



Environmentally-driven community entrepreneurship: Mapping the link between natural environment, local community and entrepreneurship

Călin Gurău, Léo-Paul Dana*

Princeton University, Montpellier Business School, Montpellier Research in Management, 2300 Avenue des Moulins, 34185 Montpellier, France



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Environmental protection and management
Community entrepreneurship
Natural habitat
Stakeholders
Sustainability
Success factors

ABSTRACT

Local initiatives that address environmental issues are determined by the shared territory, history and culture of community members, which can lead to common values and goals. This paper focuses on the role of community-based entrepreneurship in protecting and managing the natural environment that impacts directly life quality of local residents, as social and natural systems manifest and evolve in a dynamic interdependence. We apply a case study methodology to capture the richness of community-based entrepreneurship and evidence the diversity of these initiatives. By presenting and analyzing three case studies on different types of environmentally-driven initiatives – considering the natural environment as an object, context or resource of entrepreneurial activities, we identify the main elements of community entrepreneurship and the factors influencing its manifestations. These elements are integrated into a synthetic model, which maps the relationships between various components and success factors of environmentally-driven community initiatives. Our findings provide a better understanding of community-based entrepreneurship and of the hidden mechanisms of collective initiative and action.

1. Introduction

Humanity is facing an environmental crisis that needs to be urgently addressed and alleviated: social life and activity require a healthy ecosystem that supports human, plant, and animal life, through clean air, soil, water and nutrients, while also providing recreational opportunities and resources for the local economy (EPA, 1997). Sahut and Peris-Ortiz (2014) recognize the importance and potential of entrepreneurship, innovation and small business, but wisely warn readers (i) not to assume the superiority of the small enterprise, and (ii) that the contextual framework is important in explaining objectives and conduct. Our paper empirically supports the above statements, showing that in some contexts, community-based entrepreneurship may be more compatible with a given framework than is small enterprise. Specifically, the importance of the natural environment in individual and social life can be expressed using three different roles: (i) the environment as object; (ii) context; and (iii) resource for individual and collective action. To be successful, these initiatives must take into account the multiple stakeholders involved in each situation, simultaneously targeting the triad of sustainable development expressed through interrelated social, economic and environmental objectives.

Although the ecosystem, as a whole, should represent the ultimate target for preservation, development and management projects, the complex connections and interactions between socio-economic and

environmental systems are difficult to understand and address uniquely from a macro-level perspective; for this reason, community-based activities represent a natural complement of the nation-state initiatives for environmental protection and management (EPA, 1997). Avoiding the shortcomings of a top-down management process which often neglects the specificity of the local context and the needs and opinions of residents, community-based environmental management (CBEM) attempts to achieve sustainable development through grassroots initiatives, group learning and consensus building among various categories of stakeholders. For the purpose of this study, community is defined as a set of relationships that involves social interaction and commonality of either place, interest and/or purpose (Pohlmann, 1996).

Extant literature (Armstrong, 2012; Lucchetti and Font, 2013; Peredo and Chrisman, 2006) outlines the importance and role of community-based entrepreneurship (CBE) for local and regional development. Local collectivities act as agents of change by identifying needs, mobilizing resources, fostering solutions, implementing strategies that transform the relation between citizens and environment, and creating sustainable bases for the preservation and sustainable exploitation of natural resources (Valchovska and Watts, 2013). Yet, community-based entrepreneurship is difficult to map on the paradigm of traditional ventures. Based on dynamic horizontal relationships between voluntary community members, rather than on hierarchical

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: c.gurau@montpellier-bs.com (C. Gurău), lp.dana@Montpellier-BS.com (L.-P. Dana).

decision-making and implementation centered on the owner-entrepreneur, community entrepreneurship initiatives differ in terms of goals, resources and actions from the traditional business venture.

Despite the obvious convergence of these two research streams, CBEM and CBE are yet to be unified using an inclusive framework. The process is fraught with challenges, because environmental projects and initiatives are context-specific and depend on a diversity of stakeholders, goals and processes. We address these challenges by adopting a case study methodology to investigate three different environmental-driven community projects which are using the natural environment, respectively, as (i) object; (ii) context; and (iii) resource of their initiatives. Our paper attempts to develop knowledge on how smaller communities can get organized and effectively contribute to the implementation of sustainable development strategies by creatively protecting and managing the natural environment. To achieve this, we aim to identify and analyze: (i) *the relevant stakeholders*; (ii) *the organization*; (iii) *the functioning*; and (iv) *the main success factors* of environmentally-driven community projects characterized by an entrepreneurial approach.

The findings derived from the analysis of these cases studies are distilled into a model of environmentally-driven community entrepreneurship, which illustrates the main elements and success factors, as well as the relationship between variables. This model represents an original contribution to both CBEM and CBE literatures, providing a better understanding of the elements and processes that shape environmentally-driven community projects, and facilitating the identification and application of the main levers of collective action.

The paper is structured as follows. After presenting theoretical and practical foundations of the CBEM and CBE models in Section 2, we provide an overview of the research methodology applied to collect and analyze data in Section 3. Section 4 presents the three selected case studies, followed by a discussion of their main elements and processes (Section 5) based on the two theoretical frameworks mobilized in this study. This interpretative effort leads to the development of an inclusive model in Section 6, which is presented and explained in detail. We subsequently conclude with an overview of our main findings, a list of research limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Background

2.1. Community-based environmental management

Continuously increasing social and economic pressures directed towards the natural ecosystem have led to multiple environmental problems and imbalances that have to be urgently acknowledged and solved. Addressing these issues, the World Commission on Environment and Development – also known as the Brundtland Commission – produced a report (*World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987*) that introduced the concept of sustainable development, which simultaneously integrates three inter-related dimensions: (i) social; (ii) economic; and (iii) environmental. The implementation of sustainable development represents a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are aligned with future as well as present needs.

This definition outlines the systemic, dynamic and temporal dimensions of sustainable development, which require a change of values, attitudes and behaviors of all the participants in the socio-economic system (Stahel, 1997) in order to harmonize the present and the future needs of stakeholder groups (Lindgreen et al., 2009). However, despite its theoretical clarity, the implementation of the sustainable development paradigm requires practical solutions to a series of conflicting situations:

- a. Individuals and organizations have different interests depending on the role(s) they play in the socio-economic system. A person affected

by climate change may desire a systemic reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, but at the same time, s/he may enjoy the comfort of driving a car or obtaining dividends from profitable companies responsible for environmental pollution;

- b. In taking decisions, individuals and organizations must mitigate between present and future needs. Research has shown that most people prefer an immediate and certain gain to a present loss or to a future gain (Zsolnai, 2002), a choice strongly reinforced by the consumerist ideology which promises an instant gratification of needs and wants. In other words, the consumer is mainly focused on satisfying his/her present needs, rather than considering the needs of future generations;
- c. The effects of business activities and consumption are often complex and difficult to evaluate. A product (e.g., therapeutic drug), may satisfy an essential need but its manufacturing process may significantly damage the environment at the present level of technological development. This contradiction is enhanced by the lack of precise information regarding the environmental impact of various human activities. In many cases, there is no clear causal connection between an activity performed at local level (e.g., carbon dioxide emissions) and an effect manifest at global scale (e.g., global warming).

Traditionally, the natural environment was a resource that felled under the sovereign responsibility of the nation-state for its management, use and protection. From this perspective, the purpose of environmental management is to efficiently allocate environmental and natural resources to increase social welfare (Tsai and Tseng, 2003). Although the nation-state approach has some obvious advantages – centralized decision-making and application, regulatory control, economies of scale and inter-departmental synergies – in reality, its application proves difficult in poor or remote areas, characterized by corruption or weak law enforcement (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999; Tsai, 1998). In addition, the specific cultural, social, economic and environmental context of some geographical area make the adaptation and implementation of top-down solutions difficult and expensive.

Armitage defines community-based natural resource management (CBEM) as “a mechanism to address both environmental and social-economic goals and to balance the exploitation and conservation of valued ecosystem components [...] [that] seeks to encourage better resource management outcomes with the full participation of communities and resource users in decision-making activities, and the incorporation of local institutions, customary practices, and knowledge systems in management, regulatory, and enforcement processes.” (Armitage, 2005, p. 704). CBEM emerged as an alternative to the top-down approach centered on state intervention in environmental protection and management. This grassroots approach outlines that environmental problems are socially-constructed and culturally specific (Kapoor, 2001), the best solutions involving local initiatives and stakeholders' participation through public hearings and comments, advisory committees, mediation, and consensus conferences (Beierle, 1998; Gruber, 2010). The literature suggests that CBEM initiatives can avoid the major problems of the top-down environmental management (Li, 2002; Scott, 1998), providing sensitivity and responsiveness to the local context, and increasing efficiency through local agency and direct implementation of identified solutions (Gray et al., 2001; Leach et al., 1999).

However, CBEM is not free from problems and challenges (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999; Lane and Corbett, 2005). Often, the involvement of local communities in environmental management is limited to passive participation, when central institutions transmit decisions and implementation orders without creating conditions for local initiative and responsibility. In addition, environmental management programs may artificially simplify or neglect the local social and economic situation, which is inextricably connected to environmental issues. To avoid this, Tsai and Tseng (2003) emphasize the importance of local organizations

in developing and implementing environmentally-driven initiatives – such as resource conservation, landscape and scenery beautification, development of the leisure sector, advocacy or production of organic food, etc. These organizations, often based on voluntary participation and strong activism, act as engines of change providing an intermediary level between state-level policies and local residents. Tsai and Tseng (2003) advocate the necessity of more research on this specific phenomenon, to better understand the structure and functioning of these community-based organizations.

2.2. Community-based entrepreneurship

Despite the increasing popularity of this research topic, the definitions and positioning of community-based entrepreneurship is still ambiguous in the literature. Peredo and Chrisman (2006) define community based-entrepreneurship (CBE) as an alternative social enterprise model geared towards the pursuit of a community's economic and social goals, managed and governed to yield short and long term sustainable individual and group benefits. On this basis, community-based entrepreneurship is recognized by governments for its ability to transform society (Ratten and Welpel, 2011). It is interesting to note that in this definition, environmental protection is not explicitly listed among the stated goals of CBE. However, Peredo and Chrisman (2006) acknowledge that community entrepreneurship's main strategic and operational targets are local poverty and environmental degradation.

Other studies (Community Partnering, 2016; Sarreal, 2013) consider community-based entrepreneurship as a form of social enterprise that “use business to improve the life of a community. They are different from private enterprise because their business activity is undertaken as a means of achieving community benefit, not private gain.” (Community Partnering, 2016). Schlake (2005) outlines the potential of community-based entrepreneurship to improve local support and climate for private initiatives integrated in a community development strategy, while Ratten and Welpel (2011) emphasize the mutual dependence between peoples and organizations, which result in symbiotic relationships. Dana (2008) considers community-based entrepreneurship as one expression of indigenous entrepreneurship, based on traditional values of mutual support, collective action, social responsibility and environmental stewardship. Finally, as a result of an extensive literature review, Pierre et al. (2014) define community-based entrepreneurship as a locally grounded phenomenon that encompasses profit and not-for-profit organizations, local businesses, individuals, and local community-oriented projects and networks that together or separately seek to create a sustainable and flourishing community by working with the community in solving problems and improving socioeconomic value.

Community works both collaboratively and corporately to achieve a common goal. Peredo and Chrisman (2006) connect the community to a geographical territory that represents an element of cohesion given the spatial proximity of community members and the common problems experienced in a specific climate and territory. This explains the propensity of many publications to consider rural communities as the natural environment for developing community-based entrepreneurship (Eikeland and Lie, 1999; Pierre et al., 2014; Valchovska and Watts, 2013), although Peredo and Chrisman (2006) do not differentiate between rural and urban settings.

Considering the community as a social organization, Peredo and Chrisman (2006) outline three elements that influence the patterns of interaction between various community members and stakeholders: (i) social structure; (ii) social capital; and (iii) cultural values. First, social structure shapes the structuring and functioning model of the community enterprise; a good alignment between these two social frameworks ensures a more efficient functioning of the enterprise. Second, social capital represents the glue that facilitate intra-group and inter-group collaboration. Third, rooting community-based entrepreneurship in local traditions, norms and values, eliminates the contradiction

between community and enterprise culture, creating cohesion and identity even when the community is confronted with members' turnover or mobility.

To achieve their strategic and operational objectives, local communities adopt an entrepreneurial approach, characterized by opportunity exploration, identification and exploitation, entrepreneurial orientation – proactiveness, risk-taking and innovativeness, and social embeddedness (Sundin, 2011; Vestrum, 2016). During the exploitation of opportunities, different types of human, social, physical, and financial resources are combined into new configurations that act at community level (Borch et al., 2008; Vestrum, 2016). Creative resource configuration may emerge from various local sources such as scenery, natural resources, history, or local traditions and culture (Alsos et al., 2003; Carter, 1996).

In terms of their functioning, community-based enterprises are centered on participative and deliberative methods that facilitate members' interaction and collaboration, and possibly, on collective management systems (Haugh and Pardy, 1999). However, the emphasis on community as both entrepreneur and enterprise (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006) does not mean that all community members participate to the daily operations of the enterprise, or have the same role in its structure and functioning (Nath, 2001). The main success factors of community-based enterprises are cohesion and convergence of interests; the alignment and fit between enterprise goal(s) and the cultural traditions, norms and values of the community; the use of participative/deliberative methods to facilitate members' interaction; and a consensus-based leadership (Armstrong, 2012; Lucchetti and Font, 2013; Pierre et al., 2014). These elements echo the tenets of the stakeholder theory which integrates the resource-based and market-oriented perspectives, with a socio-political level of strategy (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Friedman and Miles, 2002).

Despite the increased popularity of community-based entrepreneurship in the academic literature (Pierre et al., 2014), its application in environmentally-related projects is still marginal. Centering our research on the close link between local communities and their natural habitat, we attempt to develop theoretical and practical knowledge that improves understanding regarding the structure, functioning and success factors of such community initiatives. The importance and logic of environmentally-driven community entrepreneurship is justified by the concept of ecosystem, defined as a community of living organisms interacting symbiotically with the nonliving components of their environment (i.e., air, water and mineral soil) (Smith and Smith, 2012). The survival, health and development of human communities is ultimately based on the appropriate management or local natural resources on a long-term basis (Nath, 2001).

3. Methodology

Acknowledging the importance of a specific community and environmental context in the creation, structure and functioning of community-based entrepreneurship, our approach is based on situated human practice. The dialectic and dynamic interplay between human agency and institutions (or structures) is well explained by Giddens (1984) in his work *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structure*. Structures exist only through human expression and practice, which is always situated into a specific context and cultural frame; at the same time, existing structures influence human practice representing the institutional background of the society in a specific point in time. Therefore, to analyze the practical manifestation of the environmentally-driven community entrepreneurship in terms of structure, scope and functioning, we apply a case study methodology.

Our choice is justified by the necessity to understand the complex interdependence between human and environmental systems in community enterprises or projects. Instead of using a hypothetical-deductive method to identify, measure and validate the relationship between variables related with the topic of study, we adopt a holistic-inductive

qualitative approach based on representative case studies (Dana and Dana, 2005). From a methodological point of view, the case approach is particularly adapted for the study of complex socio-economic phenomena, because of its capacity to combine primary and secondary data, and to integrate into a complex narrative both quantitative and qualitative elements. Case study methodology was previously applied for investigating the success factors of community-based natural resource management (Dyer et al., 2014; Measham and Lumbasi, 2013). In addition, case studies are often used in exploratory research that tries to answer “why” or “how” questions as they “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2009, p. 4).

The choice of the three case studies presented in this paper is not random, as they provide insights into the actions and consequences of various forms of environmentally-driven community entrepreneurship. The first one is representative for enterprises/projects that target environmental protection and management in a specific territorial area; the second presents a community-based educational program based on total immersion in the natural environment; while the third one describes a community ecotourism project implemented by the Inuit community of Arviat (northern Canada).

To select these case studies we applied a multi-stage process of secondary data collection, processing and analysis. First, after getting familiarized with the definition and characteristics of community-based entrepreneurship – through an extensive review of the extant literature, we launched an online enquiry on several search engines, using the following keywords: environmental protection community-based entrepreneurship; community-based sustainable development projects; community-based ecotourism; sustainable tourism community initiatives.

This search resulted in 127 instances of environmentally-driven community entrepreneurship, identified on various institutional websites (e.g., the website of Environmental Protection Agency) or on the websites of community-based ventures (e.g., The Lost Valley Education and Events Center in Dexter, Oregon). After reading and analyzing their content, 68 were categorized as environmental protection and management, 14 as environmental educational programs, and 45 as community-based ecotourism projects. Data processing continued within each category, leading to the selection of the three cases presented in the following section, which, in our opinion, are representatives both of their category and of the topic investigated in this paper. To reduce the bias of our selection, we submitted our choice to a panel of three regional experts in community-based entrepreneurship, who confirmed the representativeness and the relevance of these three case studies for

our research project (see Table 1).

3.1. Data coding

To group and analyze the data of the selected case studies, we codified the collected information on the main themes associated with our research objectives – participating stakeholders, organization, functioning, and success factors - using the NVIVO 11 software. We present in the Appendix A three screen captures which illustrate the use of NVIVO 11 to codify and analyze the data. The process of data coding and analysis included three main phases:

First, the collected information was divided into units of text (Allard-Poesi, 2003): parts of sentences, complete sentences, or groups of sentences related to the same theme, which were then classified into clearly defined categories. The size of these units was validated using the two criteria defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985): (i) the selected unit of analysis must contribute to develop understanding in relation to the defined research questions and (ii) it must be interpretable without additional information.

Second, after identifying and classifying the units of texts, we analyzed their meaning taking into account both the case study level and the inter-textual similarities or differences between the investigated situations.

Third, we synthesized the findings, integrating and logically ordering various elements of the investigated entrepreneurial projects, connecting the main processes with the influencing/facilitating factors and outlining the embeddedness of these initiatives into the local cultural, social, economic and environmental context.

The next section presents the selected case studies.

4. Case studies

4.1. Save Open Space: Santa Monica Mountains

4.1.1. Structure

Founded in 1990, Save Open Space is a nonprofit organization that aims to maintain and manage open space in the Santa Monica Mountains region, protecting wildlife and preserving natural resources. The organization protects open space by challenging and holding the territorial agencies to existing planning laws, in order to limit environmental damage. Its primary geographical focus is the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreational Area.

All members of the organization's board are voluntary and there are

Table 1
Main elements of analysis retained from the three investigated case studies.

Case study/elements of analysis	Save Open Space: Santa Monica Mountains	The Lost Valley education and events center	The Arviat Community Ecotourism Initiative
Stakeholders	Local residents, private firms interested in exploiting the natural environment, local administration, various civic organizations, political representatives	Local residents, visitors, students, local administration, local service providers, society	Local residents, local administration, consultants, tour operators, customers, providers of infrastructure services
Environmental focus	The protection and management of the natural habitat is the main objective of the organization	The natural environment is the context that reinforces the educational program and the events organized by the center	The natural environment represents an important resource that can enhance the customer experience
Organization	Non-profit association, meta-organization	Community venture	Community initiative, integrating both non-profit and business ventures
Functioning	Various initiatives centered on the protection and management of open spaces; flexible deployment of internal capabilities; creative mobilization of local resources	Sustainability education services delivered through a complete immersion into the natural environment and the program organized by the center	Customer-centered touristic services provided by various local residents and ventures, coordinated from a central office integrated into the life of the community
Success factors	Flexible reconfiguration of available capabilities and resources to exploit opportunities and address environmental issues; social and cultural embeddedness; creativity; proactive approach; involving various stakeholders to achieve consensus	Strong alignment between the lifestyle of the community, the surrounding natural environment, and the delivered educational services; customization of services; program legitimization achieved through UNESCO and Gaia Education certification	Detailed preparation of the project, involving many stakeholders; use of external experts; gradual planning and development of the program; identification of capability gaps which were addressed through community training; good launch of the initiative

no paid employees. Donations are thus carefully managed and used to pursue organizational goals.

4.1.2. Scope

The main objectives of this organization are (Save Open Space Website, 2015):

- to educate area residents and local, state, and federal elected officials on the value of preserving open space;
- to inform area residents and relevant officials about territory development proposals that exceed current zoning, general planning requirements and territorial guidelines;
- to set up tax deductible accounts for litigation against territory developments which violate planning laws;
- to make elected officials accountable for upholding general plans and zoning ordinances;
- to endorse nonpartisan candidates or elected officials who support the goals of the organization, while openly informing the public about the reasons of such political endorsements.

4.1.3. Activities

The members of Save Open Space are proud of their past achievements, which are clearly displayed on their website (Save Open Space Website, 2015):

- Save Open Space (SOS) stopped a developer's highway to Jordan Ranch through Cheseboro Canyon in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA);
- SOS directly blocked the development of the 2300 acre Jordan Ranch Palo in Comado Canyon. The Jordan Ranch was then purchased as permanent national parkland saving thousands of oak trees and a critical watershed in SMMNRA;
- SOS filed a legal challenge against the Liberty Canyon development. As a result of this challenge, most of the Liberty Canyon property in Agoura was purchased as permanent parkland by a park agency;
- SOS halted the Micor urban project in a sensitive hillside area which was three times the allowed density. Most of this Micor property, including 400 oak trees and a wetland, is now saved as parkland by three local agencies;
- SOS was instrumental in saving the 5400 acre Ahmanson Ranch and the 588 acre Gillette Ranch properties;
- SOS was involved with hearings on a Westlake Village development project, the Westlake Vista. The developer proposed an 80-acre swap of the buildable Westlake Vista acres to preserve undevelopable Calabasas property. As a result of the public hearing comments, Westlake Village's City Council redefined the property as "open space", the most protective and restrictive zoning category.

Analyzing the secondary information displayed on their web site and in their annual newsletter, we identified has three important characteristics of this organization, which directly contribute to its success:

- (1) it is involved in any project or action that can endanger the natural habitat of the community, taking into account the social and economic impact of the environment. As examples of projects realized in the last five years, SOS:
 - fought for an environmental review of the Mariposa School, which was given insufficient space on the Sumac School campus, and militated for a new campus for Mariposa School, arguing that "there is excess school property on Las Virgenes Road" (Save Open Space Newsletter, 2014);
 - raised money to produce an informative brochure and film regarding the danger of using rodenticides for wild bobcats and mountain lions, some of which have been found dead (Save Open Space Newsletter, 2012–2013);

- opposed the initiative of Ventura County Watershed agency to cut 30 trees on Kanan Road in Oak Park in order to install ditches used to filter storm water, as they are feasible alternatives (i.e., sidewalk filtering boxes) that can achieve this same goal (Save Open Space Newsletter, 2015);
 - sent a comment letter opposing the Conejo Creek housing proposal to replace agriculture land with a residential development. The letter outlined the inadequate consideration given to local archaeological, water availability, and geological issues (Save Open Space Newsletter, 2015).
- (2) is socially embedded in the community, working in partnership with a dense network of local organizations, such as Camarillo Sustainable Growth Organization, Old Agoura Homeowners Association, Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation, Mountain Lion Foundation, etc.
 - (3) uses a large range of legal, political and financial means to achieve its goals, ranging from legal opposition in court, citizens' petitions or demonstrations, to political lobbying.

At the same time, SOS organizes various community events, such as volunteers' day, national park walks, bird watching tours, fund raising, tree planting days, memorial days, art shows, etc., to maintain organizational cohesion and reinforce the links with, and between, community supporters and volunteers.

4.2. The Lost Valley Education and Events Center in Dexter, Oregon

4.2.1. Structure

Founded in 1989, Lost Valley is a non-profit organization build around a local staff community – the Meadowsong Ecovillage, which is home to 40–50 educators and to their families that chose to live permanently at Lost Valley. The center owns the land and provides educational programs and event rental centered on shared sustainability values (Lost Valley Website, 2016).

The Lost Valley Education and Event Center is located on 88 acres of diverse forest near the Oregon Cascades in Dexter, 18 miles southeast of Eugene. The climate is mild, facilitating environmental immersion all year around. The Center serves organic vegetarian cuisine, prepared in an atmosphere of caring service. Meals are served buffet style, typically featuring vegan and gluten free options, and can easily accommodate restricted diets. Some of the vegetables, fruits, and herbs are produced and harvested by the community, and fresh eggs are provided daily by locally-grown chickens.

Two rustic but comfortable dormitories provide indoor accommodation. The Small Dorm (available year-round) has up to four beds in each room and a capacity of 28 guests. The Large Dorm (available only in summer) has mostly double occupancy rooms, with a capacity of maximum 35 guests. Full bathrooms are located on each floor. A short walk leads to the Lodge and, further on, to the meeting rooms. In the summer season, about 100 guests may also camp in the meadow (Lost Valley Website, 2016).

4.2.2. Scope

Lost Valley is an original learning center that educates young and adult people in the practical application of sustainable living skills. Sustainability education is realized through periods of total immersion in the surrounding natural environment, engaging students in a holistic process of ecological, social, and personal growth.

The vision, structure and functioning of the community are based on a lifestyle deeply connected with the surrounding environment. All community members are, simultaneously, stakeholders, actors, and subjects of their activity, defining themselves not only as educators, but also as life-long learners that co-create together a sustainable village experience, in a dynamic combination of personal differences and similarities: "While every resident-staff member is drawn to the land for a slightly different reason, there are aspects that all of us hold in common

in our hearts: (1) a deep care for the value of life on this planet – from which the desire to serve arises, (2) a willingness to explore and venture upon a more benign and holistic life-path, (3) an interest in understanding and creating the essence of family, tribe, and partnership, and (4) a dedication to personal growth, healing, transformation, and/or spiritual understanding” ([Lost Valley Website, 2016](#)).

Besides providing educational services, the members of the Meadowsong Ecovillage fulfil various roles, each bringing his/her contribution to community life by getting involved in governance, new resident-staff intake, health and safety, trail clearing, cleaning and beautifying, meal preparation, and many others activities. The facilities of the center are shared with students and guests, in an open climate of mutual understanding and exchange: “We are all working together to co-create a kind, service-oriented, inter-generational community that works to become conscious of our impacts on each other and our environment, and therefore ourselves and our collective future” ([Lost Valley Website, 2016](#)).

4.2.3. Activities

The flagship course of Lost Valley is the Holistic Sustainability Semester, which, as presented on Lost Valley's web site, represents “a transformational 12-week program [that] introduces five spheres of sustainability — Personal, Social, Ecological, Economic, and Worldview — and integrates classroom learning with an immersion experience in our 27-year-old intentional community.” ([Lost Valley Website, 2016](#)). Students earn two internationally recognized certificates: (i) the Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC), which is the global standard in permaculture education, and (ii) the Ecovillage Design Education Certificate (EDE), a holistic sustainability standard anchored by Gaia Education and recognized by UNESCO.

Lost Valley offers also the Earth Quest program, applying a creative learner-oriented approach that co-designs meaningful experiences for participants. The program includes four courses: (i) Personal Sustainability; (ii) Social Sustainability; (iii) Ecological Sustainability; and (iv) Ancestral Skills. Each of these courses has a portfolio of topics (such as Growing Your Own Food, Sustainable Technologies, Trash Into Treasure: Recycling Resources Waste = Fertility, Designing our Sustainable Futures, Solar Energy Technologies, Nature Exploration, that are part of the Ecological Sustainability course). The programs can be tailored between four-days to a one-day experience, but the center also organizes summer camps of a longer duration: “At Earth Quest, we offer innovative overnight programs for school groups 5th grade and up, exploring all aspects of sustainability. Our Center is a living laboratory, immersing students in the Earth Sciences, Social Sciences, and personal health through interactive, hands-on lessons that build real life skills.” ([EarthQuest Website, 2016](#)).

Besides educational programs, the people willing to experience the atmosphere and the community life of Lost Valley can visit the center the first Saturday of each month to “explore the land, trails and shared spaces, have a tour, dance, hang out, enjoy delicious shared food, camp, have breakfast, meditate, do yoga and more...” ([Lost Valley Website, 2016](#)) or book a residential period between 3 and 31 days, known as Acorn visits.

4.3. The Arviat Community Ecotourism Initiative

4.3.1. Structure

The Arviat Community Ecotourism initiative is a grassroots project involving local people and small businesses, which attempts to establish a sustainable community-based ecotourism enterprise ([The International Ecotourism Society, 2012](#)). The project was financed for a five-year period from an Inuit land claim special fund. The Tourism Company - a small management consulting firm specializing in the tourism industry, was recruited to assist with local capacity building, product development and marketing.

Arviat is an Inuit community situated on the west side of Hudson

Bay with a population close to 3000 inhabitants. Access is by air, as there are yet no roads, highways or rails to link Arviat with other Canadian cities. For an in-depth discussion of this community, see [Dana and Anderson \(2011\)](#).

4.3.2. Scope

The Arviat community was selected for developing an ecotourism project for several good reasons. Arviat is one of the more traditional communities in Nunavut, located in the south of the territory and having good air access facilities. The surrounding environment is varied with beautiful landscapes providing excellent wildlife viewing opportunities. In addition, local people had some past experience with tourism and show a great interest in the development of this community-based enterprise that can help local development by creating sustainable job opportunities.

The major attractions for tourists are sighting polar bears and caribou. Arviat is ideally situated on the polar bear migration route, along the western coast of Hudson Bay, as bears search for sea ice in October and November. Every spring, Arviat experiences an amazing wildlife spectacle with massive caribou migration passing just inland from the community. During summer months, visitors can travel by boat along the coast to view Arctic wildlife including polar bears, caribou, foxes and beluga whales.

Although the economic viability of the enterprise is an important goal of this project, its success can directly contribute to an increasing awareness regarding the beauty and the fragility of the wildlife and of the natural environment, and facilitate its protection and preservation.

4.3.3. Activities

Truly committed to include the local community in all the phases of project development, in 2009, the Tourism Company launched a series of public consultations using a series of deliberative inclusive processes (DIPs). These methods bring together citizens, governmental representatives, key stakeholders and corporations, in order to discuss shared concerns. Unlike a conflictual debate where people criticize and refute opponents' positions, during DIPs participants assume that initial opinions will be transformed through interaction with others' ideas and perspectives. From this point of view, the DIPs are ideal as community-shared events that facilitate creative problem solving and implementation, as the involved parties share both strongly held views and uncertainties, in their search for common ground.

In the exploratory stage, the consulting company representatives developed positive relations with community members, participating in various cultural events and working with local people on weekends to explore the touristic potential of the surrounding territory. Then, in the planning stage, the consultants asked explicitly for ideas, opinions, comments and feedback, using radio talk-back shows, individual, group and community meetings, to ensure that all community groups ranging from hunters and trappers to elders, knew and supported the plans and progress of the enterprise. Finally, to clearly synthesize and transmit relevant information about the project, an Arviat Community Ecotourism Poster was designed, translated and placed in strategic locations throughout the community. To develop the local capability base, ongoing training workshops have been held, covering a wide range of skills in various business or tourism-associated areas, such as hospitality, cooking and caring for visitors, small business start-up and entrepreneurship, historical interpretation, cultural performance staging, eco-guiding and outfitting on the land, marine and commercial boating skills, tourism marketing and receptive tourism operations; and a series of performer auditions were organized to evaluate and select traditional musicians, drum dancers and throat singers.

The final product was flexible and customizable depending on customers' needs ([The International Ecotourism Society, 2012](#)). The tours could last between half-a-day to three-days, including a combination of the following activities: visits to a traditional *tupiq* (skin tent) and/or an igloo; dog-sled rides; boat excursions to a nearby National

Historic Site; interpretation of local cultural heritage sites; demonstrations of Inuit survival skills; visits to artists, elders and story-tellers; opportunities to buy local arts and crafts; films and lectures on Inuit history; throat-singing and drum-dancing; participation in high school cultural programs; and, traditional dining on local foods including caribou, musk-ox, beluga whale, and Arctic char.

To prepare the first tourist season, four new tourism-related businesses were founded, including two outfitters, a cultural program operator, and a bed and breakfast. A local tourism coordinator has been hired with funding from the Nunavut government. The marketing communication campaign was centered on a dedicated website: www.visitarviat.ca, and promising relations have been developed both with Canadian and international tour operators.

The first familiarization tour organized for five operator-partners in May 2011 was very successful. Several tour groups from Australia and Japan were hosted and a number of prominent media groups visited the community to film the ACE program. Four tour operators listed Arviat packages in their 2012 tariffs and sales brochures. In February, Arviat, the Gellini Bear Camp, and some of the participants in the ACE program were featured on an episode of 'Born to Explore' starring Richard Wiese, on ABC TV.

Arviat community-based ecotourism enterprise seems to be a success, judging after the comments of past visitors published in the Tourism Brochure, available on the Hamlet of Arviat website (Arviat Tourism Brochure, 2013): "The human interaction with both elders and young people from the Arviat community was wonderful. We saw wolves, caribou, musk-ox, polar bears along with multitudes of birds, stunning landscapes and sunsets. The traditional dinner was absolutely superb. Nunavut is a place that takes your heart easily". As a recognition of its quality, The Arviat Community Ecotourism program has been one of three international finalists in the community award category nominated in 2014 by the World Travel and Tourism Council based in London, England (CBC News, 2014).

5. Findings

The three case studies presented above are different in scope, form of organization and functioning, yet highly similar in terms of constituting elements and success factors. They represent perfect examples of community initiatives that have as objective, context and resource the natural habitat, which represents an essential part of the socio-environmental ecosystem.

Another common element is the high degree of social embeddedness of these community-based projects, illustrated by the large number and variety of stakeholders that are involved in the activities of the initiative groups. The analyzed organizations play a central role in bridging and connecting state-level policies and local residents' needs, acting as the missing link suggested by Tsai and Tseng (2003). They provide, in the specific context of their project, community leadership in the protection and management of natural resources, involving various stakeholders in a continuous process of debate, problem definition and solution seeking, which ultimately leads to consensus and optimal results.

To successfully fulfil this role, these community ventures adopt an entrepreneurial orientation, expressed through proactive, risk-taking and innovative actions in identifying and exploiting the local environmental opportunities. Their proactive approach is manifested through actions pursued in achieving environmentally-driven goals. In doing this they take risks, which are mitigated using a creative mobilization and redistribution of internal and external resources, creating new socio-economic configurations that are aligned with environmental objectives. Finally, the community-based initiatives presented in the case studies are highly innovative, but not in a technological or social sense. Their innovativeness is expressed at two levels: structural and process-based. Structural innovation is realized by redefining the relationship between community and natural environment. They start

from the principle that natural habitat is not separated, representing a constituent part of the human ecosystem. The link between community and territory is a source of strength, pride and distinctiveness, representing the basis for individual and collective identity.

At process level, all three organizations are flexible and customer-oriented, using a modular framework to adapt their activity to current circumstances and/or customer needs. Their innovative approach results in a rich variety of activities, processes and projects that dynamically complement each other. All means are mobilized in pursuing their goals, and each member naturally finds his/her place in this collective system. Decisions are participatory and deliberative, enhancing the creativity of the proposed solutions build on collective negotiation and consensus. The force of these collective initiatives stems from the permanent and dynamic tension between shared goals and stakeholders' heterogeneity. From this perspective, community-based enterprises are based on relational innovation.

The organization and functioning of these community ventures is highly adapted to their defined objectives. Considering that Save Open Space has no paid employees, its structure and functioning resemble a meta-organization, defined by Gulati et al. (2012, p. 573) as "networks of firms or individuals not bound by authority based on employment relationships, but characterized by a system-level goal". The Lost Valley Education and Events Center is a perfect illustration of a role model community which educates not only by using classical pedagogical programs, but also through their lifestyle in close symbiosis with the natural ecosystem. Finally, the Arviat ecotourism initiative provides a complex example of inclusive action, described during various phases of project planning, development and deployment.

6. Discussion

Community-based enterprises represent an illustration of the current paradigm change from hierarchies to networks. These collective organizations are built on the common interest, convergent motivation and group identity of people that share the same territory, and often, the same set of cultural norms, traditions and values. They function by mobilizing participatory and deliberative methods (Corus and Ozanne, 2012). Leadership is either individual, at project level, or collective, when the strategic direction of the enterprise is consensually decided.

According to Peggy Holman (interviewed in James, 2012), collective associations based on common interests and passions are significantly more creative than rigid, bureaucratic organizations: "Hubs form because people are attracted to them. Hubs grow when people are drawn to the purpose and/or the people and believe that they can both give and/or receive something of value" (James, p. 22). Networked people do not share, improve and implement creative ideas because of compulsory rules, but often because of interest and passion, which create an intrinsic drive to contribute to the common good. This situation is encountered in all the three case studies presented in this paper: group creativity and resilience emerge through information, ideas, emotions and energy exchanged through a complex relational network between members, groups and organizations.

By reinventing and redefining the relationship between community and nature, these collectivities adopt three interdependent roles: *first*, they assume the position of *guardians* of the natural environment, protecting it from abuse and neglect; *second*, they are *educators*, translating the lessons given by nature into human experience and transmitting them further to students or community members; and *third*, they are *boundary spanners* between nature and people, negotiating and facilitating exchanges by using their deep knowledge of the territorial space and time. From this perspective, these communities can be considered Barthian agents of social change (Barth, 1967). Community members willingly adopt these roles, taking pride and responsibility of their stewardship towards the natural environment. They celebrate their successes and stubbornly but intelligently pursue their goals despite challenges or difficulties.

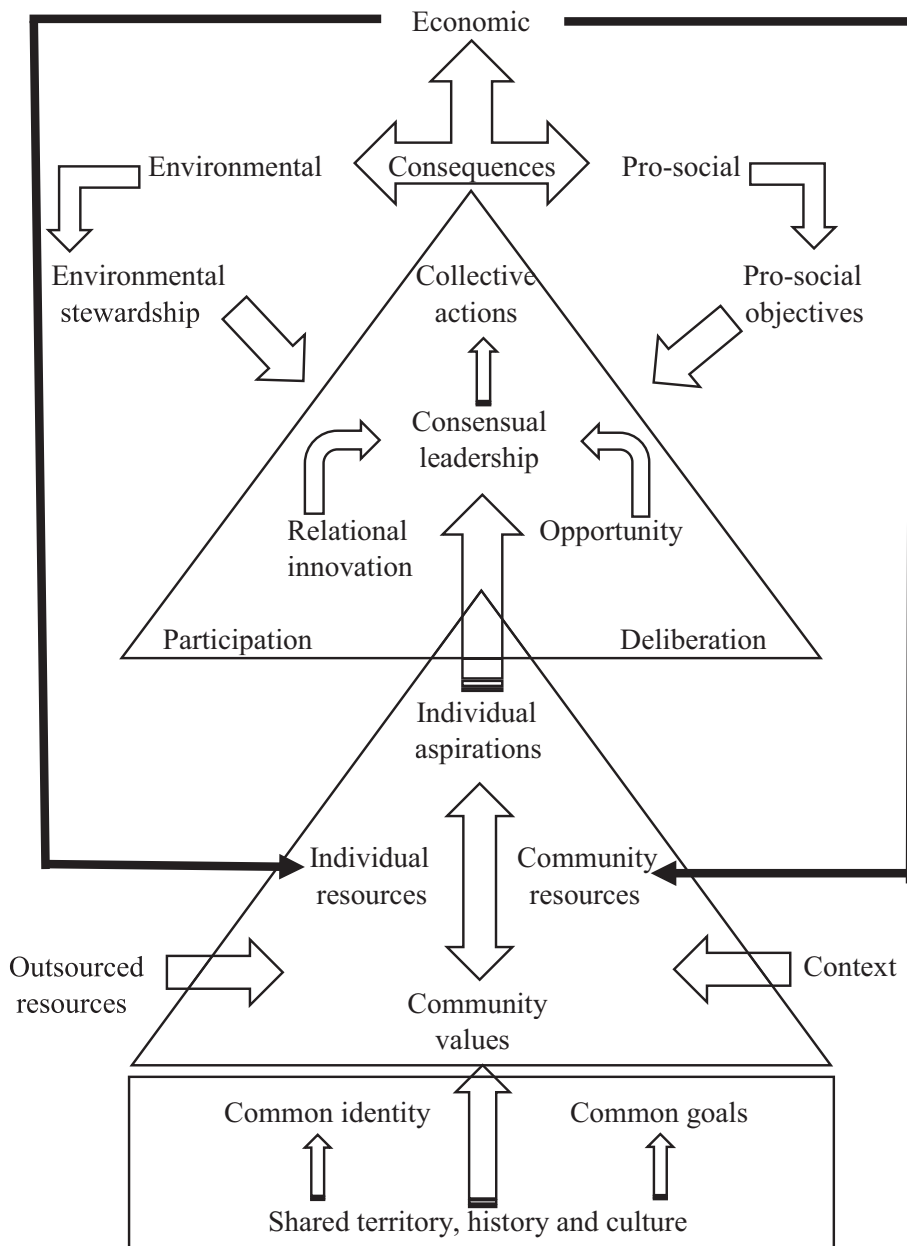


Fig. 1. A model of environmentally-driven community entrepreneurship.

Community-based enterprises cannot be considered as closed systems, as they interact with other institutions and organizations, accessing, when necessary, external resources and expertise. On the other hand, they demonstrate resilience, stability and adaptability, as the necessary resources are distributed, shared and combined in infinite variations depending on the project context. The goals of the analyzed communities are mainly social and environmental, although, given the poor living conditions of the Inuit people, the economic development is also important. The principle of sharing is central in all three communities, representing an element of cohesiveness and strong group identity.

These elements are integrated into the model presented in Fig. 1. Considering the elements outlined in the CBEM and CBE literature, as well as the data collected and analyzed in the three case studies, we identified four main modules that compose our model: (i) the common territorial, socio-economic and cultural context; (ii) the resources mobilized to initiate the community initiative; (iii) the activities and processes realized to fulfil the community objectives; and (iv) the consequences of these actions, which represent a real-time feedback

both for community resources and processes.

Building on a common historic, cultural, and territorial basis, the community members get involved in local ventures that aim to solve problems and challenges – in this case, focused mainly on the preservation and management of their natural habitat. During their implication, they input personal resources and capabilities in the addressed environmentally-driven projects, and, when necessary, they mobilize community resources or outsource external ones. In the next stage, the community venture initiates collective processes and actions, which create or exploit opportunities related with their defined goals. Organization is highly flexible involving participation, deliberation and consensual leadership which mitigates creatively the interests of various stakeholders (Gruber, 2010). Functioning is based on horizontal relationships and relational innovation, that align community structure and processes with the needs of the local ecosystem. Finally, these actions and processes have consequences that correspond to the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Although their projects are environmentally-driven, their goals are never limited to the preservation and management of natural

resources, impacting also the socio-economic system of the local community. The achieved goals feed and structure in real time the initiated actions and processes, creating virtual cycles of adaptive initiatives, customized in relation to the community context and the involved stakeholders.

7. Concluding remarks

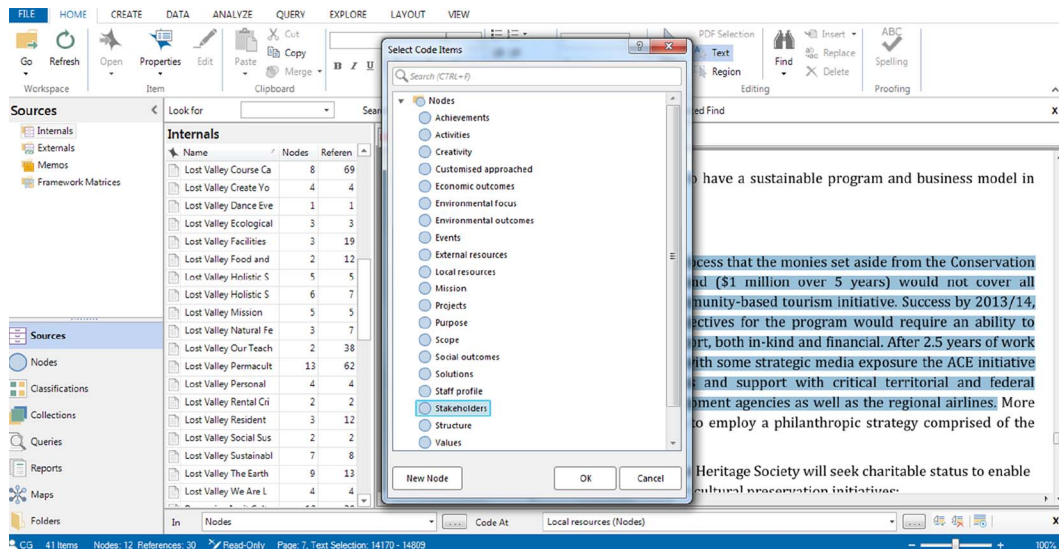
This study addresses an important knowledge gap in the community-based entrepreneurship literature, proposing a comprehensive model of collective initiatives, and clarifying the relationship between entrepreneurial action, stakeholders and natural ecosystem. Local communities are networks rather than hierarchical organizations. They use relational innovation and consensual leadership to outsource and access resources, assess opportunities, identify solutions through participatory and deliberative methods, and implement them using innovative actions. These ventures are more flexible and more resilient than traditional organizations based on a hierarchical structure of

power and rigid patterns of action.

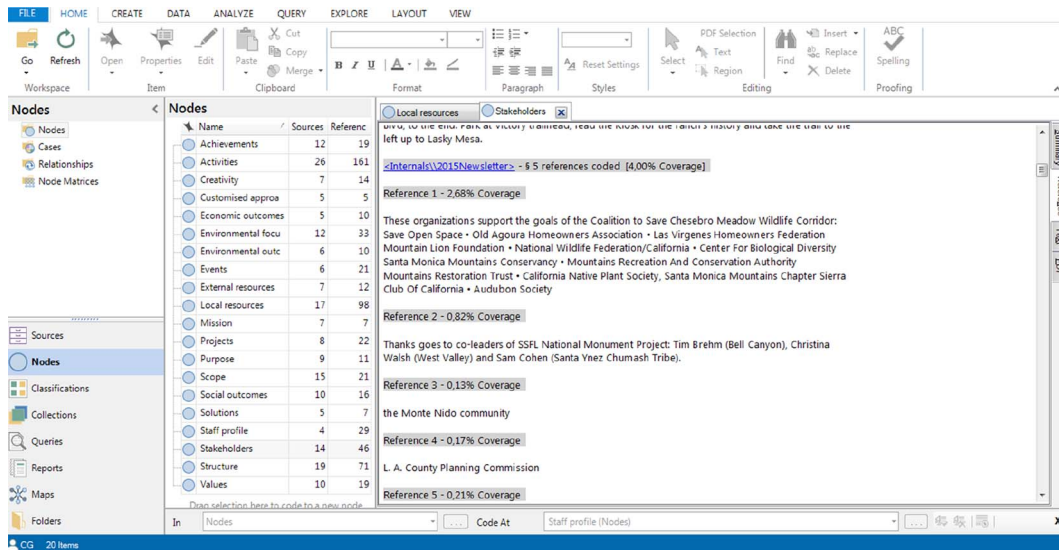
The analysis of three case studies of environmentally-driven community enterprises provides interesting insights into the structures and processes implemented by these organizations. These initiatives redefine the relationship between territorial communities and natural environment, increasing the awareness about their dynamic interdependence, and acting as guardians, educators and boundary spanners to reshape the perception, beliefs and values of human actors.

The study has a series of limitations determined by the applied methodology. Although the findings and conclusions of this paper are based on only three case studies, great care was taken to select representative situations, and to cover collective initiatives located in developed countries, which are less explored in the extant literature. Although these findings cannot be generalized, they represent a solid base for expanding this investigation to other countries or areas of community action. On the other hand, the relationships mapped in our model need to be validated and refined by future studies using a quantitative approach.

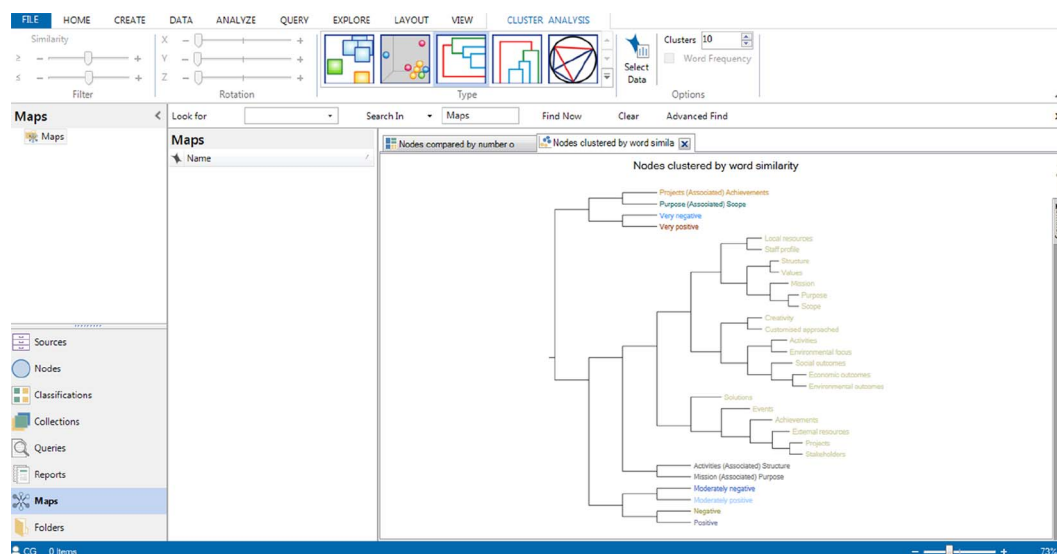
Appendix A. Screen captures illustrating the process of coding and analyzing the data with NVIVO 11



Screen capture 1: Coding the text



Screen capture 2: The parts of text codified under the node 'Stakeholders', and their coverage in various references



Screen capture 3: Nodes clustered by word similarity

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- Călin Gurău** is Professor at Montpellier Business School, member of Member of Montpellier Research in Management, and Marie Curie Fellow at Princeton University. He worked as Marketing Manager and has received degrees and distinctions for studies and research from the University of Trieste, Italy; University of Vienna, Austria; Duke University, USA; University of Angers, France; Oxford University, Southampton Business School and Heriot-Watt University, UK. His research interests are focused on marketing strategies for high-technology firms, entrepreneurship and internet marketing. He has published more than 25 papers in internationally refereed journals, such as *International Marketing Review*, *Journal of Consumer Marketing* and *Journal of Marketing Communications*.
- Léo-Paul Dana**, a graduate of Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales, and McGill University, in Canada, is Professor at Montpellier Business School, member of Member of Montpellier Research in Management, and Marie Curie Fellow at Princeton University. He formerly served at the University of Canterbury and prior to that as Visiting Professor of Entrepreneurship at INSEAD and Deputy Director of the International Business MBA Programme at Nanyang Business School, in Singapore. He has published extensively in a variety of leading journals including the *British Food Journal*, *Cornell Quarterly*, *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, *Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice*, *International Small Business Journal*, *Journal of Small Business Management*, the *Journal of World Business*, and *Small Business Economics*.