquiry during the late 1970s, coinciding with broader discussions about economic development approaches. During this period, traditional top-down development strategies, which favored large-scale organizations, demonstrated mixed results in addressing local economic challenges (Stöhr, 1980). In response, researchers and practitioners began exploring "bottom-up development" approaches that emphasized local community engagement and self-reliance.

A significant theoretical contribution to understanding community-based approaches came from Elinor Ostrom's research on the governance of commons. Her empirical studies demonstrated that communities could effectively manage shared resources through collective action and self-governance (Ostrom, 1990). This work challenged prevailing economic theories about resource management and provided evidence that local communities could develop sophisticated institutional arrangements to address complex economic and environmental challenges (Ostrom, 2010).

The concept of community-based enterprise (CBE) emerged as a distinct form of entrepreneurship through the seminal work of Peredo and Chrisman (2006). Their research documented cases where communities acted collectively as both entrepreneur and enterprise, particularly in contexts where traditional market-based approaches had proven insufficient. This conceptualization sparked increased scholarly attention to community-based forms of entrepreneurship, leading to studies across various geographical and cultural contexts (Somerville and McElwee, 2011).

2.2 Key Research Streams in Community Entrepreneurship

The fragmented literature on community entrepreneurship has conceptualized the relationship between community and entrepreneurship along three main trajectories: community as context, community as beneficiary, and community as entrepreneur. Studies focusing on community as context examine how local social structures, cultural norms, and institutions influence entrepreneurial activity. Jack and Anderson (2002) demonstrated how entrepreneurs' embeddedness in local community structures shapes opportunity recognition and resource acquisition processes. Similarly, McKeever et al. (2014) illustrated how community context influences the nature and extent of entrepreneurial opportunities available to individuals.

The second stream examines community as a beneficiary of entrepreneurial activity, investigating how entrepreneurial initiatives contribute to community development and well-being. Research in this area has documented various outcomes including community revitalization (Johnstone and Lionais, 2004) and cultural preservation (Murphy et al., 2020) . These studies often focus on how external entrepreneurial interventions or locally-initiated ventures generate value for their communities, particularly in contexts of economic or social challenges.

More recently, scholars have begun conceptualizing community as an entrepreneurial actor itself, examining how collectives identify and exploit opportunities. This perspective has generated insights into collective resource mobilization (Hertel et al., 2021) and collaborative value creation (Bacq et al., 2022). Studies in this stream often focus on formal organizations such as cooperatives, social enterprises, and community development corporations, though recent work suggests that entrepreneurial agency may exist in less formal collective arrangements as well (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2024).

These streams have generated valuable insights while revealing the complexity of the relationship between community and entrepreneurship. Empirical studies in these streams have documented diverse forms of community involvement in entrepreneurship, ranging from informal networks to structured organizations, and from local geographical communities to virtual communities of practice.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Community Entrepreneurship

Organization-centric approaches have dominated empirical research in community entrepreneurship, drawing from established methodologies in organization theory. These studies typically examine formal entities such as community enterprises, cooperatives, or social enterprises as their primary unit of analysis. For example, Hertel et al. (2021) studied resource mobilization practices across four community enterprises, while Deschamps and Slitine (2024) compared organizational processes in two community recycling initiatives. This approach has generated valuable insights into organizational structures, governance mechanisms, and resource allocation within community enterprises.

Place-based approaches examine entrepreneurship within spatially or culturally defined communities. These studies often employ ethnographic methods to understand how local context shapes entrepreneurial activities. For example, Murphy et al. (2020) studied entrepreneurship in the Toquaht Nation and revealed how Indigenous worldviews influence opportunity identification and evaluation. Similar studies in rural communities have documented how local cultural heritage and social networks influence entrepreneurial processes (McKeever et al., 2014).

Both organization-centric and place-based approaches have demonstrated the importance of the community context but few have systematically used community as a unifying framework tying together disparate cases. The diagnostic framework proposed by Hindle (2010) was the first to do this, attempting to find commonalities between different communities through factors such as physical infrastructure, human capital, and social networks. More recently, Bacq et al. (2022) developed a typology identifying five distinct community types and their corresponding roles in entrepreneurial processes. These frameworks have provided useful analytical tools while highlighting the multifaceted nature of community involvement in entrepreneurship.

Practice-based approaches have emerged as an alternative theoretical lens, shifting attention from actors or organizations to the actual practices through which entrepreneurship is accomplished. This perspective views entrepreneurial activities as bundles of practices that are relationally, materially, and temporally situated (Champenois et al., 2020). Practice theory has enabled researchers to examine entrepreneurship at different levels of analysis, from individual routines to collective activities, without privileging either individual agency or structural determinism.

Social ontology offers additional theoretical resources for conceptualizing community, particularly through collective intentionality theory. The work of Tuomela (2013) distinguishes between different modes of collective intention, from shared individual intentions to genuine group-level commitments. This theoretical perspective has been applied to entrepreneurship by Farny and Kibler (2022) , who propose reconceptualizing entrepreneurship as joint practice. Their work suggests that different forms of collective intention enable different types of entrepreneurial activities, particularly in relation to sustainability outcomes.

2.4 Synthesis and Research Opportunities

Current research has extensively documented various forms of community involvement in entrepreneurship, from informal collective action to structured organizational arrangements. These studies have generated insights into how communities influence entrepreneurial processes and outcomes across different contexts. The introduction of practice theory frameworks has provided new theoretical tools for understanding community-based entrepreneurial phenomena.

Moving beyond current literature, this study identifies three specific research opportunities at the intersection of community emergence, urban contexts, and theoretical development:

First, while existing research thoroughly documents established community enterprises, there remains a significant gap in understanding the antecedent processes through which entrepreneurial communities initially form. This gap is particularly evident in urban environments like Singapore, where diverse individuals with different backgrounds may come together through shared practices before any formal organization exists. This aligns with Hjorth and Holt (2016) argument that entrepreneurship is inherently social and involves "the social production of possibility from which all opportunities and ventures emerge"—a process that precedes formal enterprise.

Second, the theoretical tools currently employed in community entrepreneurship research require adaptation for application in urban settings. Unlike rural contexts where geographic boundaries often align with community membership, urban environments feature overlapping, fluid social networks that defy traditional community definitions. This study proposes that practice theory offers a valuable lens for examining how shared practices—rather than shared identity or location—can serve as the foundation for entrepreneurial community formation in diverse urban environments. Practice approaches are fundamentally relational (Champenois et al., 2020) and help overcome traditional dualisms that limit our understanding of fluid boundaries and overlapping networks (Thompson et al., 2021), making them particularly appropriate for studying entrepreneurial community formation in complex urban settings.

Third, existing literature has paid limited attention to the tensions between individual motivations and collective aspirations in community formation processes. Urban settings present particular challenges for community building, as diverse individuals bring different expectations, levels of commitment, and understandings of what constitutes "community." This study examines how these tensions are negotiated through everyday practices, offering insights into the dynamic relationship between individual agency and collective action in entrepreneurial community formation.

By addressing these research opportunities, this study contributes to a more nuanced theoretical understanding of community formation in contemporary urban contexts while offering practical insights for fostering inclusive entrepreneurial communities in increasingly diverse urban environments.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

For this research, I define community entrepreneurs as individuals who explicitly employ community-oriented rhetoric and practices to enact change. This working definition intentionally focuses on the discursive and practical aspects of community entrepreneurship rather than formal organizational structures or outcomes, aligning with both constructivist and practice-based perspectives that emphasize enacted behavior over predetermined categories.

I employed constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014) to investigate the practices of community entrepreneurs in Singapore, guided by the practice-based ontological perspective of entrepreneurship-as-practice (EaP). The constructivist approach aligns with my understanding that knowledge about community entrepreneurship emerges through researcher interpretation and interaction with participants, rather than from purely objective observation. Similarly, EaP's view of entrepreneurship as constituted through social practices rather than individual traits (Champenois et al., 2020) shaped my decision to focus on practices as the fundamental unit of analysis.

My initial research design considered a multiple case study approach, but early fieldwork revealed that studying communities defied neat categorization into distinct cases due to overlapping memberships and informal governance structures. This observation aligned with the constructivist recognition that social phenomena are complex and interconnected rather than clearly bounded. Consequently, I evolved the design to focus on practices as the primary unit of analysis, examining how different types of practices contribute to community formation and collective action across multiple contexts.

I conducted semi-structured interviews as my primary data collection method, enabling in-depth exploration of how community entrepreneurship practices unfolds over time through the accounts of those actively engaged in them. This choice reflects EaP's emphasis on examining routinized behavior, material arrangements, and shared understandings that constitute entrepreneurial activity (Gartner et al., 2016). Following practice theory principles, I focused on identifying and analyzing bundles of practices

rather than treating communities as bounded entities. I maintained intentional flexibility in my research design to allow for theoretical sampling as new themes emerged, following constructivist grounded theory principles which view theoretical understanding as emerging through researcher interpretation and interaction with participants. This flexibility proved crucial as early findings revealed the importance of examining how practices evolve over time and how different forms of collective intention emerge through practice.

3.2 Data Collection

Primary data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with six community entrepreneurs in Singapore from September 2024 to March 2025, including one follow-up interview with a participant who had initially stopped participating in community activities but later re-engaged. I encountered these participants through community events I regularly attended from March 2024 to March 2025. I deliberately chose not to frame any specific location or organization as a case study or primary data source. This methodological decision aligned with my aim to move beyond both organization-centric and place-based approaches that typically rely on static community boundaries. Instead, this approach better captured the fluid, overlapping nature of community formation and practices in urban contexts.

Two initial participants were selected based on their active involvement in community entrepreneurship practices, with subsequent participants recruited through snowball sampling. Notably, at the time of the interviews, several participants had moved on to different community-building efforts or taken breaks from active community involvement, allowing me to examine practices across different contexts and temporal phases. This mobility across different community initiatives further highlighted the limitations of focusing on fixed organizational or geographical boundaries when studying urban entrepreneurial communities.

The semi-structured interviews explored participants' broader experiences in community entrepreneurship, extending beyond their involvement in any single initiative. The interviews delved into participants' personal journeys in community formation and maintenance across different contexts, examining the specific practices they employed in community building in various settings. Participants shared both challenges and successes in their community building efforts throughout their journey, and reflected on their transitions between different community roles and initiatives. This broad scope of inquiry allowed for understanding how community practices evolve over time and across different contexts, rather than being limited to experiences within a single organization or initiative.

Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes. Three interviews were conducted in-person at locations chosen by the participants (typically community spaces or casual meeting locations), while the other four were conducted online via video conferencing platforms. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.3 Data Analysis

My analytical approach integrates constructivist grounded theory with informed grounded theory's framework for theoretical integration (Thornberg, 2012), reflecting my philosophical position that knowledge emerges through interpretation while acknowledging the value of existing theoretical insights. Unlike traditional grounded theory's emphasis on theoretical naïveté, I adopted informed grounded theory's perspective that researchers can productively use existing theories as sensitizing concepts while remaining grounded in empirical data. This approach aligns with my constructivist stance that recognizes both the socially constructed nature of knowledge and the value of existing theoretical constructs in making sense of social phenomena.

I conducted the analysis using Quirkos 2, a qualitative data analysis software that enables systematic coding and visual analysis of interview data. The software allowed me to import and organize all interview transcripts in a single platform, where I could assign and manage codes across the data. A key feature of Quirkos 2 is its canvas-based interface, which enables spatial visualization of codes and their relationships, allowing me to identify patterns and develop theoretical connections through a visual mapping process. Through three main phases, I systematically analyzed the data, with each phase reflecting different aspects of the constructivist and practice-based approach.

3.3.1 Initial Coding

In the first phase, I analyzed each of the six initial interview transcripts independently, generating between 80-150 codes per transcript. Following constructivist grounded theory principles and practice-based perspectives, I used gerunds for coding (e.g., 'pushing myself', 'creating opportunities') to capture participants' actual doings and sayings (Charmaz, 2014). This coding approach aligned with my focus on practices as the unit of analysis and emphasized action rather than static categories. Through constant comparative analysis across transcripts, I consolidated these initial codes into approximately 50 shared codes that represented common practices across different community-building contexts.

3.3.2 Focused Coding and Theoretical Integration

Attempting to move on to the next phase, I initially encountered what D. A. Gioia (2004) describes as a necessary phase of getting "lost" in the data – a state that reflected the complex, interconnected nature of social practices that constructivism acknowledges. While analyzing patterns in community-building practices, I observed recurring tensions between individual and collective action that existing practice-based concepts alone couldn't fully explain. At this point, consistent with informed grounded theory's approach to theoretical integration, I more actively engaged with collective intentionality theory (Tuomela, 2013; Farny and Kibler, 2022) as an interpretive framework. The

theoretical underpinnings and specific aspects of collective intentionality theory that informed this analysis are detailed in section 3.4.

My engagement with collective intentionality theory was not a departure from my practice-based approach, but rather an enhancement of it. The theory's distinction between shared intentions, joint intentions, and we-intentions provided analytical tools to understand how different forms of collective action emerge through practice. This theoretical integration exemplifies informed grounded theory's principle that existing theories can serve as sensitizing concepts while maintaining groundedness in empirical data. The theory helped illuminate how different practices contribute to various forms of collective intention, while my practice-based approach kept the analysis focused on how these intentions manifest in actual doing rather than abstract theory.

3.3.3 Theory Development

In the final analytical phase, I used the approach by Gioia et al. (2013) to "zoom out" from specific practices to more generalizable theoretical insights. I organized the analysis into three levels of increasing abstraction: first-order concepts derived directly from participants' language, second-order themes reflecting my theoretical interpretation of these concepts, and aggregate dimensions that capture the broader theoretical categories. This structure is visualized in fig. 4.1, showing the progression from empirical observation to theoretical abstraction.

While traditional Gioia methodology advocates a purely inductive approach ((Deschamps and Slitine, 2024), I employed an abductive approach as suggested by Van Burg et al. (2022), iteratively moving between empirical data and theoretical concepts to refine and develop the emerging theoretical categories. Following informed grounded theory principles, I used collective intentionality theory not as a rigid framework, but as a sensitizing lens that helped illuminate patterns in the data while remaining open to new theoretical insights.

As patterns emerged around how individuals navigate different levels of community involvement, I conducted theoretical sampling through a follow-up interview with a participant who had transitioned between different levels of engagement over time. I also returned to re-analyze earlier interviews with this theoretical lens, examining how different participants described their evolving relationship with community practices. Throughout all phases, I maintained detailed analytical memos documenting my coding decisions, theoretical interpretations, and emerging insights. These memos served as a tool for researcher reflexivity—a key principle in constructivist methodology—helping me track how my theoretical understanding evolved through engagement with both the data and existing theory.

3.4 Collective Intentionality as an Interpretive Framework

During initial data analysis, I observed recurring tensions between individual and collective dimensions that existing practice-based concepts alone couldn't fully explain. Participants expressed these tensions through statements like "it's not a community, but an opportunity" or "community doesn't feel like community"—revealing how individuals struggled to reconcile personal motivations with collective aspirations. These tensions manifested in varying commitment levels, conflicting participation expectations, and divergent views about what constitutes community.

To interpret these patterns, I adopted collective intentionality theory by Tuomela (2013) as applied to entrepreneurship by Farny and Kibler (2022) as an interpretive framework. While it informed my analysis, it did not predetermine the findings but served as a sensitizing device that helped illuminate patterns in the data. The framework distinguishes between two fundamental modes of collective intention:

3.4.1 I-mode collective intentionality

You want to go for a run. I want to go for a run. Therefore we run together.

I-mode collective intentionality occurs when individuals primarily act from personal perspectives while still participating in group activities. They think in terms of "I" even while engaging with others. Within this mode, Farny and Kibler (2022) identify shared intentionality, as illustrated by the example above. In this mode of collective intentionality, individuals might be pursuing their own initiatives, but are doing so in a way that could still be conducive to the formation of a group.

3.4.2 We-mode collective intentionality

We want to run together. Therefore we run together.

You want to run together. I want to run together. Therefore we run together.

We-mode collective intentionality occurs when individuals think and act from the group's perspective. They reason as members of a collective "we" rather than merely coordinating individual actions. Farny and Kibler (2022) further distinguish two types within this mode: joint intentionality (as shown in the first example above) and we-intentionality (as shown in the second example above).

In practice, these theoretical distinctions often blur, making it difficult to clearly distinguish between joint and we-intentionality in empirical settings. For the purposes of my analysis, I focus on their shared essential feature: both involve individuals adopting the group perspective as primary in their reasoning rather than attempting to differentiate between these subtypes.

This framework provided valuable analytical tools to examine the relationship between individual and collective dimensions of community formation without privileging either. It offered precise language to distinguish different types of collective intentions while maintaining focus on actual practices rather than formal structures, and enabled analysis of how collective intentions evolve over time. Using this theoretical perspective as an analytical lens rather than a rigid framework bridged the gap between abstract theories and concrete practices through which communities emerge and evolve.

In the next chapter, I present the key practices identified through this analysis and demonstrate how they contribute to different forms of collective intentionality in community entrepreneurship.

Chapter 4

Results

The analysis identified three key practices through which communities engage in collective entrepreneurial action: opportunity co-discovery, opportunity co-construction, and community governance. These practices emerged from the data through iterative coding and analysis, revealing patterns in how communities form and sustain collective action over time.

As these patterns emerged, collective intentionality theory provided useful conceptual language to understand the tensions between individual and collective dimensions observed in the data. The following subchapters present each practice in detail, illustrating how community members navigate these tensions through specific practices.

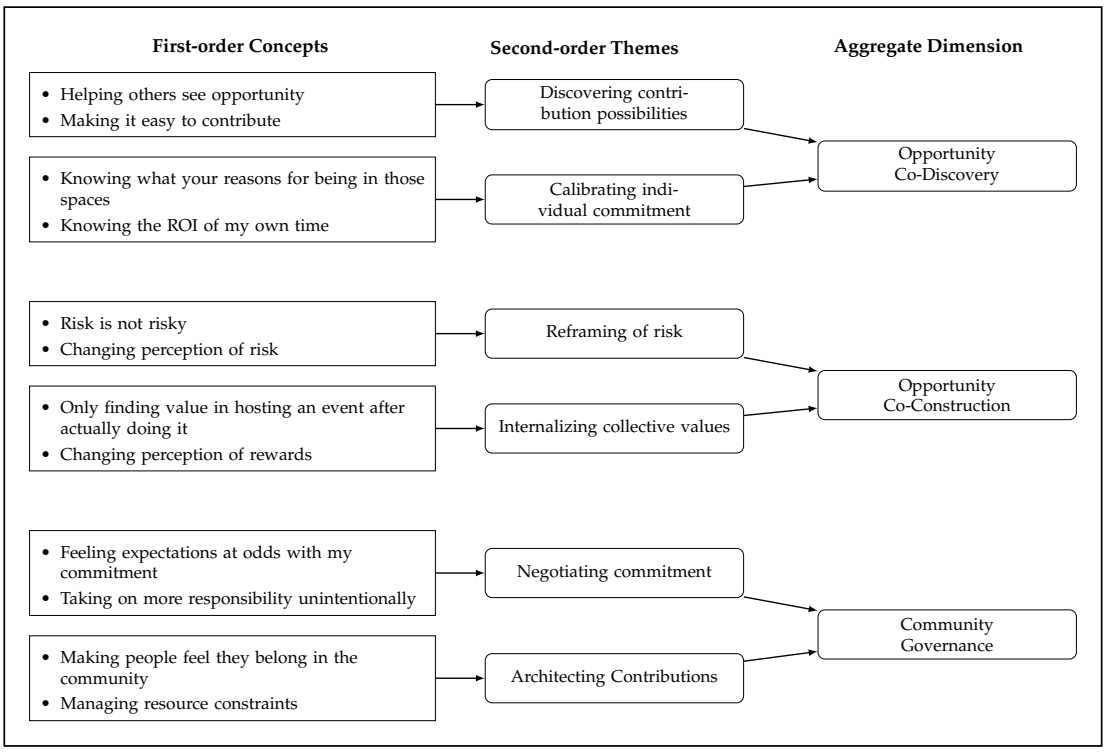

FIGURE 4.1: Data Structure

4.1 The Practice of Opportunity Co-Discovery

The practice of opportunity co-discovery involves participants pursuing personal interests that happen to align with others, creating collective outcomes through primarily individual motivations. Unlike individual opportunity discovery, the practice of opportunity co-discovery necessarily involves others. This dynamic resembles what collective intentionality theorists might call "I-mode" reasoning, though participants themselves described it in more practical terms such as "what do I get out of it right" (Source 4) or "I want to make an impact in my own personal way" (Source 6). The practice manifests through two key dimensions: discovering contribution possibilities and calibrating individual commitment.

Second-Order Theme	**Illustrative Quotes**
Discovering contribution possibilities	*"They just naturally mingle form circles and they were talking to each other so I realized that more than just an events platform so to speak, people here wanted to know about what other people in the audience were doing." - Source 4* *"you don't really know, you don't go into like I know this is the idea that I want. But then if you speak to the people around in the community, and then you have your own like knowledge they have their own knowledge, they come from different places maybe you know one fine day you'll be like eh why don't let's, why don't we try something together." - Source 5*
Calibrating individual commitment	*"If I have to put it very coldly, it's like I must know what my ROI of my own time is...So I had my own individual like this is what I put X amount of dollars to per month. And each month I got to go down, I had an experience that was satisfactory like for my exchange of dollars." - Source 1* *"Initially I just wanted to participate and just enjoy the space, I went for a few times to enjoy the conversations. But then I thought why not I just try to share something as well. I find some joy in that as well so I thought why don't I do that." - Source 5*

TABLE 4.1: *Illustrative quotes of the practice of opportunity co-discovery*

4.1.1 Discovering contributory possibilities

The practice of discovering contributory possibilities emerges through dynamic interactions within community spaces, where individuals gradually uncover ways to participate beyond passive engagement. Unlike traditional organizational settings with predefined roles, community members discover contribution opportunities through organic interactions, experiential learning, and observation of existing community norms. This process involves both structured onboarding mechanisms and informal learning through participation, allowing individuals to find meaningful ways to contribute that align with their capabilities and interests. Importantly, this discovery process respects individual autonomy—community members are not pressured to change but rather find opportunities that naturally align with their existing skills and inclinations.

4.1.2 Calibrating individual commitment

The process of calibrating individual commitment represents a distinct yet complementary practice where members consciously adjust their level of involvement based on personal capacity and perceived value. This calibration process involves experimentation with different levels of engagement until individuals find a sustainable balance. Community members often begin with minimal involvement, gradually increasing their commitment as they discover more meaningful ways to contribute. The voluntary nature of community participation makes this calibration essential—members must find a level of engagement that feels personally rewarding while remaining sustainable over time. This process is inherently individual, with each person determining their own optimal level of commitment based on their circumstances, interests, and capacity.

4.2 The Practice of Opportunity Co-Construction

The practice of opportunity co-construction describes a pattern of community engagement where members shift from leveraging existing opportunities to creating new ones through collective action. In this practice, participants adopt reasoning that considers group goals and collective well-being alongside—and sometimes above—individual interests. This reasoning can manifest both when collective and individual interests align and when collective interests might temporarily require personal sacrifice. This pattern resembles what collective intentionality theorists might call "We-mode" reasoning where participants think in terms of "we" rather than just "I". This practice manifests through two interconnected processes: the reframing of risk and the internalization of collective values.

Second-Order Theme	**Illustrative Quotes**
Reframing of risk	*"It did not take courage for me to do this. Because I knew I had community behind me already." - Source 1* *"That's why we have a community here now because this process of putting yourself out there you know it really feels quite lonely. It really feels like what am I putting in all this effort for." - Source 4*
Internalizing collective values	*"I think most of the interactions that occur from these events have no benefit to me at all... But they benefit others. It provides me a sense of fulfillment la. Like that what I'm doing is impacting someone else's life. Even though I may not benefit from it directly." - Source 2* *"It is only after you have hosted the event, with an open curious mind that you actually see how transformative it is for you." - Source 4*

TABLE 4.2: *Illustrative quotes of the practice of opportunity co-construction*

4.2.1 Reframing of risk

The reframing of risk emerges as community members begin to perceive entrepreneurial action through a collective rather than purely individual lens. This collective buffer against risk transforms what might be seen as daunting individual endeavors into more manageable shared challenges. The presence of community support reduces perceived individual costs, making it easier for members to take entrepreneurial action. What begins as a solitary journey becomes embedded within a supportive network that distributes the emotional and practical burdens of entrepreneurial action.

4.2.2 Internalizing collective values

Simultaneously, members begin internalizing collective values, shifting their assessment of benefits beyond purely personal gains. This transformation represents a crucial shift where members begin deriving satisfaction not just from personal returns but from their contribution to collective outcomes. Even when direct personal benefits are not evident, members find fulfillment in contributing to the community's broader goals and supporting others' growth.

4.3 The Practice of Community Governance

The practice of community governance addresses how communities sustain themselves over time while balancing individual autonomy with collective needs. This enables both opportunity co-discovery and opportunity co-construction to co-exist within the same community. By creating flexible structures for participation and clear expectations around commitment, governance practices allow members to engage through individual-oriented reasoning (finding opportunities that align with personal interests) while simultaneously supporting collective initiatives that benefit the community as a whole. This practice manifests through two key processes: architecting contributions and negotiating commitments

4.3.1 Architecting contributions

The process of architecting contributions involves designing clear pathways for community participation while managing resource constraints. This includes creating various entry points and progression routes that allow members to contribute according to their capabilities and interests. Community organizers must thoughtfully structure these contribution pathways while managing both physical resources (such as meeting spaces) and digital resources (such as online platforms). This design process requires

Second-Order Theme	**Illustrative Quotes**
Architecting Contributions	*"we would need to sort of rent the place, so it's also that feeling of yea I should cover costs." - Source 6* *"Right now it's still very community focused. We're in the season where we're trying to basically you know get to community to contribute to the financial upkeep." - Source 4* *"And then next thing you know I'm starting to moderate the chats and everything. Cos like I'm so involved right, and then when crazy people come in. I'm like hey, there's like this guy bothering people you know." - Source 3*
Negotiating Commitment	*"Is the people who keep showing up lor. And It doesn't always have to be the same people. But there's a certain kind of consistency, or like they can also be very upfront about it. My level of commitment can only be once a month, but if they stick to that, that they are already sharing, and being upfront with you, then that is very committed already." - Source 1* *"I think very quickly I was not involved in it already because it really felt like umm. Over what I was expecting, or just too much expectations." - Source 3* *"I would think being part of the community would be sort of like an active member contributing right. So I mesh I would say that I haven't been very active, so I wouldn't say that I'm part of the community now, but I can sort of be like a contributor to the community at one point, yea." - Source 5*

TABLE 4.3: *Illustrative quotes of the practice of community governance*

careful consideration of how to make participation accessible and meaningful, while simultaneously addressing practical constraints like space limitations or platform moderation. The challenge lies in creating enabling structures that facilitate organic participation without becoming overly prescriptive or bureaucratic.

4.3.2 Negotiating commitment

The process of negotiating commitments involves establishing sustainable group norms that accommodate varying levels of involvement without creating undue pressure on members. While some individuals may choose deeper engagement, the community maintains healthy boundaries by avoiding the problematization of lower commitment levels. This negotiation process recognizes that commitment naturally varies among members and over time, focusing instead on creating an environment where different levels of participation are valued and supported. The emphasis is on developing frameworks that allow members to contribute meaningfully at their chosen level of engagement, rather than pushing for uniformly high commitment.

4.4 Sustainable Collective Intentionality: A Theoretical Framework

Building on the three practices identified above, I propose a theoretical extension to collective intentionality theory through two distinct community orientations: "I-community" and "We-community." These orientations represent different manifestations of collective intentionality in community entrepreneurship, and understanding their dynamics provides insight into how communities develop and sustain collective action. It is important to note that these orientations are theoretical constructs representing ends of a spectrum; in reality, most communities exhibit characteristics of both orientations to varying degrees. The "pure" forms described below serve as analytical tools to understand the dynamics that shape community development.

FIGURE 4.2: Conceptual Model of Sustainable Collective Intentionality

4.4.1 I-community Orientation

I-communities are characterized primarily by the practice of opportunity co-discovery, where members operate through I-mode reasoning as described in section 4.1. In these communities, individuals participate based on overlapping personal interests while maintaining their autonomy. As one participant explained, "Everyone here has their own journey. We just happen to be on parallel paths that occasionally intersect." This sentiment reflects the individualistic yet potentially collaborative nature of I-communities.

The collective intentionality in I-communities emerges through the shared practices of opportunity co-discovery. Members recognize shared interests but maintain personal goals as primary. The community sustains itself by accommodating varying levels of commitment and providing value to individual members through the discovery processes outlined in section 4.1.

This approach excels at creating spaces for exploration and innovation, attracting diverse participants who might be deterred by more demanding commitment structures. As one participant noted, "if it's a free event, I'm free to experiment. There's no expectation of me to perform a certain way." I-communities can be particularly effective in early stages of community formation or in contexts where individual autonomy is highly valued.

However, I-communities face distinct challenges. The limited collective commitment can make coordinated action difficult, especially when facing external pressures or resource constraints. As one participant observed, "it doesn't feel very organic. It's just like people coming together trying to find something, but don't really know what that thing is." Additionally, the community may struggle to maintain continuity as individual interests change, with another participant noting that "once you stop going for events, it just fades away."

4.4.2 We-community Orientation

We-communities, in contrast, emerge through the practice of opportunity co-construction described in section 4.2, where members adopt we-mode reasoning with stronger collective commitment. In these communities, individuals shift from "I am participating in this community" to "we are building this community together," reflecting a deeper integration of personal and collective identity.

The collective intentionality in We-communities is more explicitly articulated and intentionally cultivated through the co-construction practices outlined in section 4.2. Members not only coordinate actions but also develop a stronger sense of shared identity and purpose through collaborative creation. This was evident when a participant described how "they feel like they are part of that growth, like they're founder members. They feel satisfaction when the project succeeds because they see it as their success too."

We-communities excel at generating strong collective action and resilience in the face of challenges. As one participant explained, "people would reach out saying 'You can do this, I've got this developer for you, let me help you.' That's what kept us going through hard times." This orientation can be particularly effective in communities with clear missions or where deep collaboration is essential.

However, We-communities also face distinct challenges. The stronger boundaries and expectations can make them less accessible to newcomers or those unable to commit fully. As one participant noted, "the deeper the collective identity, the stronger the

commitment—but also the harder it is for casual participants to feel included." Additionally, the intensity of collective identity can create vulnerability to disillusionment if expectations are not met, as evidenced by one participant's observation that "when money becomes the incentive, people show their ugly side. A strong community can quickly turn when expectations aren't met."

4.4.3 Sustainable collective intentionality

The research reveals that while I-community and We-community orientations are useful theoretical constructs, most successful communities don't exclusively adopt either orientation but rather develop what I term an "integrated orientation" that incorporates elements of both. Few, if any, communities exist as "pure" I-communities or "pure" We-communities. Instead, real-world communities typically exist on a spectrum, leaning more toward one orientation while incorporating elements of the other. This integration is primarily achieved through all three practices working in concert, creating structures that accommodate both I-mode and We-mode intentionality.

This integrated approach creates what I term "sustainable collective intentionality"—a dynamic state where communities can maintain collective action while accommodating both individual and group needs over time. The governance practices outlined in section 4.3 provide the framework within which both opportunity co-discovery and opportunity co-construction can flourish.

While I refer to "pure" I-communities or "pure" We-communities as theoretical constructs for analytical clarity, the data shows that communities leaning too heavily toward either extreme face distinct challenges. Communities that focus solely on co-discovery may struggle to develop sufficient collective commitment for sustained action. Communities that emphasize co-construction without adequate governance practices may become too insular and struggle to adapt to change. Communities that focus too heavily on governance without nurturing co-discovery and co-construction may become overly bureaucratic and lose their capacity for organic collective action.

The three practices of opportunity co-discovery, opportunity co-construction, and community governance, along with the resulting community orientations presented in this chapter, provide a framework for understanding how communities form and sustain collective action. The following chapter will discuss the implications of this framework for theory development and practical applications in community entrepreneurship.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study sought to understand what constitutes a community that engages in collective action and how such communities are formed and sustained in an urban setting. The findings reveal that entrepreneurially created communities can effectively engage in collective action in urban contexts, challenging traditional views that effective communities must emerge from pre-existing social bonds or formal organizational structures. Rather than relying on pre-existing communities, these deliberately created communities successfully balance individual agency with collective coordination through specific practices that enable sustained action. This insight is particularly valuable for urban environments where traditional community boundaries are fluid and diverse individuals may not share pre-existing ties.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

First, this study advances understanding of community entrepreneurship by identifying three distinct but interrelated practices—opportunity co-discovery, opportunity co-construction, and community governance—that enable sustained collective action. While previous research has largely focused on established community enterprises or geographically bounded communities (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; McKeever et al., 2014), this study reveals how communities emerge and evolve through specific practices before and beyond formal organization. This contribution is particularly significant for urban contexts where communities often form through shared interests and practices rather than pre-existing social bonds.

The practice of opportunity co-discovery identified in this study shares important parallels with Georgiadou et al. (2024) findings on transactive memory systems (TMS) development in new venture teams. Just as they found that TMS development begins with a "TMS enabling process" involving member motivation, self-declaration, and member expectations, this study reveals how community entrepreneurs engage in similar practices during early stages of community formation. However, while Georgiadou et al. focused on formal venture teams, this study extends their insights to more fluid community settings, showing how TMS-like processes can emerge even before formal organization. Specifically, the practice of co-discovery demonstrates how community

members develop shared understanding of "who knows what" through informal interactions rather than formal role assignments. This extends their work by showing how distributed knowledge systems can develop through voluntary participation and fluid role arrangements rather than formal organizational structures.

Second, the findings extend collective intentionality theory by demonstrating how different modes of collective intention can productively coexist within the same community. Previous applications of collective intentionality to entrepreneurship have typically treated different modes of intention as distinct or hierarchical (Farny and Kibler, 2022). In contrast, this study reveals how communities sustain collective action precisely by maintaining multiple modes of collective intention simultaneously. The concept of "sustainable collective intentionality" introduced here explains how communities can accommodate both individual and collective orientations while maintaining coherence and adaptability.

5.2 Implications for Practice

For community entrepreneurs and organizers, the most significant insight from this research is the importance of normalizing and legitimizing individual motivations within community settings. This approach acknowledges the reality of our existence within capitalist structures while creating pathways toward more collective forms of action.

In the context of "capitalist realism"—the pervasive sense that capitalism is the only viable economic system—communities exist in a tension between aspirational collectivism and the practical necessities of individual survival Fisher (2022). While utopian visions might imagine pure collectivism divorced from self-interest, my research recognizes that as long as community members must sustain themselves within capitalist society, their capacity to contribute remains inextricably linked to meeting their individual needs first.

Community builders should therefore recognize that members' ability to participate is constrained by material conditions that require them to prioritize personal sustenance. They should create space for members to openly express what they hope to gain personally from participation without moral judgment. This includes designing contribution opportunities that transparently offer individual benefits alongside community value, and acknowledging fluctuations in involvement as legitimate responses to changing personal circumstances rather than as failures of commitment.

This approach doesn't abandon collective aspirations but rather grounds them in material reality. By starting with honest recognition of how capitalist structures shape our lives and needs, communities can build more sustainable models of engagement that don't rely on self-exploitation or burnout-inducing volunteer labor disguised as pure altruism. The research suggests that paradoxically, by acknowledging the constraints of our current system rather than pretending they don't exist, communities

create stronger foundations for prefigurative practices that might eventually transcend those constraints.

This perspective aligns with contemporary movements that reject false choices between individual well-being and collective action, instead recognizing that sustainable community initiatives must operate within the tension between present realities and future possibilities.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into community formation and sustainability, several limitations suggest directions for future research.

First, the study's focus on urban communities in Singapore may limit generalizability to other contexts. Singapore represents a unique urban environment characterized by high population density, a strong state presence, sophisticated digital infrastructure, and a multicultural population with high levels of education. These conditions may facilitate particular forms of community organization that differ from those in settings with different socio-political arrangements or physical infrastructure. Additionally, Singapore's distinctive blend of Eastern and Western cultural influences creates a specific context for collective action that may not translate directly to other urban environments. Future research could examine how these practices manifest in different cultural and institutional environments, particularly those with weaker institutional support, different cultural approaches to collectivism, or varying degrees of digital connectivity. Studies in diverse urban contexts across Global North and Global South settings would help establish which aspects of the theoretical framework are context-specific and which have broader applicability.

Second, this study's urban focus may limit understanding of how these practices operate in non-urban settings. Rural and suburban communities often face different challenges in mobilizing collective action, including geographic dispersion, different resource constraints, and distinct social network structures. Future research exploring how opportunity co-discovery, opportunity co-construction, and community governance manifest in non-urban settings would help refine the theoretical framework and potentially identify additional practices or variations that emerge in these contexts.

Third, while the study identifies key practices enabling collective action, it does not fully explore how these practices might vary across different types of community enterprises or different stages of community development. The research captures communities at particular moments in their development trajectory but cannot fully account for how practices evolve as communities mature, face challenges, or undergo leadership transitions. Longitudinal studies tracking communities from formation through various developmental stages could provide deeper insight into how practices evolve over time. Such research could also identify critical junctures where communities either

develop sustainable collective intentionality or fragment due to unresolved tensions between individual and collective aims.

Fourth, the research primarily captured the perspectives of active community builders rather than peripheral or former members. This approach provided rich data on how communities are intentionally constructed but may overemphasize successful practices while underrepresenting fault lines or exclusionary dynamics. Future studies could examine how different community members experience and interpret these practices, particularly those who choose lower levels of engagement or exit the community entirely. Research incorporating these perspectives would provide a more complete picture of community dynamics and potential barriers to inclusive participation.

Finally, while the study identifies community orientations as theoretical constructs, empirical measurement of where specific communities fall on the I-community to We-community spectrum remains underdeveloped. Future research could develop measurement instruments to assess community orientation more precisely, enabling comparative studies across different community types and contexts. Such research could investigate whether certain community purposes or contexts systematically correlate with particular orientations, providing more nuanced guidance for community design.

These limitations notwithstanding, this study makes important contributions to understanding how communities form and sustain collective action in contemporary urban contexts. By moving beyond both organization-centric and place-based approaches and integrating insights from collective intentionality theory with practice-based perspectives, it provides both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for community entrepreneurship. The theoretical framework of community orientations and sustainable collective intentionality offers a foundation that future research can build upon to develop a more comprehensive understanding of collective action in diverse community contexts.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study began by questioning the dominant narrative of entrepreneurship as an individual endeavor—the lone hero founder pursuing a unicorn startup. Through examining how communities form and sustain collective entrepreneurial action in Singapore, the research has revealed that effective entrepreneurial communities engaging in collective action can be deliberately created in urban contexts.

As one participant poignantly expressed, "That's why we have a community here now because this process of putting yourself out there, you know, it really feels quite lonely. It really feels like what am I putting in all this effort for." This sentiment captures the fundamental tension that drives community entrepreneurship—the recognition that entrepreneurial journeys need not be solitary struggles, but can instead be collaborative endeavors where shared practices create both individual meaning and collective impact.

The three key practices identified in this study—opportunity co-discovery, opportunity co-construction, and community governance—demonstrate how communities navigate the inherent tensions between individual motivations and collective aspirations. Rather than viewing these tensions as obstacles to overcome, the concept of sustainable collective intentionality suggests that effective communities harness this dynamic interplay to create more resilient and adaptable forms of collective action.

This understanding challenges both the individualistic narrative of entrepreneurship and idealistic conceptions of community that overlook the complexity of human motivation. As another participant reflected, "I must know what my ROI of my own time is," while simultaneously finding fulfillment in contributing to collective outcomes. This paradox isn't a contradiction to be resolved but rather the fundamental dynamic that sustains community entrepreneurship—the continuous negotiation between individual and collective needs.

The findings have profound implications for how we conceptualize entrepreneurship education, policy, and practice. Rather than training entrepreneurs to be self-sufficient heroes, we might instead focus on developing their capacity to participate in and nurture collective action. Rather than designing support systems that reinforce individual competition, we might create structures that enable sustainable collective intentionality to flourish.

Perhaps most importantly, this research reminds us that community entrepreneurship isn't merely an alternative to mainstream entrepreneurship—it represents a recovery of entrepreneurship's collective roots that have been obscured by innovation amnesia. As communities navigate the practical realities of collective action in diverse urban contexts, they aren't just creating new organizational forms; they're rediscovering and reinventing ancient patterns of human cooperation adapted for contemporary challenges.

The practices of opportunity co-discovery, opportunity co-construction, and community governance offer pathways for this reinvention—not as idealized blueprints for perfect communities, but as practical approaches to sustaining collective action in a world that often privileges individualism. By recognizing that communities require both I-mode and We-mode intentionality to thrive, this research points toward more sustainable and inclusive forms of entrepreneurship that balance individual agency with collective purpose.

In the words of Margaret Wheatley quoted at the beginning of this thesis, "Whatever the problem, community is the answer." This research suggests that community isn't just an answer to our economic challenges, but a continuous practice of answering them together through sustainable collective intentionality.

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