From Entrepreneurial (EE) to Purposeful Ecosystems (PE) in Wales in a Post Covid Era

Abstract

This study looks to understand the development and movement of the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. The literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE) is reviewed with new insights provided as to the emergence and importance of considering purpose within this debate. Through an in-depth case study of the ecosystem within South West Wales the findings support this movement of focus from entrepreneurial ecosystems to purposeful ecosystems (PE). Ultimately it is argued that there is a current preoccupation within the literature on EEs on high growth organisations as opposed to well-being and a balance of profit with purpose.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial ecosystem, well-being, purpose, purposeful ecosystem, covid-19, regional development

1. Introduction

The entrepreneurial ecosystems approach began to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s (Stam & van de Ven, 2019) and has been influenced by biological ecosystems, broadly claiming that businesses rely on the interaction with other actors to survive in the same way as animals in an ecosystem do (Moore, 1993; Overholm, 2015). The term eco-system has been used in relation to business for more than 20 years (Moore, 1993) and is also a term now used by practitioners (NESTA, 2015). It tends to describe "the inderdependant relations between cooperative actors and different cooperation and value networks (Autio and Thomas, 2014, pg.628) and has received a renewed focus in recent years (Acs et al, 2017). Eco-systems are perceived to be self-renewing systems with the local business environment being critical to the success of firms (Uotila et al, 2012; Harmaakorpi et al, 2017). The term entrepreneurial ecosystem has been heavily used in both academic and policy circles and as such there is a need to re-focus and analysis the concept in conjunction with more recent macroenvironmental trends.

Alongside this current focus on the EE concept is a focus on concepts such as the sustainable development goals (SDGs), social purpose and well-being. There is also a growing trend towards purposeful business, something that is currently not reflected in the entrepreneurial ecosystem literature. Purposeful business is defined by the British Academy (2019) as "the purpose of business is to solve the problems of people and planet profitably, and not profit from causing problems". Related to this there is an increased focus on B-Corp enterprises as well as the circular economy (Demirel and Danisman, 2019). A B-Corp is defined as a "new kind of business that balances purpose and profit" (B-Corp, 2021).

Recently there has been an argument within the literature that regional development policies focused on supporting and enabling a small sub set of so called high growth, high technology firms is misplaced and based upon attempting to replicate silicon valley type approaches (Litan and Hathaway, 2017; Gunaeskara, 2006). This focus on high growth is also problematic if you consider the fact that most firms are not high growth firms. Therefore, the majority of firms who contribute to the development of regions are neither high tech nor high growth and yet contribute well to employment and economic prosperity of regions. This bias in both the academic literature and in policy development means that there is a lack of research on regional development focused on grass roots development and different types of SMEs.. In particular, research on how (social) networks affect the development of business models in entrepreneurial ventures is still in its infancy" (Neumayer & Santos, 2018, p.4566).

The entrepreneurial ecosystem literature tends to focus on the achievement of high growth, which by its definition focuses on growth in revenue or employee numbers (OECD, 2008) as opposed to also focusing on social purpose. However recent research has acted to highlight that taking a purposeful approach to business can lead to greater success (Forbes, 2018). Thus an entrepreneurial ecosystem approach centrered on purpose and purposeful business may be key. Therefore this paper aims to investigate the linkage between entrepreneurial ecosystems and purposeful business through a case study of an ecosystem facilitator in South West Wales, a community interest company called 4theRegion. This paper firstly presents a contemporary review of the EE concept before moving on to a review of purposeful business and well-being. Thereafter

the paper presents the methodology that was followed for this research before the presentation of key findings and a new purposeful ecosystem framework.

2. **Literature Review**

2.1. Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Theoretical Foundation

Traditionally, the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach focusses on high-growth firms and start-ups such as the successful entrepreneurial eco-system in Silicon Valley, an incubator including businesses such as Apple, Google and Facebook (Stam, 2015). Many different ecosystem models have been generated over the years with Isenberg (2011) arguing that a successful ecosystem rests on culture, enabling policies and leadership, finance, human capital, venture friendly markets and institutional and infrastructrual support. Isenberg (2011) argues that a holistic approach must be taken to entrepreneurship and ecosystem development with a clear understanding of the impact of all of these different areas, all of which will differ depending on regions. Isenberg argues that governments should not lead the development of these eco-systems as this is not their area of expertise and neither should the private sector as this is not their area of interest but rather it should be a combination of different actors within one organisation, an entrepreneurship enabler. Similarly, the World Economic Forum, (WEF, 2013) identifies markets, culture, education, training, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure, funding, finance, and human capital.

At the current time there is a lot of buzz around the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems in terms of studying, but also providing policy blueprints based around developing entrepreneurship and small business growth at the local and regional level. Spigel (2017) sets out the concept in full. The concept builds on previous systems of innovation approaches in its focus on regional organizations, institutions, and cultures, but puts more focus onto entrepreneurs as the drivers of growth (Tsvetkova et al., 2019, 2020). Spigel (2017) takes more of an innovation systems perspective arguing that ecosystems are regionally based. He argues that start ups are key and the entrepreneur builds and sustains an ecosystem. He argues entrepreneurs are at the heart of the ecosystem, in opposition to Isenberg. Similarly, to Stam (2015) he argues there are three levels to an ecosystem including systemic and framework conditions, outputs (entrepreneurial activity), and outcomes (value). Spigel (2017) suggests that ecocystems are made up of social (networks), cultural (attitudes) and material elements (place specific organisations and institutions). It is as yet somewhat unclear how applicable the ecosystem concept is outside of the high-tech urban clusters in Europe and North America in which it has been developed: how it applied to weaker, post-industrial, peripheral regions, and to other sectors than high tech and science based is unclear, however research is starting to broaden out into interrogating the concept in different contexts (e.g.: Brydges & Pugh, 2021; Al Baimani et al., 2021).

Brown and Mason (2014) however take an economic geography perspective and argue that entrepreneurial ecosystems are "a set of interconnected entrepreneurial actors, entrepreneurial organizations, institutions and entrepreneurial processes which formally and informally coalesce to connect, mediate and govern the performance within the local entrepreneurial environment" (p. 5). Even more recently Brush et al (2019) argue that even though all of the ecosystem models and

literature have added to a depth of knowledge there is a lack of focus in these models on female entrepreneurs.

There is very little understanding of the benefits gained from involvement in a strong eco-system and very little knowledge on the processes through which ecosystem factors work to creative a cohesive eco-system (Spigel, 2018). It is argued that ecosystems require: certain cultural traits, particular actors, research universities, dense social networks, sufficient investment capital and supportive public policies (Nicorta et al, 2017). A bottom up approach to ecosystem thinking starts by looking at the entrepreneurial practices within an ecosystem and how entrepreneurs seek out resources and analysing how this contributes to the development of ecosystem structures. This focuses on what entrepreneurs do as opposed to what they should do. The bottom up approach also argues that entrepreneurs should lead ecosystems as opposed to the public sector as they best understand what is needed. However, it is identified in the literature that this has its own issues as entrepreneurs are resource and time lacking. It is argued that a mixed methods approach looking at both the bottom up and top down approaches is what is needed to further understand eco-systems and to aid policy development (Spigel, 2018).

Despite the growing interest in entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE) the concept is still one that has no widely agreed definition and measurement (Stam and Ven, 2021). The concept of the EE traditionally tends to focus upon high growth firms and the best environment in which to support them (Mason and Brown, 2014) as well as on new firm creation (Cantner et al, 2021). Stam and Ven de Ven (2021) for instance find that the existence of high growth firms is strongly related to the quality of its entrepreneurial ecosystem. There does not appear to be any reference to "purposeful ecosystems" within the academic literature. It is argued there is a lack of theoretical development in the EE literature and rather the knowledge so far is conceptual in nature (Spigel, 2017). It has been suggested that the EE concept can explain economic resilience (Martin, 2012) something that it is crucial to consider when analysing the impact of the pandemic. Despite this there is a lack of research looking at the relationship between EEs and economic resilience. There is also a lack of EE measures at a local level with most taking a country level analysis (Perugini and Iacobucci, 2021). The most common framework in the literature for EEs is that by Babson college which looks at policy, finance, culture, supports, human capital and markets (Iacobucci and Perugini, 2021). Less research has been done on identifying the causal relationships between ecosystem factors (Mikiza and Kansheba, 2020). Much of the research on EEs is conceptual as opposed to empirical (Corrente et al, 2019).

2.2. Purpose: The future lens

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development covers 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted by all UN member states. They cover challenges such as poverty, health and well-being, education, gender equality, clean water and industry, innovation and infrastructure. Although not legally binding countries are expected to take ownership and action for the goals and to review their progress made against them. Related to the concept of the SDGs is the business specific term "Purposeful business" which is defined by the British Academy (2019) as "the purpose of business is to solve the problems of people and planet profitably, and not profit from causing problems". The covid-19 pandemic has acted to highlight this need for a focus on SDGs and purposeful

business further with the United Nations (2020) report entitled "Shared responsibility, Global Solidarity" being echoed by the World Economic Forum (2021) who launched the Great Reset Initiative, aiming to move towards a more sustainable future. This move towards sustainability and purposeful business also has been vaguely linked with existing work on entrepreneurial ecosystems (Isenberg, 2011) as it is recognised that businesses have a responsibility to their surrounding ecosystem (Vives, 2020). Thus, the inclusion of a purposeful focus may be a necessary next step for entrepreneurial ecosystems both in academic and practical terms. This merging of a purposeful focus with the entrepreneurial ecosystem focus suggested in this paper would enable ecosystem models to be current, dynamic and impactful.

The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the business environment around the world, with security measures such as lockdowns having an impact on the way in which businesses can operate. This is especially true for small businesses who are more vulnerable to economic changes due to limited resources and limited cash reserves (Rashid and Ratten 2020, Shankar 2020). Entrepreneurial ecosystems can provide support to business activity through formalised networks (St Pierre et al., 2015). Ecosystems can also facilitate the sharing of resources for small businesses through strong social networks (Rashid and Ratten 2020). An early paper published during the pandemic by Kuckertz et al. (2020) on the impact on business start-ups points to the support of entrepreneurial ecosystems, as well as outlining the resilience of innovative businesses, in which the entrepreneurs show bricoleur tendencies, drawing on theories of resource bricolage (Williams et al., 2017; Gilbert-Saad et al., 2018) by combining available internal resources and drawing on external resources from their network (Baker and Nelson, 2005).

It is recognised that the Covid-19 pandemic has created a changing environment which has led to a questioning of how businesses operate, with the post-Covid-19 period exploring aspects of resilience and sustainability for more purposeful development. Before the pandemic, debates on sustainability were increasingly prominent in relation to entrepreneurial ecosystems, coinciding with discussions on climate change, or the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Volkmann et al., 2021; DiVito & Ingen-Housz, 2021). However the latest report by the UN (2022) highlights that macroenvironmental crises such as covid-19 and the war in Ukraine have exasperated the challenges the SDGs aim to overcome and have put its aspirations in jeopardy. This further highlights the need to re-consider and frame the EE concept in light of these trends and developments.

2.3. Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015)

Well-being is defined as "a state of being with others and the environment, which arises when human needs are met, when individuals and communities can act meaningfully to pursue their goals, and when individuals and communities enjoy a satisfactory quality of life" (Fudge et al. 2021, p144). Some countries are increasingly looking to well-being as a more suitable measure of development, over GDP or growth. Wales became the first country to introduce well-being legislation with the Well Being of Future Generations Act (2015), with public policy based on the foundations of well-being. This was created for public bodies and focuses on social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being but is increasingly being focused on in private enterprise

as well. It requires public bodies to think about the long term impact of their decisions. The act covers seven well-being goals; a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a more equal Wales, a healthier Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of thriving culture and welsh language and a globally responsible Wales. Iceland and New Zealand have also followed this recently, aimed at promoting sustainable development.

Within Wales Regional Economic Frameworks (2021) have been created for each region. South West Wales REF within which this case study is based has a key focus on the south west wales experience offer. There is a clear regional focus on renewable energy and net zero economy. Values include inclusivity, trust, openness, collaboration, whole system thinking and appetite for change. Ways of working cover asset based, shared ownership, continuous development and community led action. The engagement process for the REF highlighted the importance of equality and diversity, children and young people, the welsh language and the environment. Ultimately there is an ambition to investigate a way of measuring success that is not purely economical. Ultimately the Welsh Government's Economic Resilience & Reconstruction Mission sets out a vision of a well-being economy which drives prosperity, is environmentally sound, and helps everyone realise their potential.

However as previously highlighted there is a lack of focus within the EE literature on well-being or purpose, with high growth and business development being the key focus. This paper aims to bridge this gap and understand the linkages between these areas.

3. Method: Qualitative Case Study

3.1. Regional context

The methodology utilised for this paper was that of an exploratory case study of a community interest company (CIC) called 4theRegion based in South West Wales. This is an interesting region for exploration due to it varied regional bases covering both urban and rural areas. South West Wales has lagged behind other regions in the post-industrial economy and this is despite significant investment in the area and in Wales in general. Historically the Welsh Government have focused on foreign direct investment opportunities through the WDA. Since this time focus has moved to be sector specific looking at areas such as life sciences and the creation of hubs surrounding these. Recently focus has shifted again to entrepreneurship through schemes such as the Development Bank of Wales and a focus on region specific schemes such as City Deals, which focus very much on internet themes.

In 2021 the Welsh Government established four Regional Economic Frameworks (REF) for each four areas of Wales, with a key focus here being on the REF for South West Wales. The REF was founded on the principle that place matters with a more regionally focused model of economic development. The Welsh Government wish to use these REFs as key in driving a well being economy. Equality is included within the REF with a focus on disadvantaged and young people as well as climate change, decarbonisation and sustainable development. Local authorities formed a key part of the REF development as well as public, private and third sector.

3.2. The focus of the case study: 4theRegion

4theRegion is a membership organisation of regional businesses, community groups and stakeholders aimed at achieving asset-based growth across the Swansea Bay City Region. 4theRegion is a membership organisation that unites local businesses, community groups, policymakers, and any relevant stakeholders aimed at promoting local development within the Swansea Bay City Region area. The ethos of the organisation is centred on asset-based local development, underpinned by a social purpose of well-being. This approach is investigated as it offers a place-based method that focusses on local assets, and how engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, through discussion groups and localised networks, can generate opportunities for growth within the local economy. This method builds on the principles of regional development discussed in the relevant literature, including networking, engagement with triple helix, human capital, entrepreneurial ecosystems and smart specialisation, however, it is characterised by its place-specific focus, as well as its social purpose based on well-being. This corresponds to the Well-being of Future Generations Act, a law passed in Wales in 2015 aimed to ensure that decision-making takes a long-term perspective based on 7 well-being goals, including prosperity, resilience, health, equality, cohesive communities, vibrant culture and Welsh language, and global responsibility.

The work of 4theRegion covers the Swansea Bay city region area, which is comprised of 4 administrative authorities in West Wales, UK, notably the City and County of Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. The city region was established in 2017 through investment from each local authority, as well as the Welsh and UK governments. The region is centred around the urban areas of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, but also includes rural areas of Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. The case study is comprised of multiple research methods aimed at developing a holistic understanding of 4theRegion, its approach to regional development, and its impact on the community.

3.3. Methodology and methods of enquiry

Three independent research phases are conducted in a sequential design, with data collected and analysed separately, before being triangulated for further interpretation. Two interview phases were conducted to investigate the activities of 4theRegion and how they impact the wider community. Firstly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 2 directors of the company to understand the aims, values and activities of the organisation in promoting asset-based local development through engagement with the various stakeholders. Secondly, 10 interviews were conducted with representatives of members of 4theRegion, to add further depth to knowledge about the contributions of 4theRegion and its network in supporting opportunities for regional development across the city region. Additionally, secondary data was gathered on 4theRegion's policies and practice through a document analysis. Data was sourced from the 4theRegion website, 28 videos and 25 articles relating to the organisation. The aim of this phase is to provide context on 4theRegion and develop a detailed understanding of its activities.

Given the range of stakeholders involved with the organisation, maximum variation sampling was used to ensure that interview respondents were representative of public, private and third sector organisations, as well as covering the geographical area. Data analysis for all interviews was conducted both manually and through the Leximancer data mining software. While Leximancer is

becoming increasingly evident as a data analysis tool in social science research (Taecharungroj, 2019), a manual process of coding and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was also conducted independently of the Leximancer analysis, to ensure that a thorough analysis process was conducted.

4. Results

4.1. 4theRegion Director Analysis

The "old paradigm"

The directors had a clear frustration with existing regional development approaches and felt that there was a general negativity within the region, despite the clear positive things that were happening. They also felt that there was a lot of silo working within the region with a lack of communication and collaboration occurring. There was a clear feeling that the region needs to have confidence in itself and the resources that it has at its disposal. Being part of various network organisations over their careers the directors expressed how they were able to learn from these to enable the creation of 4theRegion. However, they also expressed how "male dominated" they found these groups to be with all talk and little action.

Throughout the interview the directors referred to the "old paradigm" or "traditional" ways of working. This was often in terms of inward investment, with the sense that large organisations come into the region, take what they can and then leave the region worse off than it was before. The directors feel that the traditional way of working involves top-down development, which they feel is unsuccessful. This top-down development they express is often mirrored in traditional networking organisations. The directors feel that this old paradigm does not focus on consultation or collaboration and is what has led to unsuccessful regional development.

Ecosystem Facilitators

Throughout the interviews the respondents expressed a deep level of emotion and passion not only for 4theRegion and its aims and objectives but for Wales as a country and its people. The directors highlighted their focus on positivity, linking people, providing a voice for people, convening conversations and being on a mission. Another key theme that emerged was that of localism with 4theRegion wanting to highlight and encourage local opportunities for local people and businesses. The term "purpose led" is used to describe what 4theRegion focusses upon and 4theRegion is described as "silo busters".

Conversely to the "old paradigm" they talk about their vision for the future. The directors see themselves as "doers" and feel strongly that for regional development to be effective ownership is needed from everyone. As such, one of 4theRegion mottos is empowerment and is something they hold at the heart of what they do.

Frequently in the interview the directors refer to 4theRegion's role being to "convene conversations". The directors consistently use the term "whole system focus" to describe what it is that 4theRegion does. They see 4theRegion as bringing the whole system together in conversations thus enabling holistic discussions. The directors are described as facilitators as opposed to knowing all the answers.

They feel strongly that 4theRegion aims to build ecosystems in order to build regional resilience to protect against macro environmental impacts such as Covid-19. The terms "purpose

driven" and "force for good" are used frequently. Other terms that are used to describe what 4theRegion believe in is "asset based community development" and "holistic flourishing", which is defined as "everyone having access to the things we need for our own wellbeing".

4.2. 4theRegion Member Analysis

Ecosystem Facilitators: 4theRegion
4theRegion was spoken about in an extremely positive manner by all of the participants. In particular the directors of 4theRegion were highlighted as being very impressive. When speaking about what 4theRegion is good at the participants focused on their ability to link people who may not otherwise come together. The theme of collaboration between these parties was highlighted especially between public, private and third sector organisations. It was evident from many of the participants that they felt that this was something that 4theRegion could develop further, being highlighted as one of their key capabilities. This theme links closely with the theme of "connections" as it was frequently mentioned and discussed how 4theRegion has many connections in different areas. This enables 4theRegion to have a diverse membership base, something that the members discussed as being a key strength of the organisation. The members also spoke about the multi-stakeholder involvement that 4theRegion brings to their organisation, facilitating the engagement of stakeholders in their events.

Above all else it was apparent that 4theRegion's focus is on social purpose, similarly to many of their members. Many of the members spoke about how 4theRegion enables them to have an outlet for their social purpose initiatives that they otherwise may not have. The term being a part of a "force for good" was used by many of the participants. Many members spoke about the platform that 4theRegion provides for them, enabling everyone to have a voice within the region which when combined enables a collective voice to sound out. It was suggested that 4theRegion is open to ideas and encourage participation and creative thinking within their membership base. The term "similar ethos" was used by many of the members to describe their reasoning for joining 4theRegion and it was apparent that they felt they had a common purpose and goal. The members also spoke about 4theRegion enabling them to share knowledge and about 4theRegion sharing knowledge from other members and stakeholders that may be relevant to them and that they otherwise may not be able to gain.

Some of the members also spoke about how 4theRegion has been instrumental in helping them with their social purpose initiatives, enabling them to gain further funding and resources. Again, this is something that was suggested that 4theRegion should do more of as it was highlighted as one of their key capabilities. Some members had even been able to gain new work opportunities due to their membership of 4theRegion, through gaining "local intelligence".

4theRegion feedback
Although the discussion of 4theRegion with the members resulted in an overwhelmingly positive reflection of 4theRegion and what they do there were some areas on which the members felt they could provide some feedback. The first of these was regarding 4theRegions role, which many of the members expressed as being unclear. This linked closely with the theme of the 4theRegion aim as being "too broad". Generally, members felt that although the 4theRegion aim was positive and good it was too ambitious and that they would be able to achieve more if they had a narrower focus as opposed to trying to be "everything to everyone". It

was highlighted that 4theRegion is relatively early in its development and that this is something that would potentially come with time. It was also expressed that 4theRegion does not currently have the resources to do everything they would like to do. Critically it was also highlighted by the members that there is often an overlap between what 4theRegion does and what other organisations or groups do within the region and that this has sometimes led to conflict or tension.

Many of the members also discussed the emergence of membership silos with a clear lack of collaboration between members. It was often discussed how members are guarded especially if they are operating within the same industry. This is interesting as this is the opposite of the 4theRegion ethos, which aims to "silo bust".

Finally, a notable theme that emerged was that of "too much talking" where members expressed that although the 4theRegion events were very good, they often left them with a sense of impact being needed. It was apparent that most of the members did not know what happened after the events had taken place and that more impact was needed on specific projects.

Other networking groups

Although it was primarily 4theRegion that was discussed throughout the interviews, participants did also talk about other networking or membership type organisations that operate both within Wales and nationally.

Participants consistently referred to other networking or membership type organisations as "traditional" groups. In particular there was quite a negative perception of most of these groups, with participants feeling that they are comprised of people who are egotistical and only there to sell their business and generate income. Many participants referred to these groups as being "male dominated" and many highlighted that they felt uncomfortable when they did attend any meetings organised by these groups. There was a sense that these groups are influenced by Local Authorities or political bodies and this is in stark contrast to 4theRegion.

It was also discussed that there is a lack of cohesion between these traditional groups with many of them having overlapping priorities and purpose. Members who were from large organisations often highlighted that they were a member of these groups because "you have to be" as opposed to wanting to be and expressed that they cost a lot of money with not a lot of return on investment.

However, some members did discuss these groups in a positive light highlighting their ability to share ideas, develop action plans, connect them to large companies and enable networking. In particular it was apparent that for some organisations it was crucial for them to be members of professional bodies. Third sector networking or membership organisations were also discussed by some of the participants.

Social Purpose

Many of the participants interviewed referred to their focus on balancing profit with purpose and the need for this to be a focus for all organisations. Much of the purpose driven work that the organisations and/or people referred to involved participation by multiple stakeholders from the ecosystem. Social purpose was a term that was used widely throughout the interviews to refer to both official work undertaken by the companies and to refer to projects undertaken outside of the scope of the business. Critically some participants were highly focused on evaluating the impact

of their social purpose work whilst it was apparent that this was something that others either had not considered or did not have time for.

Many of the members also discussed ways in which they had helped 4theRegion through providing advice or by helping with events and that this was something that was important to them. It was clear that the members play a crucial role in supporting the local area with many of the businesses providing training opportunities to people within the region and ensuring that they take care of their employees. One of the members in particular focused on wanting to leave a positive legacy, while others spoke of wanting to generate sustainable jobs. One member in particular focused on wanting to empower future generations and give back to the local community. The larger organisations often spoke about corporate social responsibility.

With regard to themes that were discussed regarding purpose driven work these included the circular economy, sustainable development and ethical consumerism.

Place based

When discussing the purpose driven projects and initiatives that the members are involved in it became apparent that these were all place based or place focused. The majority of the work discussed involved community projects or community engagement and ultimately aimed to support and develop the local region, people and economy. The theme of "people and community" was one that was prominent throughout all of the member interviews regardless of industry or organisational size. It also became apparent throughout the interviews that many of these social purpose initiatives would not be able to take place without the volunteers that gave up their time to be involved in them.

Throughout discussions "place-based regeneration" also emerged as a key theme and links closely with the "Wales as a country" theme. Members felt very passionately about Wales as a place to live and work and were passionate about local regeneration. Some members expressed that this could be achieved through collaboration whilst others argued it needed to stem from softer projects.

With regard to what participants felt were the regions greatest assets people and community consistently emerged as a key theme. It was widely felt that Wales is resource rich but linked with this was a discussion of community skills being largely underutilised. Aside from people and the community, Welsh nature and Welsh culture also emerged as being key themes that enable Wales to stand out, with the need for the region and its people to have more confidence in itself. The Well-being of Future Generations Act was discussed in a very positive way as being unique to Wales and something that should aim to be expanded into the private sector. The term "asset-based community development" was one that was used by a number of the members with them arguing that Wales should focus on its strengths and assets that it already has. Interestingly this is something the directors also refer to.

5. **The generation of a Purposeful Ecosystem (PE) Framework**

The preceding literature review and in-depth case analysis of an ecosystem facilitator within South West Wales has enabled the generation of a purposeful ecosystem (PE) framework (see figure 1). The purposeful ecosystem framework shown below has the Well Being of future Generations Act (2015) as its basis. The act provides the foundation for the ecosystem actors that

surround it. Figure 2 highlights this in a slightly different way evidencing the collaborative links between all of the ecosystem actors. The Well Being Act is still the basis of the approach and purpose (green strand) is the theme that links all ecosystem actors together. In these figures each step is linked to the next and the first steps must be completed for other steps to be achieved. Although it is currently only legislated within the public sector it is evident from the findings that its principles and values are extending into the private and third sector also. The ecosystem actors shown in the framework that surrounds the Well Being Act is borrowed from the Babson entrepreneurship ecosystem platform which is one of the most comprehensive ecosystem models contained within the literature. The analysis of 4theRegion highlighted each of these different factors within the Welsh ecosystem. These provide the layers upon which the Well-Being Act can be implemented throughout the ecosystem. The PE loop is finished with a "purposeful focus" for each of the ecosystem actors. Thus the framework depicts an ecosystem approach that is unique to Wales and which focuses on a balance of purpose and profit as opposed to being purely entrepreneurial in nature.
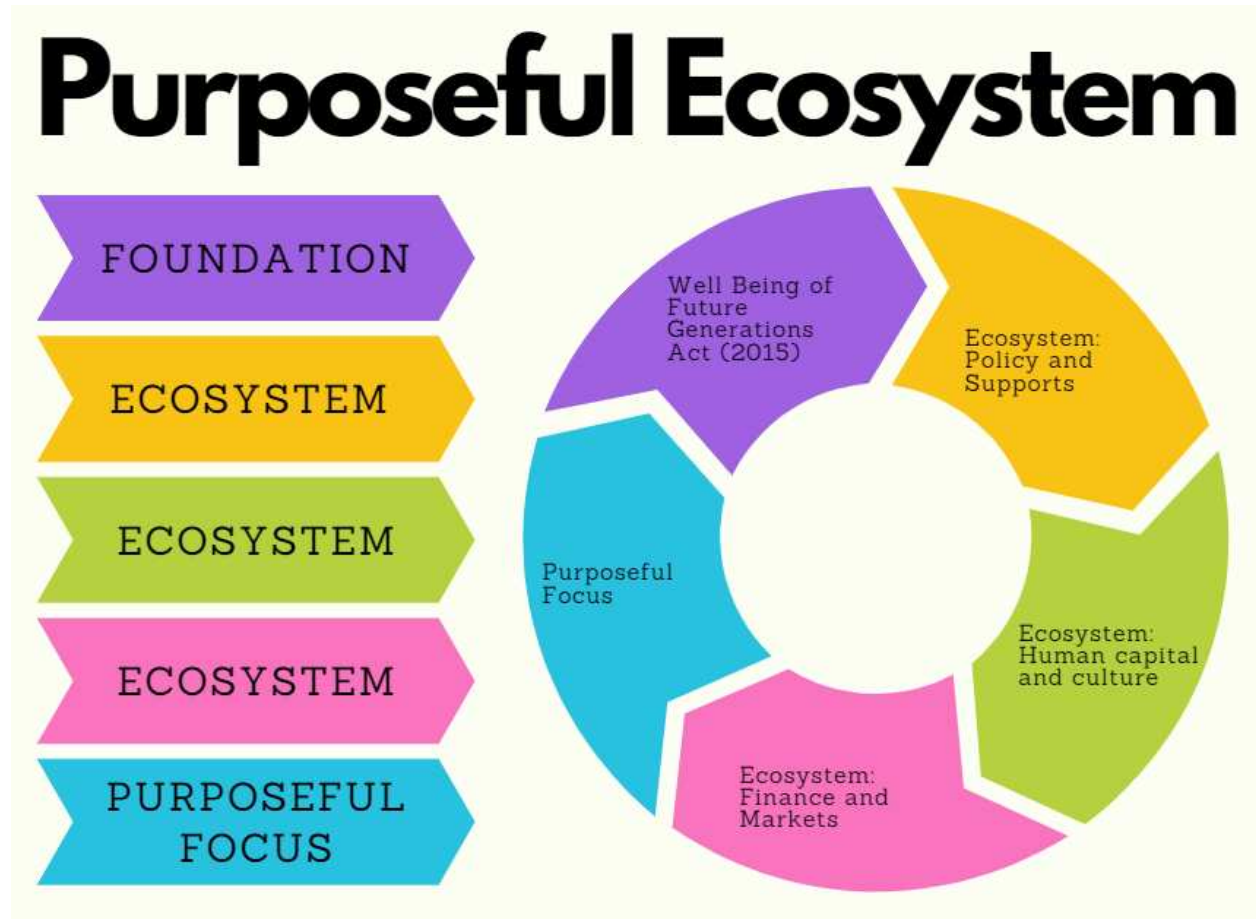

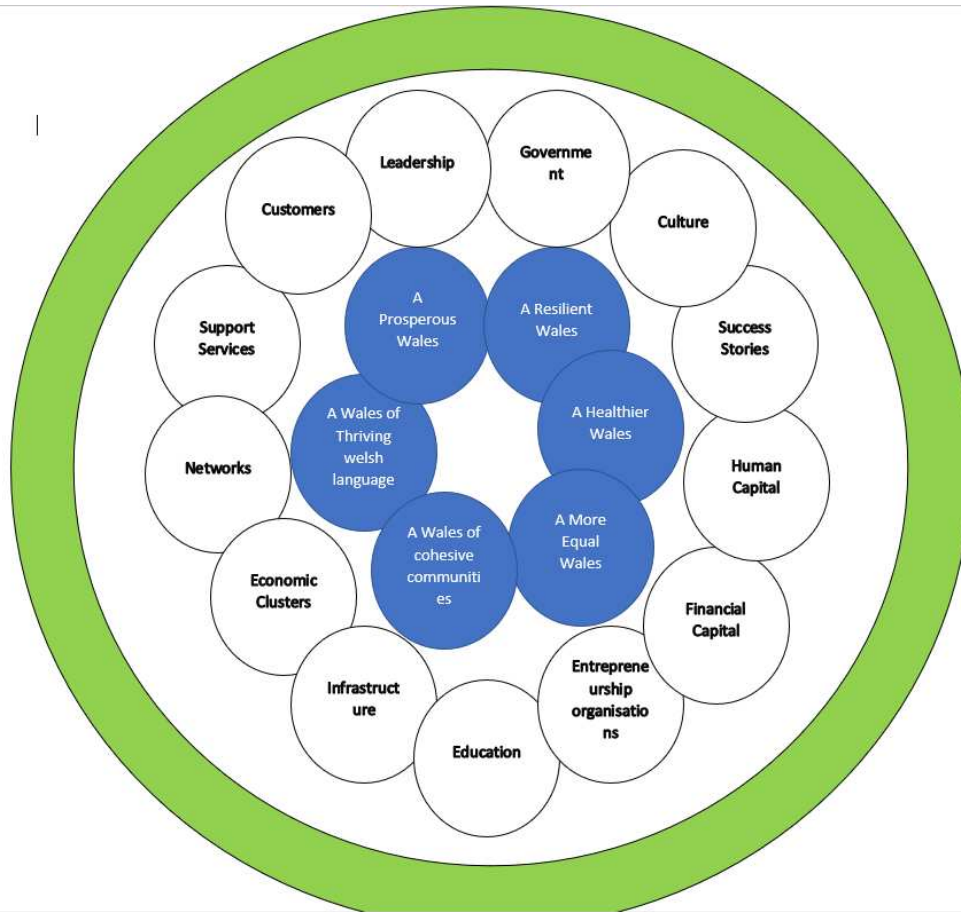Figure 1: Purposeful ecosystem (PE) Framework for Wales

Figure 2: Collaborative nature of the Purposeful Ecosystem Framework

6. Discussion

This paper acts to further knowledge on the entrepreneurial ecosystem concept, a concept that although relatively recent has received great attention both academically and politically. The 4theRegion case study confirms Isenbergs (2011) ecosystem model, as each of the various factors within this model were found to be evident within South West Wales. The case study of 4thRegion also confirms the arguments made by Isenberg (2011) that ecosystems can be lead and developed by ecosystem enablers, which in this case would be 4theRegion. Isenberg argues for the importance of bottom up ecosystem development, something that was echoed in this research. The research however also supports work by Spigel (2017) who argues for the importance of entrepreneurs driving an ecosystem. This research found that 4theRegion, led by two female entrepreneurs was a key ecosystem facilitator and yet their approach is highly community led and focused. This suggests that perhaps entrepreneurs cannot be the only ones to lead an ecosystem, but that they must be led and supported by communities as well. However, Spigels general findings that ecosystems are made up of networks, attitudes and place specific organisations and institutions is supported here as it was found that there was a clear shared vision amongst the membership base of 4theRegion and "place" was of key importance. The

findings also support the work of Brush et al (2019) who argue that the EE literature does not consider females or female entrepreneurs enough. This research found that "male dominated" groups were often considered as traditional and not effective, suggesting that within this ecosystem there was a call for a greater focus on what females could offer. However, the findings also further the EE literature through the finding that there is now less of a focus on EE for high growth, business development or economic return but that this has instead shifted towards a focus on purpose and social development. This research also adds to the empirical research base on EE, which is argued to be lacking (Corrente et al, 2019).

The findings also support the increased focus within organisations and people on challenges such as the sustainable development goals and "purpose" more generally as this was the main focus of 4theRegion and their members. The research supports Vives (2020) who argues that businesses have a responsibility to their surrounding ecosystem with this being at the core of what 4theRegion is trying to achieve. However, the research also furthers the literature on SDGs and purpose through its linkage with the EE concept.

Finally, the research adds to the literature surrounding the Well Being of Future Generations Act (2015). The findings suggest that the act is something that the South West Wales ecosystem is proud of but which they feel needs to be more widely implemented beyond that of public bodies. The regional focus of the REFs within Wales coupled with their focus on concepts such as asset based development, community led action and shared ownership are the values called for by the 4theRegion membership base. This suggests that there is a positive movement within South West Wales whereby public, private and third sector are beginning to work together alongside the community to enable positive change to occur.

This research suggests that the EE concept needs to be re-imagined in light of recent macro-environmental developments. The bringing together of the literature on EE, SDGs and well-being along with the in depth case study has enabled the generation of the PE concept. Considering the social, economic and environmental challenges that the whole world is currently facing this re-focusing of the EE concept is one that is desperately needed.

7. **Conclusion**

This paper aimed to understand the development and movement of the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. The literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE) was reviewed with new insights provided as to the emergence and importance of considering purpose within this debate. Through an in-depth case study of the ecosystem within South West Wales the findings support this movement of focus from entrepreneurial ecosystems to purposeful ecosystems (PE). Ultimately it is argued that there is a current preoccupation within the literature on EEs on high growth organisations as opposed to well-being and a balance of profit with purpose.

There are a number of key contributions that this paper makes. The case study presented and analysed in this paper results in the generation and proposition of a purposeful ecosystem (PE) framework which covers the Well-Being of future Generation Act (2015) and the Isenberg (2011) ecosystem actors under a purposeful focus. The findings confirm the ecosystem actors evident in Isenbergs (2011) model but is able to further the literature on entrepreneurial

ecosystems by providing a much needed focus on purpose and well-being. This enables a new lens to be applied to EE literature and research, one which considers trends that are shaping the future of business and society as a whole. The research findings also further the literature on purposeful business, which is currently under researched, by combining it with the EE concept. The consideration and findings covering the Well Being of Future Generations Act (2015) furthers the knowledge on this key piece of legislation within different areas and highlights its linkage with social purpose and SDGs in general.

The purposeful ecosystem (PE) framework presented in this paper has key implications not just for Welsh governmental policy but for policy in general. The framework offers a way in which to conceptualise the adoption of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act (2015) in areas other than the public sector, enabling the act to have bottom up ownership. More widely the principles of the PE framework could be drawn upon by other regions and countries in order to enable and encourage a purposeful ecosystem focus resulting in both economic and social development.

This research provides implications for practice through the way in which the framework provides a blueprint by which practitioners can engage in and contribute to this purposeful ecosystem. Examples of best practice can be drawn from the 4theRegion case study to enable greater collaboration and innovation with purpose and well being at its core. Ultimately this framework could provide practitioners with a way in which they can achieve monetary and social goals combined.

Ultimately it is hoped that this research enables further conversations, debates and research to be undertaken on the movement from EEs to purposeful ecosystems (PE) and the important role this plays in our social, environmental and economic development. Although this paper provides an important first step further research is needed on the PE concept. It would be interesting to undertake wider scale research both within Wales and beyond in order to generate and share best practice which could inform the PE concept. As the review of the impact of covid on the SDGs and well-being highlights, the time is now and the need for a consideration of purpose within everything that we do is critical.

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