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Ideological evolution of social entrepreneurship: Insights from Chile 1960–2020

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship is often framed as a transformative force for addressing societal challenges, yet its ideological underpinnings remain underexplored, particularly outside of the Global North. This study addresses this omission by exploring the role of ideologies in shaping the evolution of social entrepreneurship in Chile between 1960 and 2020, a context marked by ideological polarisation as well as a vibrant contemporary social entrepreneurship sector. We use historical methods to explore the role of Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberalism in shaping approaches to social welfare, leading to social entrepreneurship's emergence (1990–2010) and growth (2010–2020). Our findings reveal an ideological synthesis that forms the basis for contemporary social entrepreneurship, underpinned by dimensions of messianism, markets, and managerialism. By highlighting the role of religious and economic ideologies in structuring the field, we offer new insights into the contested nature of social entrepreneurship and its role in contemporary social change.

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Social entrepreneurship;
ideology; social change;
historical narrative;
historical analysis

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is both praised and criticised for its potential to affect change, revealing a complex interplay of ideals, values, and tensions. It is a morally charged field (Choi & Majumdar, 2014) laden with values and ideological underpinnings (Ranville & Barros, 2022), shaped by a collection of heroic, political (Dey & Steyaert, 2010) and entrepreneurial narratives (Barton & Muñoz, 2023). This constitutes a fertile ground for grand accounts of transformation in response to poverty, lack of education, inequality and many more entrenched social issues. As a result, idealised conceptions of social entrepreneurship abound, as it is viewed as 'transformative' to the lives of many (Desa, 2012) through its innovative solutions (Dees, 1998) and role as an institutional 'changemaker' (Sen, 2007). Research has begun to reveal possible consequences of establishing such 'social trajectories' (Dey & Steyaert, 2012) and the entrepreneur's 'untrammelled pursuit of a messianic social vision' (Nicholls & Cho, 2006).

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However, whilst cautionary tales and critical studies have grown (e.g. Dey & Lehner, 2017; Healy et al., 2024; Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018), the ideological drivers that underpin the emergence of social entrepreneurship remain relatively understudied. Most research on ideology has revolved around neoliberalism. On the one hand, by prioritising social change over profit, the social orientation of entrepreneurship is seen as a challenge to neoliberalism and simply conflating social entrepreneurship with markets may be erroneous (Maclean et al., 2025). On the other hand, research has documented how social entrepreneurship's evolution reinforces the neoliberal narrative by positioning firms as being key to social change rather than the state (Chalmers, 2021; Spicer et al., 2019; Teasdale et al., 2023). However, ideological drivers have mainly been studied in the US and Europe, where we have developed a broad understanding of ideologies, institutions, and social enterprise maturity (Sepulveda, 2015). Outside of Global North contexts, research has paid little to no attention to the ideological drivers of social entrepreneurship's evolution. As such, we ask: *How do ideologies shape the evolution of the social entrepreneurship sector in Chile?*

Prior studies have documented historical features of social entrepreneurship's development and maturity in the US and Europe (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Nicholls & Teasdale, 2017; Teasdale et al., 2023). However, in less formalised contexts, where rules, institutional structures, isomorphic pressures and governance are less well defined, the ideological drivers of the sector's evolution are poorly understood (Muñoz et al., 2022). Moreover, such contexts may also experience a lack of political continuity whereby the underlying historical processes may involve understanding the effects of authoritarian rule, revolutions, social unrest, violence and the political regimes behind them, representing alternative business histories (Austin et al., 2017). At a policy level, social entrepreneurship is alluring, and its evolution is grounded in political history (Lucas & Park, 2023; MacDonald & Howorth, 2018), yet it is also grounded in culture and religion (Spear, 2010), which are rarely addressed in the literature. It is this complex historical interplay among ideological drivers shaped by politics, civil society, culture and religion that motivates our research question.

We contextualise our study during Chile's tumultuous socio-political landscape from 1960 to 2020. This period, marked by polarised ideologies, offers an exemplary backdrop against which the evolution of social entrepreneurship as a deliverer of social solutions can be historically analysed (Wadhvani et al., 2020). Our analysis reveals that social entrepreneurship is an ideological synthesis of opposing historical forces—Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberalism—with dimensions of these ideologies manifesting as messianism, market orientation and managerialist tendencies. These tendencies surface as social entrepreneurs, equipped with passion, data, and expertise, use the competitive market to solve social problems.

Social entrepreneurship and ideology

As a concept, social entrepreneurship is typically traced to the work of Gregory Dees (1998), even if the practice significantly pre-dates this (Teasdale et al., 2023; e.g. Maclean et al., 2025). At the concept's inception, social entrepreneurship gained recognition for bringing entrepreneurial market-based methods to social problems in a way that could sustain positive impact. In the academic literature, researchers proceeded to dispute the definitional issues for two decades (Chliova et al., 2020; Glasbeek et al., 2024), seeking to clarify the fuzziness

of the term as distinct from the work of charities and/or commercial entrepreneurs (Austin et al., 2006), as well as address more critical questions regarding myths, outcomes, and perceived impact (Dey & Steyaert, 2012).

In this paper, we define social entrepreneurship as a process of using market-based practices to solve social and/or environmental problems (Grimes et al., 2013), because it is a widely accepted definition in which key elements (i.e. markets and social welfare) are traceable through broader ideological shifts in the context. Research to date shows how social entrepreneurship, as an organisational category, can lean back and forth between different ideological principles, which either promote the role of the market and 'business' as a solution (Price et al., 2023; Sparviero, 2019) or focus more on the social change itself (Brest & Born, 2013; Mair & Martí, 2006; Rawhouser et al., 2019). As a result of these contested logics, the evolution of social entrepreneurship can be seen as being shaped by ideologies and the political regimes that enact them.

The ideology most closely associated with social entrepreneurship is neoliberalism. Entrepreneurship is widely considered to be a central component of neoliberal governmentality because free enterprise, free trade and private property are central to competitive liberal economies (Mudge, 2008). On the one hand, research has highlighted that social entrepreneurship challenges our understanding of neoliberalism. By blending market and state logics, it has galvanised the idea that the 'free market' does not necessarily just involve profit-making actors and, instead, can be geared towards more ethical business values (Stephan et al., 2016). According to Bandinelli (2019), this represents a significant challenge to the *homo economicus* of the neoliberal regime.

On the other hand, a more dominant strand of literature has argued that social entrepreneurship perpetuates neoliberalism's ideological presence. In this vein, Gregory and Anderson (2006) describe two schools of thought: the social innovation school and the social enterprise school. The social innovation school is primarily associated with the outcomes of transformational social change rather than their income-generating activities (Mair et al., 2023). The social enterprise school borrows more from the entrepreneurship field, where income-generating activities and the 'start-up' are the main focus (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). While they differ in emphasis, both schools, according to Mason (2012), help justify a reduction in the role of the state as a provider of welfare, emphasising individual, well-intending entrepreneurs. Hence, the evolution of social enterprise perpetuates the desire for a business-like focus in social welfare, e.g. healthcare (Lowe et al., 2019) and social care (Baines et al., 2010).

The United Kingdom is insightful in this regard. With a historical background of a vibrant voluntary and non-profit sector, the UK has embraced a more entrepreneurial version in the last two decades (Teasdale et al., 2023). However, both the innovation and enterprise schools of thought emphasise the neoliberal belief that markets and entrepreneurship can solve social problems (Nicholls & Teasdale, 2017), leading to what Chalmers (2021) describes as a 'solutionism problem', where 'an entrepreneurship "gloss" is liberally applied to a broad range of complex social problems' (p. 1366). This represents a positivist view of social change, where social outcomes are thought to be generated through a simple cause-and-effect relationship (Nisbet et al., 2021), such that a social enterprise plays a central role in tackling the cause and generating the effect in the context of a particular social problem.

However, of particular interest in this paper is not simply the observation of the relationship between social entrepreneurship and political regimes, but the ideological principles

informing the actions across macro, meso, and micro levels and the complexities that enable it to emerge. In the UK, for example, we know that neoliberalism became a key ideological driver of statecraft from the 1980s to the present day. Whilst neoliberalism would promote the role of the individual entrepreneur, it would also create the space to allow new public management to emerge (Dutta et al., 2023). This involved a private-sector-like series of neoliberal reforms using managerialism and austerity to cut costs and improve public service efficiencies, i.e. the ‘rolling back of the state’ (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994). A series of initiatives such as New Labour’s ‘Third Way’ and the coalition government’s ‘Big Society’ sat alongside large-scale regulatory changes such as reforms of Public Contract Regulations and the introduction of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012. Social entrepreneurship’s evolution and legitimisation in this context exists as political regimes interact with the wider ecosystem of aspiring entrepreneurs, support programs, investors, educational establishments, civil servants and more.

It is also noteworthy how social entrepreneurship appears to be quite politically neutral. Because entrepreneurship has been conveyed as a ‘solution’ for stagnant economies (Galindo & Méndez, 2014; OECD, 2023), it garners support from more typical conservative regimes. Yet, for social democrat political regimes or even democratic socialists, it may also be appealing because of its potential public welfare benefits (Gregory, 2024). However, the relationship between political regimes and ideology is particularly complex when we consider the institutional varieties of capitalism and the national approaches to welfare provision and market regulation (Kibler et al., 2018). In addition, the different welfare conventions associated with the political economy (Fraser et al., 2023) and the style of political leadership in place may also have a role to play (Bennett et al., 2023).

Political consensus on social entrepreneurship may result from the category ambiguity of the concept (Chliova et al., 2020) and the lack of a universal definition (Choi & Majumdar, 2014). Assuming the definitional debate in the field will continue to evolve (Glasbeek et al., 2024), political actors are likely to promote social entrepreneurship from both the left and right, albeit through different ideological lenses.

In summary, political regimes and their ideologies are critical to understanding social entrepreneurship’s evolution across different institutional contexts. Prior research has documented in broad terms how social entrepreneurship theory and practice have evolved from its academic pre-conception (Bacq & Janssen, 2011) and early days of emergence (Sepulveda, 2015) to its more recent maturity (Teasdale et al., 2023). However, our understanding of historical institutional processes is limited to only a few examples that focus almost entirely on the ideological drivers of the political economy. Social entrepreneurship’s evolution is rooted in political history (MacDonald & Howorth, 2018) but also in aspects of culture and religion (Baker & Welter, 2024; Spear, 2010). Whilst most accounts focus on the former, very little is known about the latter, and even less is known outside of Global North contexts.

We regard this as problematic because social entrepreneurship has become an important policy feature across Latin America, South and South-East Asia, as well as some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. In such contexts, there exist varying degrees of political continuity with historical processes sometimes tied to authoritarian rule, revolutions, social unrest, inequality, economic liberalisation, cultural change and religious influence. The historical story of social entrepreneurship in Latin America likely contrasts with formalised accounts from the US and Europe (Mahn & Poblete, 2023; Muñoz et al., 2022) because of the varying historical influences

of socialism and revolutionary Marxism, nationalism and perhaps even fascism/militarism, which may still leave their traces in contemporary (neo) liberal economies. In this regard, historical analysis is ideally suited to understanding the legacy of ideological influences on shaping social entrepreneurship.

Method

We use interpretive historical analysis (Cronon, 2013) to explore how Chile's ideologically informed approaches to social welfare shaped the evolution of social entrepreneurship. We draw on over ten years of empirical research experience in Chile and combine our deep knowledge of the context with historical analysis of ideologies surrounding the Church and state during the height of the global war in Chile. Our approach of weaving backwards and forward across empirical and conceptual sources and across time enriches the story and grounds our approach to theory building (Kipping et al., 2014).

Empirical context

Our case study is contextualised in Chile's historiographical record between 1960 and 2020, representing a tumultuous period marked by critical events and diverse ideologically based approaches to solving social problems. Chile represents a fascinating context for understanding the role of historical ideologies on social entrepreneurship as it has an entrepreneurial spirit cast against a complex historical and institutional story of Catholic heritage, colonialism, grass-roots social movements, and neoliberalism. Waves of social reform expanded the social economy between the early 1960s and 1973. These efforts were abruptly dismantled following General Pinochet's 1973 coup d'état, which ushered in a seventeen-year military dictatorship. The subsequent transition to democracy in the 1990s intensified the neoliberal political economy. Throughout the polarising upheavals, the Church played a critical role, ranging from collaboration to vocal opposition. Alongside this turbulent socioeconomic history of morality, oppression, and inequality, social entrepreneurship evolved (Muñoz et al., 2016).

Sources

We used a contingent historical logic and focused on sources produced during critical events, as such events are more likely to expose underlying ideological positions (Kipping et al., 2014; Wadhvani, 2016b). Within the critical events, we examined how political and civil society actors portrayed their approaches to solving social problems. We built a case of materials relevant to Chile's evolving social welfare strategies, including archival sources and oral history interviews, which we used to interpret the evolution of social entrepreneurship (Yates, 2014). For the archival data, we worked with Universidad del Desarrollo's librarian to collect sources spanning 1960 to 2020. This timeframe was selected to capture key shifts in Chile's political and social landscape, beginning with the social reform era of the 1960s and extending to the constitutional reform efforts following the 2019 riots. Additionally, we worked with the Museum of Memory and Human Rights' archival liaison in Santiago to retrieve primary sources related to state social welfare policies and civil society demands leading up to and throughout the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990).¹ We included sources related to social welfare reforms produced during critical events and that indicated an

Table 1. Selection of historical sources consulted.

		Ideological foundations
CatholicSocial Teaching	Data Type	Selected examples
	Document	Anonymous (1985). <i>Chile. National agreement for the transition to full democracy</i> . Nueva Sociedad, (80). Retrieved from https://nuso.org/articulo/chile-acuerdo-nacional-para-la-transicion-a-la-plena-democracia/t
	Document	Chilean Socialist Party. (1966). <i>Political report to the national plenum</i> . *
	Film	Francia, A. (Director). (1972). <i>Praying Is No Longer Enough</i> [Film]. Cine Nuevo Viña del Mar, Emelco Chilena. *
	Book	Gutiérrez (1973). <i>A theology of liberation: History, politics, and salvation</i> (C. Inda & J. Eagleson, Trans.). Orbis Books. †
	Speech	John Paul II. (1987). <i>Towards an economy of solidarity</i> . Vatican Press. †
	Image	<i>Pinochet maintained a close relationship with conservatives in the Catholic Church, which collaborated in his repressive plan</i> [Photograph]. (n.d.). LM Neuquén. https://media.lmneuquen.com/p/41a877b5767df6daea02f5e30148e9b2/adjuntos/195/imagenes/001/037/0001037893/pinochet-conservo-un-aceitado-vinculo-la-iglesia-catolica-que-colaboro-la-aplicacion-su-plan-represivo.jpg *
	Document	Permanent Committee of the Chilean Episcopal Conference. (2021). <i>Principles and values of the Church's social teaching: Study document for the drafting of a constitution</i> [Study document]. Chilean Episcopal Conference. https://www.iglesia.cl/participacionciudadana/docs/principios_valores.pdf *
	Image	Pino Lanata, C. (2017). <i>History of the PDC and crisis in the Christian Democratic Party</i> [PowerPoint slides]. SlideShare. https://es.slideshare.net/christianpinol/historia-del-pdc-y-crisis-en-el-partido-democrata-cristiano *
	Papal Encyclical	Pius XI. (1931). <i>Quadragesimo anno: On the reconstruction of the social order</i> . Vatican Press. https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html *
	Interview	Razeto Migliaro, L. (2011). <i>Interviews on the solidarity economy in Chile</i> . http://www.luisrazeto.net †
	Speech	Silva Henríquez, R. (1986). <i>El alma de Chile</i> [Speech transcript]. CIEPLAN. https://www.cieplan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Libro-El-Alma-de-Chile-002.pdf *
	Speech	Thayer, W. (1965). <i>Remuneration policy in the government of President Frei: Full speech of the Minister of Labour in Concepción</i> [Speech transcript]. Government of Chile. https://www.bcn.cl/obtienearchivo?id=documentos/10221.1/13003/1/179960.pdf *
Neoliberalism	Data Type	Selected examples
	News article	BBC News. (2001). <i>Pinochet's rule: Repression and economic success</i> . BBC News. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/63821.stm *
	Policy document	De Castro, S. (1992). <i>The brick: Foundations of the economic policy of the Chilean military government</i> [Policy document]. Centro de Estudios Públicos. https://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-9502.html †

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Neoliberalism		
Data Type	Selected examples	
Lecture	Friedman, M. (1975). <i>Milton Friedman in Chile: Foundations for economic development</i> [Lecture transcript]. Fundación de Estudios Económicos BHC. https://www.elcato.org/pdf_files/mfriedman-conf-chile-1975.pdf *	
News article	Friedman, M. (1982). Free markets and the generals. <i>Newsweek</i> , p. 59. https://miltonfriedman.hoover.org/internal/media/dispatcher/214267/full *	
Constitution	Government of Chile. (1980). Political Constitution of the Republic of Chile [Constitution]. Editorial Jurídica de Chile. https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=242302&idVersion=2024-01-19&idParte= *	
Speech	Guzmán, J. (1987, October 28). <i>Speech on the 20th anniversary of the Movimiento Gremial</i> [Speech transcript]. Movimiento Gremial. https://archivojaimeguzman.cl/uploads/r/archivo-jaime-guzman-e-3/e/0/0/e0019c7731727d76f43232648cd25a43ca995b8ab30042570416d265dba863f6/GRE.87.00_MG_UC_Discurso_20_a_os_1987.pdf †	
Interview	Harberger, A. (2000). <i>Interview with Arnold "Al" Harberger</i> [Television series episode]. In <i>Commanding Heights</i> . PBS. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/shared/minitext/int_alharberger.html †	
Report	Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation. (1991). <i>Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation</i> (Vols. 1–2) [Report]. United States Institute of Peace. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/collections/truth_commissions/Chile90-Report/Chile90-Report.pdf *	
Memoir	Piñera, J. (2007). <i>Milton Friedman and world freedom: A personal note</i> . José Piñera's Personal Website. http://www.josepinera.org/josepinera/Jp_ABC_Milton_Friedman.htm *	
Speech	Piñera, J. (2009). <i>Towards a property-owning society</i> [Speech transcript]. ElCato.org. https://www.elcato.org/hacia-una-sociedad-de-propietarios †	
Interview	Progreso y Equidad. (2019). <i>Don Francisco from Canal 13 interviews young Jaime Guzmán in 1980 about the new Constitution</i> [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4Sg-OAvDHQ *	
Emergence		
FOSIS	Data Type	Selected examples
	Brochure	Fondo de Solidaridad e Inversión Social (FOSIS). (n.d.). <i>FOSIS: Social development programs for overcoming poverty in Chile</i> [Brochure]. Fondo de Solidaridad e Inversión Social. https://andinoblob.blob.core.windows.net/media/filer_public/01/dd/01dd272f-ef92-4844-8ba4-50de0a523669/61_brochure_fosis_engl.pdf †
	Speech	Fundación Patricio Aylwin. (1990). <i>The creation of FOSIS</i> [Speech transcript]. Fundación Patricio Aylwin. https://fundacionaylwin.cl/la-creacion-del-fosis/ *
	Policy	National Congress Library of Chile. (1990). <i>Law No. 18,989: Creates the Ministry of Planning, the Solidarity and Social Investment Fund, and the International Cooperation Agency</i> [Policy document] (A. Ksiazek & A. Pucci, Trans.). National Congress Library of Chile. https://web.archive.org/web/20141022074609/http://www.verdugo.cl/berrios.htm#%20,%20translated%20by%20A.%20Ksiazek,%20A.%20Pucci *

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

		Emergence
FOSIS	Data Type	Selected examples
	Report	National Congress Library of Chile. (2019). <i>History of Law No. 18,989: Creates the Ministry of Planning, the Solidarity and Social Investment Fund, and the International Cooperation Agency</i> [Legislative history report]. National Congress Library of Chile. www.bcn.cl/historiadelaaley . *
	Dissertation	Salazar, C. A. M. (2016). <i>Implementation of poverty alleviation policies in Chile, 1990–2010: The case of FOSIS</i> [Doctoral dissertation, Universidad Complutense de Madrid]. Docta Complutense. https://docta.ucm.es/entities/publication/bb63a368-4f27-4f0e-9980-caa2653b51e8/full †
	Policy report	Tomei, M. (1996). <i>Social investment funds: The case of Chile</i> [Policy report]. International Labour Office. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_123591.pdf †
Report	United Nations (1995). <i>Report of the World Summit for Social Development: Copenhagen, 6–12 March 1995 (A/CONF.166/9)</i> [Conference report]. United Nations. https://undocs.org/en/A/CONF.166/9 †	
TECHO	Data Type	Selected examples
	Interview	CNN Chile. (2014). <i>CNN íntimo con el sacerdote Felipe Berríos</i> [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/J91VwCszbLw *
	Interview	Exchange the World (2020). <i>A roof for all</i> [Interview]. Exchange the World. https://www.exchangetheworld.info/single-post/2020/08/18/a-roof-for-all †
	Dissertation ethnographic	Frösén, K. (2013). <i>NGOs and governmentality in Chile: The case of TECHO and slum eradication programs</i> [Bachelor's thesis, Lund University]. Lund University Publications. https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?fileId=4006476&func=downloadFile&recordId=4003310 †
	Press release	BioBio. (2011). <i>Juan Pedro Pinochet resigns as executive director of Un Techo para Chile</i> [Press release]. https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/2011/10/15/juan-pedro-pinochet-deja-la-direccion-ejecutiva-de-un-techo-para-chile.shtml †
	Webpage	Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship. (2005). <i>Felipe Berríos: Jesuit priest and social entrepreneur</i> [Web profile]. *
	Webpage	TECHO. (2011). <i>Mission, vision, and objectives</i> [Webpage]. Un Techo para Chile. https://web.archive.org/web/20110501063948/http://www.untechoparachile.cl/?page_id=1229 *
	Press release	United Nations. (2010). <i>Activities of Secretary-General in Chile, 4-7 March</i> [Press release]. United Nations. https://press.un.org/en/2010/sgt2715.doc.htm †
	Interview	Verdugo, A. (2014). <i>Father José Miguel Berríos: A life dedicated to the marginalised</i> [Interview]. Verdugo.cl. https://web.archive.org/web/20141022074609/http://www.verdugo.cl/Berrios.htm †
		Growth
CORFO Start-Up Chile	Data Type	Selected examples
Policy	CORFO. (2018). <i>Technical guidelines: Flexible allocation seed subsidy for social innovation ventures (SSAF-S)</i> [Policy document]. Chilean Economic Development Agency (CORFO). https://www.corfo.cl/sites/Satellite?blobcol=urlata&blobkey=id&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1475166558643&ssbinary=true *	

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

		Growth
CORFO Start-Up Chile	Data Type	Selected examples
	Policy	Start-Up Chile Management Office. (2021). <i>Technical conditions of lines 1–3 of the Start-Up Chile program (Resolution E No. 1127, October 2021)</i> [Policy document; English translation]. Start-Up Chile. https://startupchile.org/content/uploads/tc-sup-big-3-english.pdf *
	Video	Fontaine, J. A. (2010). Chile as a national start-up [Video]. Stanford Technology Ventures Program. YouTube. https://youtu.be/cZDepmE_FT5?si=EdSIh0AXVqHFmbqH †
	Article	The Economist. (2012). <i>The lure of Chilecon Valley</i> . https://www.economist.com/business/2012/10/13/the-lure-of-chilecon-valley †
	Letter	Frías-Rivas, R. (2020). <i>Testimonial on Dr Jonathan Kimmitt's contribution to social entrepreneurship in Chile</i> [Unpublished letter]. Chilean Economic Development Agency (CORFO). *
	Letter	Cheyre, H. (2019). <i>Dr. Jonathan Kimmitt's contribution to designing social impact bond (SIBs) in Chile</i> [Unpublished letter]. †
	Impact case study	Kimmitt, J., Wilson, R., Martin, M., Lowe, T., & Gibbon, J. (2021). <i>Enabling socio-economic policy change in Chile: Introducing social impact bonds and developing social entrepreneurship</i> [Impact case study]. UK Research Excellence Framework. https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/impact/4412a2cd-424f-4d09-b9e9-23bc84bca911?page=1 †
	Article	Moed, J. (2018). Start-Up Chile's impact 2010–2018: Inside the revolutionary start-up accelerator. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathanmoed/2018/11/19/start-up-chiles-impact-2010-2018-inside-the-revolutionary-start-up-accelerator/
Socialab	Data Type	Selected examples
	Project	Innovación Económica. (2014). <i>101 solutions: Public policies by and for social enterprises</i> . [Policy report]. Innovación Económica. https://innovacioneconomica.org/descarga/101-soluciones-politicas-publicas-por-y-para-las-empresas-sociales/ †
	Interview	Diario Sustentable. (2020). <i>Julián Ugarte de Socialab: "El verdadero protagonista de los próximos años será la innovación social"</i> [Interview]. Diario Sustentable. https://www.diariosustentable.com/2020/12/julian-ugarte-de-socialab-el-verdadero-protagonista-de-los-proximos-anos-sera-la-innovacion-social/ *
	News article	Palacios, J. P. (2014). <i>Agenda de productividad, innovación y crecimiento incorporará propuestas de emprendedores sociales. La Tercera</i> . https://www.latercera.com/noticia/agenda-de-productividad-innovacion-y-crecimiento-incorporara-propuestas-de-emprendedores-sociales/ †
	Editorial	Revista Emprende. (2018). <i>2018: The year of Socialab</i> [Editorial]. <i>Revista Emprende</i> . https://revistaemprende.cl/2018-el-ano-de-socialab/ †
	Video	Socialab. (2012). <i>Presentación Socialab 2012</i> [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/4k49AqgYIOC?si=y1v0P8Ea_w3UmixD *
	Webpage	Socialab. (2016). <i>The economy of love: Socialab at the UN</i> [Blog post]. <i>Socialab</i> . https://blog.socialab.com/la-economia-del-amor-socialab/ *
	Video	Ugarte, J. (2016). <i>La Economía del Amor ECOSOC 2016 presentation</i> [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/lf1r1UiVtps *

Sources marked with † are cited and in the reference list. Uncited sources are marked with * and are only in Table 1.

For the oral history interviews, we took inspiration from Maclean et al.'s (2016) approach to include individual voices alongside archival research to provide contextual sensitivity through lived experience (Giacomin, 2023). Our aim was to understand how historical events influenced the development of social entrepreneurship and how contemporary social entrepreneurship reflects history. To achieve this, we conducted 13 oral history interviews with key actors and experts in the sector, identified through snowballing and reputation. Interviews included those actively engaged in the contemporary sector, as well as those with multi-generational experience who lived and worked through Chile's critical socio-political transformations from the early 1970s to the present.

We met as a research team to evaluate our collection of sources' evidentiary potential in explaining the evolution of social entrepreneurship in Chile. We evaluated each source against source criticism guidelines, assessing authorship, perspective, intent, intended audience, and relevance to our research question (Lipartito, 2014). The research team comprised two Chilean nationals and two UK-based researchers with over ten years of research on social entrepreneurship in Chile. The deep contextual knowledge and intimate connection to the research context provided both benefits and challenges, particularly in balancing sensitivity to the historical context with the risk of being overly embedded. During deliberations, the non-Chilean researchers were often positioned in an outsider role, contributing a degree of analytical distance. Our consultations with the archival liaison further helped clarify the relevance of sources, and the variety of text, visual, and digital materials helped enhance a nuanced understanding of social entrepreneurship in Chile.

Periodisation

We grouped the events and related sources into distinct periods, guided by emerging analytical themes. Periodisation represents a bracketing strategy used to maintain coherence and contextual sensitivity to an event's time and place, while enabling the identification of historically meaningful patterns (Wadhvani, 2016a) such as 'patterns of continuity, discontinuity, and historical causation' (Rowlinson et al., 2014).

In our findings section, we begin by introducing the ideological context from 1960s to 1990 to contextualise our periodisation. We then examine the evolution of contemporary social entrepreneurship in two periods: its emergence (1990–2010), informed by early conceptions of the field, and its growth (2010–2019), marked by increased engagement and formalisation. We illustrate social entrepreneurship's evolution, its emergence and growth, through four case vignettes representing two state programs and two social enterprises. These cases are historically embedded in efforts to address social problems and have played a formative role in the evolution of Chile's social entrepreneurship sector.

Findings

Chile's ideological foundations

Catholic social teaching

Whatever your function in the fabric of economic and social life, help to build an *economy of solidarity* in the region! – Pope John Paul II, Santiago, 1987

Until recent decades, the Catholic Church played a central role in Chile, acting as a moral authority for all and as a source of charity and refuge for the marginalised. Consequently, Chile's Catholic heritage and the Church's Catholic Social Teaching played a significant role in shaping Chile's societal structures and beliefs. Catholic Social Teaching, a doctrinal body of work developed in response to industrialisation and its effect on social life, offered a moral guide to align the economic sphere with human dignity and the common good. Among its core principles, subsidiarity, solidarity, and the preferential option for the poor are particularly significant in the Chilean context. Solidarity emphasises shared responsibility for the welfare of others; subsidiarity advocates for decision-making at the most local and capable level; and the preferential option for the poor calls for prioritising the needs of society's most vulnerable. These principles have profoundly shaped how social actors, including grassroots movements and political elites, have approached social welfare in Chile. Competing interpretations of Catholic Social Teaching principles would impact social, political, and economic structures into the 1990s, shaping the environment for which social welfare would be addressed (Ruderer, 2022).

In the 1960s, progressive Catholics drew on humanist scholarship and aligned with the solidarity and independence movements in Latin America, seeking to end market colonialism and establish social justice. Following the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellín in 1968, Liberation Theology reframed the 'preferential option for the poor' as a call for structural change, lobbying for social reform and urging direct 'Catholic action' (Gutiérrez, 1973). Laypeople responded to the call by organising ecclesial base communities, enacting Liberation Theology through grassroots activism to tackle poverty and inequality (Díaz de Valdés, 2018). While Liberation Theology inspired progressive social movements, it also heightened tensions within the Church and broader society, with conservative and centrist Catholics opting for controlled reform over radical changes (Ruderer, 2022).

Ideological tensions spiked during the height of the Cold War in the 1960s. Centrist interpretations of Catholic Social Teaching gained political traction through the Christian Democratic Party, which sought to develop 'socialcristianismo', representing a 'third-way' between unbridled capitalism and communism. President Eduardo Frei Montalva, a centrist, launched 'Revolution in Liberty' reforms, which aimed to address structural inequality through state-led development. Frei's administration nationalised industries *via* Corporación de Fomento de la Producción (CORFO), Chile's economic development agency. The administration also redistributed land to address agrarian inequality and expanded cooperatives to promote socioeconomic inclusion. In these efforts, the Church was key in lobbying for cooperatives and other subsidiary-based reforms.

However, reforms went too far for 'third-way' Catholic politicians and business elites when President Salvador Allende, a secular Marxist elected in 1970, accelerated nationalising industry to fund social programs initiated by Frei. The economy spiralled downward as radical reform policies provoked resistance from all but the most progressive Catholics. Facing US sanctions and fearing secularisation and communism, the Christian Democratic Party assisted General Augusto Pinochet and the CIA in the coup d'état of the democratically elected Marxist government.² For third-way Catholics, democracy was a means to establish Catholic moral primacy, not an end in itself, and the military Junta was calculated as the lesser evil compared to communism (Mackin-Plankey, 2020). In 1973, General Augusto Pinochet overthrew Allende's government, marking a decisive rupture with Chile's reformist era. Pinochet's

military dictatorship redirected Chile towards neoliberalism, severed Catholic Social Teaching's influence on policymaking, and imposed authoritarian rule for the next 17 years.

While conservative Catholics aligned with the regime, the Church's progressive wing became increasingly vocal in its opposition to widespread human rights abuses, playing a pivotal role in supporting the persecuted and marginalised. The Vicariate of Solidarity, established by Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez in 1976, provided legal aid to victims, documented abuses, and supported grassroots mutual aid efforts, which would help revitalise the eventual return of Chile's social economy (Martín & de Benito, 2022). The Cardinal also commissioned the renowned Chilean economist Luis Razeto Migliaro to investigate how those living in extreme poverty survived the neoliberal dictatorship (Razeto Migliaro, 2011). Migliaro published his findings in *Popular Solidarity Economy*, which documented how poor communities organised around democratic governance and mutual aid, pulling resources for survival. The Chilean Episcopal Conference published the book and disseminated it throughout Latin America. The Cardinal later promoted it to Pope John Paul II in preparation for his 1987 visit to Chile (Razeto Migliaro, 2011), an event that served as a symbolic and moral catalyst for economic justice and reconciliation.

Pope John Paul II's 1987 speech provided the moral momentum for Chile's solidarity economy and galvanised international support for Chile's return to democracy. In his address, the Pope called for the integration of the social and economic priorities and to apply the 'dynamism and creativity of private enterprise' towards the common good (Paul, 1987). During the 1980s, the Church facilitated multi-party negotiations in transitioning to democracy, reinforcing Catholic Social Teaching's principles and the Pope's vision of an economy grounded in solidarity (Anonymous, 1985). These efforts set the stage for how the returning democratic government would address social welfare through entrepreneurship and for the emergence of a vibrant social sector addressing poverty and inequality.

Neoliberalism

The only way to end inflation in Chile is eliminating drastically the fiscal deficit, preferably reducing public spending [through] shock treatment [by] ... suppressing all restrictive measures that hamper the emergence of a strong and dynamic private sector.

- Milton Friedman per *El Mercurio*, 1975

'To make Chile not a nation of proletarians, but a nation of entrepreneurs.'

- General Pinochet per BBC News, 2001

The 'Chicago Boys', a group of Chilean economists trained by the University of Chicago School of Economics, advised Pinochet on dismantling Chile's 1973 welfare state and, in its place, constructing a free market economy, shaping Chile's political economy into the mid-1980s and beyond. Their proposals drew on *El Ladrillo* ('The Brick'), a 189-page neoliberal strategy document guided by principles of deregulation, privatisation, competition, and individual self-reliance (De Castro, 1992; Harberger, 2000). However, when the Chicago Boys were unable to lower inflation, Pinochet sought the counsel of Milton Friedman during his 1975 seminar tour in Chile. The looming light of free market economics counselled Pinochet to intensify neoliberalism, resulting in radical austerity policies that shifted social welfare

provision to the private sector, the Church, NGOs, and citizens (Edwards & Montes, 2020). Guided by *El Ladrillo* and Friedman's counsel, the Chicago Boys implemented the 'National Recovery Plan' in 1975. The plan prioritised inflation control, trade liberalisation, tariff reduction, and foreign investment. It also repurposed CORFO, the economic development agency, to lead the privatisation of state-owned industries (mining and utilities) (Taylor, 2013).

The neoliberal reforms created conditions in which low-income communities and pro-social organisations had to innovate as a means of survival and to address socioeconomic inequalities. The case of Villa La Concepción illustrates how neoliberalism affected marginalised citizens and how innovation emerged as a survival strategy. In 1984, the government revoked the community's land rights, prompting residents to organise a community-led housing initiative, supported by Taller Norte NGO. This initiative used micro-credit and a 'materials-and-tools bank' to incrementally construct housing through mutual aid. Under extreme neoliberalism, such settlements were accepted as normal as marginalised citizens were expected to be micro-entrepreneurs of their survival (Jordan, 1990).

Conservatives framed neoliberalism as a pathway to prosperity and individual freedom. This sentiment was captured by the Minister of Labour and Social Security, José Piñera, in his 1980 speech *Towards a Society of Owners*, where he linked the privatisation of social welfare to the expansion of personal liberty (Piñera, 2009). As the Chicago Boys returned to professorial posts in Chile's most prestigious universities, they forwarded a competitive epistemology that would shape future generations through education. Admiral José Toribio Merino captured the neoliberal dictatorship's competitive ethos when he declared, 'Let fall those who must fall. Such is the jungle of economic life' (Whyte, 2023). This worldview evolved into a dominant logic oriented towards efficiency and growth, values that would later be internalised by generations of politicians and private sector actors.

Neoliberalism's enduring influence in Chile was also embedded constitutionally. Jaime Guzmán, an alumnus of the Pontificiate Catholic University of Chile, drafted the 1980 constitution, which espoused a conservative reading of Catholic Social Teaching through the lens of neoliberalism. Guzmán invoked the principle of subsidiarity to justify limiting the role of the state while privileging market-based solutions. As a result, the Subsidiary State Act constitutionally prohibited the state from creating public enterprises (Jones & Lluch, 2015). As Guzmán proudly declared in a 1987 speech:

The defense of the autonomy of intermediate bodies and its immediate consequence, which is the principle of subsidiarity, has been extensively developed in recent years. Today, they are even part of the foundations of our constitutional framework and the main social and economic structures that have emerged since 1973. ... No one could justly deny that it was we, the gremialists of the Catholic University, who most decisively transformed them into part of Chile's current sociopolitical heritage (Guzmán, 1987).

The 1980 constitution recast the state as a guarantor of autonomy for 'intermediate bodies' rather than a direct provider of welfare. It was within this ideologically sanctioned void that social entrepreneurship emerged as a response to the state's constitutional withdrawal under the conservative interpretation of Catholic Social Teaching's subsidiarity principle.

In 1988, Chile transitioned to democracy, yet the constitution and neoliberal political economy remained firmly in place. Historical ideologies underscore contemporary tensions in social entrepreneurship, where actors navigate tensions between market mechanisms and community empowerment and localised autonomy, with the need for broader

structural support. The polarised legacies of neoliberalism and Catholic Social Teaching also manifest in ongoing debates over the perspective roles of the state or market in social welfare.

Emergence: entrepreneurship as a social welfare strategy, 1990-2010

The Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (1990–2010), a coalition of Catholic and socialist (centre and left-wing) political parties, led Chile's transition to democracy. The Christian Democratic Party provided the first two post-dictatorship presidents, beginning with President Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994), who commissioned the 1991 National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation to account for the dictator's abuses, representing an early step towards social accountability and solidarity.

Aylwin's second priority was to overcome the inherited 'social debt' of high unemployment (40%) and extreme poverty (Jones & Lluch, 2015); to this end, he launched the *Growth with Equity* platform, focusing on: (1) rebuilding democratic institutions within Guzman's constitution, (2) intensifying the neoliberal economic framework and (3) initiating targeted social reforms. However, the critical need for deeper structural change was constrained by the Concertación's economic growth priorities, its need to appease business elites, and debt payment obligations to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which reinforced fiscal austerity.

With the ideological background of Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberalism introduced, the following section examines how these foundational ideologies shaped the evolution of social entrepreneurship. We present our analysis through four case vignettes, two key government programs and two high-profile social entrepreneurs, illustrating dynamics in the sector's evolutionary phases of emergence and growth.

FOSIS

Help yourself, I will help you is the motto that inspires me when guiding the government's policy. We want to help everyone who is willing to lend a helping hand.

- President Patricio Aylwin, FOSIS creation ceremony speech, 1990

Amidst extreme poverty and international pressure, the Concertación government launched policies to create an entrepreneurial culture of innovation, productivity, and self-reliance. Growth with Equity would focus on wealth generation over wealth distribution (Taylor, 2013). Key to this initiative was Fondo de Solidaridad e Inversión Social (FOSIS), 'Solidarity and Social Investment Fund', designed to reduce poverty through entrepreneurship. In 1990, Law 18,989 officially created FOSIS and the Ministry of Planning, which Aylwin introduced in a public speech, 'Help yourself, I will help you'. Paradoxically, the program intended to 'create opportunities, foster competitiveness, promote individual autonomy and strengthen community bonds', setting the stage where competitiveness and individualism would exist alongside community solidarity (FOSIS, n.d.).

With the coffers depleted, the government addressed social welfare by creating entrepreneurial citizens, framing poverty as an individual's responsibility to be overcome through entrepreneurship. FOSIS offered a comprehensive suite of training programs: I am an Entrepreneur; I am an Entrepreneurship Seed Program; and I am an Entrepreneur Community Program (National

Congress Library of Chile, 2019). While Chile had a long history of grassroots social solidarity economy (cooperatives, mutual benefit, associations, and popular economy enterprises) (Giovannini et al., 2019), FOSIS represented a transition where entrepreneurship would be articulated as a strategic endeavour at the policy level to solve social problems at scale. It also represented a change in how the government would carry out programs by building collaborative public-private partnerships across all socio-political levels, including international.

FOSIS built on Chile's popular economy of necessity-driven micro-entrepreneurs (Tomei, 1996), the only social solidarity economy sector to grow during the dictatorship (Gaiger et al., 2019), as a base to inspire an ethos of self-reliance and solidarity. As an expression of Catholic Social Teaching, the program supported the most impoverished women in rural communities through 'technology transfer, microenterprise development, and basic infrastructure...and credit' (Tomei, 1996) to improve their businesses (e.g. vendors, rubbish collectors, artisans).

In stark contrast to the previous government's centralised control approach, FOSIS promoted collaboration in executing its vision. It was a 'functionally decentralised public service, whose purpose is to finance, in whole or in part...efficient programs and projects to solve poverty problems' by 'supporting the participation of those affected by poverty in solving their own problems' (National Congress Library of Chile, 1990). On the ground, it required public-private partnerships with NGOs, which brought critical field knowledge and strong ties with micro-entrepreneurs. The 'NGO was a type of institution very much based on the concept of solidarity and democratic struggle', as one director stated. However, this sentiment eventually evolved towards a market logic:

But later, it happened that the market ended up imposing itself. And finally, what was most valued was not solidarity, nor knowledge of the territory, nor the strengthening of collective action, but rather, what was most valued was the construction of the infrastructure, the technical aspect, and for that, there were other institutions that had more competition. This led to FOSIS as an institution being completely framed in the character that is developed in the market (Salazar, 2016).

The outsourcing of social welfare to individual micro-entrepreneurs, facilitated through public-private partnerships, was deemed an economic and social development success story. FOSIS was represented at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, showcasing how the entrepreneurship program was instrumental in reducing the poverty rate from 40% in 1990 to 27.6% (United Nations, 1995).

FOSIS represented a bold policy initiative, breaking from the autocracy's focus on centralised control and foreign direct investments in commodity industries to sharing decision-making with regional governments, private actors, and NGOs to foster low-tech 'entrepreneurship on the periphery' in order to overcome the 'social debt'. The creation of FOSIS was contingent on multiple factors: the democratic transition, debt repayment pressure, and a left-centre coalition where Catholic Social Teaching values co-existed with beliefs in market competitiveness, efficiency and individual agency. The program would sow the seed for Chile's approach to solving social problems through entrepreneurship, embedding the co-existence of solidarity and self-reliance, an approach which would eventually resurrect the social economy through associative and cooperative policy reforms.³

Techo

It is not our fault that the Son of God didn't have a proper place to be born ... but it is our responsibility that on his 2000 birthday everybody has such a place. 2000 houses were built already in 1999. So why not build the next 2000 houses in the year 2000...

- Felipe Berríos (Verdugo, n.d.).

Felipe Berríos is an entrepreneur who happens to be a Jesuit priest. He exemplifies the definition of an entrepreneur as 'one who pursues opportunities without regard for the resources currently at hand'. He has been able to leverage human and financial resources from the public and corporate sectors and has galvanised the media and the Chilean population to achieve social transformation...

- Schwab Foundation, Social Entrepreneur of the Year, Chile, 2005

During the democratic 1990 transition, the Church was a formidable and critically needed force in society. As a powerful historical institution, the Church had resources, expertise in organising, and an extensive network. Moreover, the progressive Jesuit order had an especially strong base of support and trust for being 'activists that do things more than say things' (interviewee A).

In 1997, after the Patagonia earthquake, Father Felipe Berríos, a Jesuit Priest, and a group of Catholic university students made a pilgrimage to help build Mediagus, emergency housing, for those in need (Frösén, 2013). Berríos employed the Jesuits' progressive interpretation of Catholic Social Teaching principles and strove to 'mix classes' between affluent university students and the marginalised Chileans they were helping (CNN Chile, 2014). For many students, service work represented an awakening akin to Prince Siddhartha Gautama first leaving the palace, as cofounder Sebastián Errázuriz expressed in an interview with Exchange the World:

We went there on a mission with a large group of engineering people from the Catholic university. We couldn't believe how these people lived. Our perception of the world changed completely that day. Earlier, we used to think, 'Oh, it is snowing, we may go skiing'. From that moment on, we asked ourselves, 'It's raining. How will the people in the slum do? What can we do for them?' (Exchange the World, 2020).

Observing the youths' energy and desire to serve and to create social change, Berríos formed Un TECHO Para Chile, 'A Roof for Chile' with early team members because 'universities did not have outreach centres, so students had no way to contribute to society. [Un TECHO Para Chile] filled that gap, particularly for students at the Pontifical Catholic University' (interviewee B). Berríos began mobilising student volunteers to build mediaguas, emergency 'slum' housing, throughout the year.

He believed in the power of young people. We were 18, 20, 23 years old, and he made us believe that we could change something, step by step. All we needed was faith in a vision and a good team of friends. ... [Berríos] motivated us to dream big. It started with the idea of building 100 houses for the poorest, we ended up announcing the construction of 2000 houses for the year 2000. It was 1997 (Exchange the World, 2020).

The organisation flourished on youth idealism, which it formalised through internal regulations: 'If you were over 30, your time was up. We rotated leadership roles every two years. What mattered was purpose, passion, and mission, not career advancement' (interviewee B). The

students' university education, volunteering experience, Catholic Social Teaching and passion for social change collectively made TECHO a success. They also triggered the 'TECHO generation' youth movement.

With ambitions to scale, they hired their first employee, Juan Pedro Pinochet, to serve as TECHO's Executive Director. He began by leading the 'Mediaguas en el 2000, Un Techo para Chile' project. Eleven years later, they operated 50 offices in 19 Latin American countries (BioBio, 2011). During those eleven years, the organisation went through successive stages of restructuring, increasingly becoming more formal and entrepreneurial. In 2001, they formalised as an NGO, rebranded as TECHO, and began working with the Inter-American Development Bank to expand throughout Latin America (Frösén, 2013). The business model minimised risk and maximised buy-in from grantors to beneficiaries. For example, 'residents paid 10% of the cost, and if they didn't have the money, they had to work for it' (interviewee B). Consequently, they scaled quickly and 'became the largest social real estate developer in the country, with over 100 housing projects' (interviewee B).

In 2006, TECHO transitioned from a charitable organisation constructing emergency housing to an intermediary in the government's housing program as an official 'Entidad Gestión Inmobiliaria Social' (Social Real Estate Management Entity) (interviewee B). In this role, TECHO was an enterprise fulfilling government procurement contracts to enrol slum residents in the government's subsidised housing.

In 2005, the Schwab Foundation awarded TECHO Social Enterprise of the Year, bringing international acclaim. Berríos used his public platform to challenge power holders and advocate for the poor. As the Schwab Foundation wrote in 2005:

Berríos is not afraid of open debate and is often seen on national television being interviewed on any number of economic, social and cultural topics. On many occasions, he has taken on the government when it failed to pursue anti-poverty policies, as well as the Catholic Church, which is dominant in Chile. Because of his ability to 'name and shame' in a loving and humorous manner, he has gained the respect of the populace, from the former slum dweller to the President of the country.

Fame also brought corporate sponsorships and helped put Chile's emerging social entrepreneurship sector on the map. This visibility soon attracted international actors such as Ashoka in 2009 and Sistema B in 2012 to set up offices in Santiago (Correa, 2019).

National and international legitimacy placed TECHO as the go-to organisation for emergency housing in Chile, so when the Maule earthquake (8.8 magnitude) occurred in 2010, TECHO responded. Chileans responded in solidarity, their traditional response to natural disasters, and mobilised crisis support resources (Bustamante et al., 2022). Mario Kreutzberger of 'La Teletón' motivated Chileans to donate 90 million USD for emergency housing. TECHO constructed 23,886 emergency homes (TECHO, 2011). Chile's plight of natural disasters makes recovery efforts an important (and ongoing) field for social entrepreneurship.

Although the state lacked the infrastructure to mobilise emergency support efficiently, it accused TECHO of expanding slum dwellings instead of solving the housing problem. The ideological divide regarding social welfare would be a constant power struggle between the two actors (interviewee B). Regardless, when the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited after the earthquake, President Pinera showcased TECHO (United Nations, 2010). Berríos used his celebrity position and famous wit to critique the government, yet despite playfully antagonising power holders, Berríos was embedded in the structure as a government intermediary with a business model dependent on government contracts.

While TECHO's ethos remained rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, as indicated in Berríos' interview with CNN Chile (2014), it was becoming increasingly secularised, enacting the 'preferential option for the poor' through entrepreneurship (e.g. procurement contracts and corporate sponsorships). TECHO's visibility and financially viable social mission began to shape 'how people saw the intersection of business and social impact' (interviewee A).

The 'TECHO generation' of elite youths became enthused about the possibilities of entrepreneurship for the collective good. As an early founding member of TECHO stated, 'this really started with this youth movement in these conversations, and then you're meeting the same people you know throughout these different experiences.... We started seeing that social change can occur in the private sector' (interviewee C). The movement of socially conscious, entrepreneurial youths would seed the emerging sector. As a previous Executive Director, shared, 'If all former TECHO volunteers were gathered today, where are they? Most of them are former PUC [Pontifical Catholic University of Chile] students who now hold important positions' (interviewee B).

The democratic transition's resurgence in social demands against a backdrop of Chile's Catholic heritage renewed space for the social sector to address social injustices. This era also saw the increasing secularisation of the social sector as the Church's direct influence waned, spurring a differentiated approach to social welfare provision and creating a vacuum to fill. While privatisation created a need for private actors to act, the state's support for entrepreneurship fostered how prosocial organisations would form as for-profit entities. Hence, this period marked the merging of morality and the market, where a neoliberal government drawing on Catholic Social Teaching (e.g. FOSIS) and a faith-based NGO (e.g. TECHO) both embraced entrepreneurship as a strategy for providing social welfare. As a result, the era set the stage for how ideologies underpinning social welfare provision shifted from Catholic Social Teaching to a hybrid with neoliberalism. This convergence of deeply embedded Catholic Social Teaching and the neoliberal turn towards entrepreneurial solutions created a fertile ground for the growth of social entrepreneurship.

Growth: social entrepreneurship as a social innovation strategy, 2010–2019

Start-up Chile

The state responded to the catastrophic Maule earthquake in February 2010 with entrepreneurship policies and programs. Newly elected billionaire business mogul and conservative Catholic, President Sebastián Piñera (2010–2014), promised Chile prosperity through his business acumen.⁴ Piñera envisioned an economy driven by entrepreneurship where Chile would reinvent itself and in which social welfare would 'ripple out' (as opposed to 'trickle down') through innovative entrepreneurs. This vision was reflected in his approach to natural disaster recovery. By August 2010, CORFO (economic development department) launched Start-Up Chile, designed to turn entrepreneurial ideas into viable ventures and spin out innovative, scalable solutions. Piñera directed the program to open the doors of Chile to the world's most ambitious entrepreneurial talent to transition Chile from a resource-based economy to a globally competitive innovation economy centred on entrepreneurship.

Private-sector entrepreneurial innovation significantly altered Chile's approach to social welfare and natural disaster recovery by introducing market-driven solutions. While CORFO was launched in response to the 1939 Chillán earthquake, its mandate was to develop domestic infrastructure and industry, which was far different from creating an

'entrepreneurial state' (Salvaj & Couyoumdjian, 2016). Likewise, the Christian Democratic Party used policy and programs to promote entrepreneurship in the 1990s through FOSIS. However, FOSIS was markedly different in that, through collaborative public-private partnerships, it sought to empower Chile's popular economy of marginalised micro-entrepreneurs through knowledge transfer and credit. Start-Up Chile's mandate was to instil an 'entrepreneurial mindset' in Chile by attracting international talent (interviewee D). In a September 2010 recruitment campaign at Stanford University, Juan Andrés Fontaine, Minister of Economy, introduced the program, stating, 'It's not something very tangible....What we are trying to [do] is to develop the innovation culture, and we think that creating this critical mass of people doing innovation in Chile is going to help in that direction' (Fontaine, 2010).

Innovation was key for Chile in how it would move forward and address its many social and economic challenges, with entrepreneurship serving as the government's chosen vehicle to foster it. As Fontaine shared with the Stanford entrepreneurs:

In my generation, we used to think that in order to change the world, you had to make a revolution, and all those experiences fail[ed]. But ... in this creation of a new way of managing Chile, a start-up for the nation, which has the orientation of actually a widening the room for people to innovate. So, to instead of changing the world through revolution, to change the world through innovation.

Essentially, driving innovation through entrepreneurship represented a strategy of using the market to crowdsource solutions; in effect, the social and economic development strategy represented a rippling out of value versus the dictatorship's trickle-down approach. Whereas the neoliberal-government maintained austerity in providing social welfare provisions, it fully committed resources to launch ambitious initiatives enabling entrepreneurial innovation.

Start-Up Chile was the world's largest government-run accelerator, and it put 'Chilean Valley' on the entrepreneurial ecosystem map (The Economist, 2012). Despite international acclaim, Chile continued to face unresolved social problems. In 2014, left-wing President Bachelet mandated that the world-renowned program show greater domestic social impact, prompting initiatives like a social service credit system that obligated entrepreneurs to provide community services such as educational talks. Seeding the nation with entrepreneurs mandated to provide public service lectures helped instil an entrepreneurial mindset across Chilean society. In turn, the awareness generated demand for differentiated programs, stimulated entrepreneurship research, university programs, and encouraged the growth of private-sector incubators serving both commercial and social ventures (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2012).

Between 2010 and 2015, social innovation through entrepreneurship started to gain traction with festivals such as FIIS (2013) and awards such as AVONNI, spurring further growth. Corporate sponsorships fuelled the fanfare of social entrepreneurship as a unique sector, blending values of solidarity with entrepreneurial ambition. This convergence attracted both social and commercial actors to collaborate around so-called 'win-win' ventures. To support the growing sector, CORFO Start-Up Chile launched the Subsidio Semilla de Asignación Flexible (SSAF) Social program in 2015 to 'foster innovation and address social challenges through [social] entrepreneurship' (CORFO, 2018). The program provided funding and support to social entrepreneurs focused on creating an impact related to Chile's priority areas, such as education and income generation. However, the fanfare swelled the program

with social entrepreneurs who had well-intended yet unrealistic social change promises. As a previous executive of Start-Up Chile, recalled, 'Social enterprises were funded by grants and awards but couldn't talk about the business... it was an "award-centric" rock-n-roll show between corporate sponsors and this nice new superhero...but no evidence to support claims' (interviewee D). Social entrepreneurship's narrative of social change aligned with Catholic Social Teaching's emphasis on direct action to address injustice. However, it clashed with neoliberalism's demand for investment-ready, quantifiable evidence. Concerns grew regarding social entrepreneurship as a 'fantasy' of overpromised change driven by hype rather than substantive outcomes.

The tension between 'doing good' and evidencing impact led CORFO and Universidad del Desarrollo to commission research into the social entrepreneurship sector. The resulting 2016 policy report found that the vibrant and growing sector remained immature in terms of accountability, investment, and collaboration (Muñoz et al., 2016). The report led to the 2018 redesign of the SSAF-Social program, which would require all social entrepreneurs to measure social impact. Social entrepreneurs and incubators were provided training and allocated funds to measure impact, creating a foundation for formalising the social entrepreneurship ecosystem (Kimmitt et al., 2021). Measurement indicators were based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting a shift towards global standards and evidence-based outcomes. The sector responded by becoming more 'business-centric' in practices and more 'realistic' in proposed solutions (interviewee D). Boards followed suit and began requiring accountability methodologies, promoting social impact measurement for performance and strategic decision-making purposes (interviewee E). The shift also marked a transition towards evidence-based policymaking in social entrepreneurship. The 2016 policy report fed into the government's policy framework for social entrepreneurship, leading to Chile's first social impact bond, which committed 50 million USD in 2018 to channel investment towards social enterprises with measurable impact (Cheyre, 2019).

Socialab

The rise of the 'TECHO generation' catalysed the emergence of social entrepreneurship, and Socialab played a key role in its growth. Socialab began as TECHO's Innovation Centre in 2010, which was operated by youths and guided by Father Felipe Berríos under the umbrella of the Society of Jesus. The purpose of the Innovation Centre was to create impact beyond housing and to lessen the costs associated with relying on any one organisation (interviewee A and interviewee B).

Building on its predecessor, Socialab marked the culmination of a new ethos in Chile's social entrepreneurship sector, where efficiency, evidence, and self-sustaining viability became the guiding values for pursuing solidarity for the common good. One of Socialab's co-founders drew on historical narratives to metaphorically convey this ethos:

We have this solidarity spirit, and we like to say that Chile, or this impact entrepreneurship, is a mixture of two worlds: Mother Teresa and Walmart. If you put it into a liquidator, that's what you get; it's the mixture of these two worlds.

Solidarity shifted from the mutual aid of sharing the 'olla común' common unity pot to private enterprise for social impact. As interviewee A said, 'We started to say, "Hey, we can generate impact directly from the private sector"'. This shift reflects the increasing integration of neoliberal market mechanisms with Chile's Catholic Social Teaching heritage.

Socialab believed that innovation and entrepreneurship were social in their impact, given the guardrails of lifting the nation out of poverty without damaging the environment. Based on the impulse to drive impact 'direct to market', Socialab launched in 2012. By 2013, it hosted 'open innovation' challenges with the belief that 'impact matters and should be driven by the best in their field', declared Co-founder Julián Ugarte (2016). Though on a smaller scale than Start-Up Chile, Socialab also used the market to accelerate innovation, using open calls to crowdsource solutions to societal problems. This model of applying innovation and competition to the common good led to the #101 Solution for Social and Impact Enterprise campaign in 2014, in which Socialab and partners facilitated crowd-sourcing solutions through a digital platform and presented the 101 best solutions to President Michel Bachelet. The Minister of Economy, Development and Tourism, Luis Felipe Céspedes, facilitated the public side of the partnership, expressing:

We are interested in public-private collaboration and because we are interested in supporting private initiatives that generate a positive social and environmental impact, that solve social problems and do so with economic profitability, contributing to the country's economy.

The 101-innovation campaign led to a working group developing government proposals (Ecología y Desarrollo, 2016; Innovación Económica, 2014; Palacios, 2014). Thus, social entrepreneurs directly consulted the government on developing policies to grow the sector.

Based on the guiding belief and organisational motto that 'the only way that we can overcome poverty is if it is a business, a good business for everyone', Socialab restructured from an NGO to a for-profit enterprise in 2016 (Interviewee A). Socialab's motive to restructure and its market logic for social innovation were expressed in the following:

The NGO mindset is very different from the enterprise mindset... if I don't work and I don't add value to my customers, they don't pay. And if they don't pay, I don't have money to pay my bills, and everything goes to hell. ... When our business depends on their business, you try to help them do business. ... So, I have to get something in return, the people that live in a precarious condition have to get something in return, and the government has to get something in return. (interviewee A).

Socialab's decision to restructure as a trading model obligated them to 'walk the talk' and embody their values by embracing the entrepreneurial risks and impact they advocated for (interviewee A).

That same year, Ugarte proposed the 'economy of love' at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) summit in New York on the premise that 'love can be more profitable than selfishness' (Ugarte, 2016). As with TECHO, Socialab would leverage its public platform to advocate for change, which led Ugarte to run for senator the following year, representing the Northern territory. In 2018, Socialab turned over nearly 1 million USD and scaled to serving in five Latin American countries (González, 2019; Revista Emprende, 2018).

Socialab's platform of love and entrepreneurship culminated in the ideological synthesis of Catholic Social Teachings and doctrinal principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, and the 'preferential option for the poor' with neoliberalism's innovation and market competition to scale change. The lab became essential in the social entrepreneurship ecosystem, facilitating collaboration and competition to foster a 'love economy' of social change. Socialab emerged from TECHO's Innovation Centre and from the 'TECHO generation' of youths who were called to solidarity during the Maule earthquake and immersed in Catholic Social Teachings connected to the Society of Jesus. This generation, shaped by the media spotlight on TECHO

and raised in a neoliberal economy, came of age as FOSIS and Start-Up Chile transformed the Chilean mindset into that of an entrepreneur.

In summary, post-dictatorship Chile represented a return to democracy that layered an entrepreneurship-driven neoliberal economic-growth model onto enduring Catholic Social Teachings and a history of social solidarity economy practices. Start-Up Chile extended FOSIS' 'I am an Entrepreneur' mindset across all sectors, including civil society. Start-Up Chile's SSAF-Social program and innovation hubs like Socialab furthered the synthesis of Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberal ideologies and formalisation of the sector. This led to the growth of prosocial venturing initiatives, solidifying social entrepreneurship as the driving force in Chile's approach to welfare provision.

Discussion

Chile presents a particularly compelling site of analysis for two main reasons. First, Chilean social entrepreneurs have been thrust into the central role in creating innovative solutions for complex social problems. Second, the country offers a rich institutional history shaped by ideological polarisation spanning religion, dictatorship, economic liberalisation, and social movements. As such, Chile provides a compelling empirical context for examining our research question: *how do ideologies shape the evolution of social entrepreneurship?* Our findings show that social entrepreneurship in Chile emerged through the historical layering and eventual synthesis of two distinct ideological traditions: Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberalism. Over time, these synthesised ideologies became sedimented in Chilean institutions, norms, and beliefs in how entrepreneurship would solve social problems.

We conceptualise this ideological synthesis through three distinct yet interrelated dimensions—*messianism*, *market orientation*, and *managerialism*—that collectively define how divergent ideological traditions cohere within Chilean social entrepreneurship. Messianism refers to the moralised and often sacrificial framing of entrepreneurial activity, rooted in the Church's tradition of duty and direct action. Market orientation captures the neoliberal belief that entrepreneurial activity is the most legitimate and effective mechanism for addressing social needs. And managerialism reflects neoliberalism's technocratic logic that structures how social entrepreneurship must evidence, measure, and scale its impact. Together, these dimensions provide a framework for understanding how historical ideologies shape social entrepreneurship as a model of social change that synthesises seemingly opposite ideologies.

For messianism, Catholic Social Teaching infuses the entrepreneurial figure with moral duty and solidarity, while neoliberalism reframes this figure through agency and self-reliance. TECHO demonstrates messianism by integrating Catholic moral discourse with market mechanisms. Felipe Berríos mobilised privileged youths (students) to serve the poor as a moral mission and scaled through volunteers, corporate sponsorship and government contracts. As TECHO's entrepreneurial saviour figure, Berríos used his platform of celebrity status and moral authority to advocate for social housing, while the government charged him for extending slum housing. Though his moral authority granted TECHO legitimacy, this same authority risked entrenching a paternalistic narrative of salvation where elite service substituted for structural reform. For the saviour, salvation is not collective or institutional; instead, it is achieved through an individual's passion, vision, and risk-taking, where a heroic intervention appears both morally necessary and economically rational.

The market dimension primarily evolved through conservative interpretations of the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, solving problems at the most local level, which resonated with the neoliberal distrust of the welfare state. This synthesis provided a moral justification for the state to recede further, framing entrepreneurship as the instrument through which solidarity is enacted, and the common good is pursued. FOSIS exemplifies this ideological synthesis as it emerged shortly after John Paul II's speech advocating the for a solidarity economy and under the Concertación's Catholic leadership. FOSIS' 'I am an Entrepreneur' program marked a shift by using entrepreneurship as a social welfare strategy aligned with subsidiarity and solidarity. Start-Up Chile further extended entrepreneurship as a social welfare and natural disaster recovery strategy and fostered an entrepreneurial mindset throughout the nation. Through programs like FOSIS and Start-up-Chile, entrepreneurship became increasingly embedded in Chile's social policy landscape, positioning (social) entrepreneurship as a means of virtuous and viable social welfare provision.

Managerialism reconciles moral aims with measurement tools, transforming the imperative to act for the common good into investment-ready performance metrics. This synthesis developed as the democratic Concertación escalated neoliberal policies, producing a highly competitive environment, requiring viable enterprises and evidence of social value. CORFO Start-Up Chile's SSAF-Social program institutionalised social impact measurement in 2018 as a condition for support, aiming to stimulate investment-ready, scalable social ventures trained in global accountability methods, transforming the once grassroots and youth movement into a professional sector. In parallel, Socialab restructured as B-corp 'Stistema B' and furthered the growth of the for-profit social sector by incubating 'impact entrepreneurs'. Socialab's 'economy of love' discourse exemplifies the ideological synthesis where 'preferential option for the poor' is demonstrated through measurement.

Contributions

The paper provides three key contributions regarding (1) how such historical approaches can enhance our understanding of social entrepreneurship; (2) how the phenomenon emerges within unique international contexts outside of the Global North and (3) our conceptual understanding of social entrepreneurship. Our historical analysis sheds light on the role historical ideologies played in shaping the evolution of social entrepreneurship through which we make our main contribution: conceptualising the ideological synthesis that occurred over time and its dimensions of messianism, market, and managerialism. Our conceptual framework provides a way for understanding both historical social entrepreneurship as well as being a resource for understanding how contemporary social entrepreneurship reflects its legacy of historical ideologies, especially for understanding why and how social entrepreneurship appeals to a broad base of ideological opposites. Thus, our contributions have implications for historical perspectives on the evolution of social entrepreneurship as well as for foundational and critical understandings of contemporary social entrepreneurship.

First, our study enriches the literature by showing that social entrepreneurship is a historically contingent outcome of contested religious, political and economic forces. By adopting a historical lens and tracing the ideological roots and institutional layering over sixty years, we surface how competing ideological traditions of Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberal market rationality ultimately synthesised into a seemingly coherent field. As a

result, social entrepreneurship can appear simultaneously secular and sacred, disruptive and conformist. This nuanced finding was made available through interpreting archival and oral history sources, providing an empirically grounded long-range understanding that would be unavailable through analysing slices of contemporary data (Lubinski et al., 2024); only through unravelling the complex historical story could we determine the critical aspects of both politics (Jarrodi et al., 2020; Lucas & Park, 2023) and religion (Spear, 2010) as ideological legacies shaping the field. In this regard, Chile's contentious and ideologically rich historical context provided an exemplary case for examining ideology's role in shaping social entrepreneurship.

To date, prior research has documented the evolution of the social entrepreneurship sector but has relied on shorter historical accounts (Maclean et al., 2025) and/or where the social enterprise sector is more formalised (Teasdale et al., 2023). More specifically, most research on ideologies focuses on the effect of the political economy on understanding how and why social enterprise evolves (Nicholls & Teasdale, 2017), but there are very few accounts of the role of culture and religion as determining institutional factors (Spear, 2010). Chile's historical background of ideological polarisation against a vibrant contemporary social entrepreneurship sector made for an empirically rich case study and adds to understanding how social entrepreneurship has evolved differently from prevailing explanations.

Second, we demonstrate the emergence of the social entrepreneurship phenomena within a particular emerging economy context where we can observe the moulding forces of ideologies within the state and other social institutions. In contrast to most Global North cases, often marked by stable welfare states, gradual policy reform, and institutionalised third sectors, Chile's trajectory reflects a postcolonial, post-authoritarian, religious and ideologically saturated environment where successive regimes embedded Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberalism into policy. The evolution of social entrepreneurship in Chile complicates perspectives concerning the sector as being a vehicle for neoliberal encroachment (Spicer et al., 2019), displacing the government's role in providing social welfare. While we appreciate this cautionary concern, such critiques often assume stable welfare regimes where the retreat of the state is politically motivated; they do not account for contexts where state capacity has historically been weak or ideologically fragmented. Rather than a story of displacement, the democratic government in Chile enabled the evolution of social entrepreneurship through policies and by working with the Church and NGOs as a strategy to provide social welfare within the extreme 'social debt' inherited from the dictatorship. Thus, Chile complexifies the Global North narratives (Muñoz et al., 2022), illustrating how social entrepreneurship evolves differently in volatile and ideologically dense contexts.

Lastly, our exploration of social entrepreneurship's ideological background contributes to literature conceptualising its role and purpose, including its contested definitions, normative camps and mythologies. We provide an empirical and historically informed explanation of its rootedness and synthesis in the ideological opposites of Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberalism, and its manifestation in messianism, market orientation, and managerialism, which we infer as the source of its continued provocation and persistence. Social entrepreneurship's durability stems from its capacity to absorb oppositional beliefs and value-laden tensions across moral, political and economic traditions, allowing it to appeal to a broad spectrum of philosophical norms (Ranville &

Barros, 2022). It is because of this historical synthesis of ideological opposites, tethered by tensions and interpretability, that social entrepreneurship persists as a cohesive narrative despite contestations.

This is significant for understanding the decades of debates and social entrepreneurship's elusive 'definitive' conceptualisation (Chliova et al., 2020; Dacin et al., 2010; Glasbeek et al., 2024). We provide empirical support for social entrepreneurship being a 'contested concept' (Choi & Majumdar, 2014), where definitional attempts are understood as expressions of normative beliefs (Ranville & Barros, 2022). In this regard, our study provides insights on how social entrepreneurship seemingly satisfies diverse political objectives and ideologies (Jarrodi et al., 2020) as the synthesis of progressive and conservative ideologies attracts adherents across political divides and better positions social entrepreneurship to secure institutional support while shielding itself from critique.

Social entrepreneurship also makes for a potent mythology with multiple readings ranging from the Trojan horse of neoliberalism (Spicer et al., 2019) and messianic hero (Dey & Steyaert, 2010) to being an ethical practice (Stephan et al., 2016) of social change. Building on what Dey and Lehner (2017) describe as a hedonistic social entrepreneurship journey, we trace the historical origins of this ideological mindset in the context of Chile. Through Catholic Social Teaching and its contemporary interpretation alongside neoliberalism, we see a messianic portrayal of the social entrepreneur, where social entrepreneurship is considered a transformative movement. The evolution of the social entrepreneurship in Chile highlights a sector underpinned by the promotion of individual saviours, an unrelenting belief in markets and a managerial cause-and-effect approach (Nibset et al. 2021) to address complex social problems. While valuable in directing an enterprise's moral mission and bringing attention to the sector, this 'gloss' may produce more charisma and passion than substantive change (Chalmers, 2021).

Limitations and future research

In this paper, we aimed to explore how social entrepreneurship evolved in Chile. This is an especially important topic because of an emerging critical discussion in social entrepreneurship research regarding how and why a particular version of social entrepreneurship has emerged globally. Our research context of Chile highlights an institutional story that brings together the role of religion, dictatorship, economic transformation, inequality, and natural disasters. We show how historical ideologies formed the basis for social entrepreneurship in Chile and how history is reflected through the manifestation of three dimensions: messianism, markets and managerialism.

Despite the contributions of this historical analysis, we are also mindful of the limitations which could simultaneously offer scope for future research. First, we offer a single historical institutional story from the Latin American context of Chile. Whilst this has unearthed several complex layers of social entrepreneurship, only elements of this are likely relevant for understanding social entrepreneurship evolution elsewhere. As a counter approach, it would be interesting to understand social entrepreneurship contexts where it may be present but less conceptualised. Likewise, a welfare conventions approach would be particularly interesting

to understand the historical trajectories of how social entrepreneurs make sense of social problems (Chiapello & Knoll, 2020).

Conclusion

In this paper, we ask: *How do ideologies shape the evolution of the social entrepreneurship sector in Chile?* Based on a historical analysis of Chile from 1960 to 2020, our findings highlight how historical layering from two ideological traditions helped shape the social entrepreneurship sector. These ideologies helped mould the institutions and beliefs in social entrepreneurship we see today. We conceptualise this through three connected dimensions of messianism, markets, and managerialism. The Chilean story offers a glimpse into how a historical lens can illuminate our understanding of social entrepreneurship as a concept.

Notes

1. Museum of Memory and Human Rights: <https://mmdh.cl>.
2. Frie would later apologize.
3. Several laws relevant to the social entrepreneurship were enacted between 1990 and 2010, e.g. 1993 Indigenous Law; 1994 Community Association from reinstated; 2004 General; 2008 Law on Transparency and Access to Public Information.
4. The first conservative government since Pinochet.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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