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Necessity Social Enterprises: Community Resilience Strategies of "Kitchen Rebellions"

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship out of economic necessity—sometimes combined with addressing social and environmental challenges—is attracting growing attention. However, welfare states show a phenomenon unaccounted for in both necessity and social entrepreneurship literatures, conceptualized here as necessity social enterprise. We collect ethnographic data from individuals starting a social venture ("from their kitchen") driven by problems in the private sphere. We show how over time the emphasis of these ventures moves from necessity to social transformation at the community level. Our abductive analysis suggests that they enact rebellious sentiments to fulfil self-actualization needs and develop specific strategies for community resilience. We develop a framework capturing these dimensions and discuss community resilience strategies at individual, organizational and community levels.

1 | Introduction

Social entrepreneurship (SE) as a practice and as an academic field of inquiry has gained significant momentum, specifically as means to deliver positive outcomes within the spheres of employment, equality, environment, and well-being (Wejesiri et al. 2025). It is generally acknowledged that the term "social enterprise" encompasses a wide variety of ventures rooted in the principles of collective social action which offer solutions to social and environmental issues (Mair 2020). Studies of SE generally emphasize *opportunity recognition* as the main driving factor for its inception (Anand et al. 2021; Cohen and Winn 2007; Dufays and Huybrechts 2014; Shaw and Carter 2007); as a result, most policy efforts tend to support so-called opportunity entrepreneurs—those who choose to launch a venture after seeing its market potential. Nonetheless, opportunity recognition is only one motive driving social entrepreneurs.

The predominant focus on successful opportunity-driven entrepreneurs has in part overshadowed the understanding of *necessity* entrepreneurs—those who pursue entrepreneurship due to the belief that they lack access to viable or desirable livelihood alternatives (Dencker et al. 2021). Most literature on necessity entrepreneurship (NE) has primarily emphasized the adverse factors that push individuals into entrepreneurship, rather than their development and positive outcomes (O'Donnell et al. 2024). This has contributed to a perception of necessity entrepreneurs as lacking the entrepreneurial qualities to deliver sizable social impact (Bacq et al. 2025). In contrast, opportunity-driven entrepreneurs are often perceived as possessing the skills, resources, and motivation needed to drive change through SE. To expand these views, we draw inspiration from the ongoing debate on sustainability-oriented innovations. Although such innovations are often perceived as unattainable for small and medium enterprises due to resource and expertise constraints, this view has been increasingly questioned by qualitative studies (Rodgers 2010) and theoretical research (Wu 2017) which suggest that even small-scale enterprises can successfully implement societal change practices. In a similar spirit, our study aims to contribute to this discussion by highlighting how necessity entrepreneurs can drive meaningful innovation for communities.

Despite the well-established importance of context in SE (Martin et al. 2019; Saebi et al. 2019; Shantz and McMullen 2024; Sutter et al. 2019; Van Wijk et al. 2019), the relationship between necessity drivers and social outcomes has remained underexplored. Yet, it seems intuitive that conditions such as low living standards, limited government support, increased privatization, and reduced public funding for essential services will drive individuals in necessity conditions to launch ventures addressing unmet social needs (Haldar 2019). Building on this insight, we contribute to qualitative research that challenges the assumption that necessity and social engagement are mutually exclusive, instead suggesting that the two dimensions can, and often do, co-exist (see de Vries et al. 2020; Kautonen and Palmroos 2010). For instance, necessity-driven entrepreneurship has been shown to contribute to recovery from economic crises (Fossen 2020; Liñán and Jaén 2020) and to urban regeneration (Williams and Williams 2014). Consequently, it is essential to reconsider the potential of necessity entrepreneurs to lead ventures that deliver social impact within their communities, and in economies more widely, as noted by the (OECD/European Union 2023) in their recent "Missing Entrepreneurs" report. This calls for advancing extant literature, which has largely reduced the endeavors of necessity entrepreneurs to small-scale and/or short-lived activities (Andersson 2018; Venâncio and Pinto 2020).

Against this background, this paper explores whether, and if so, how necessity and addressing social problems can go hand-in-hand in ventures which we conceptualize as necessity social enterprises (NSEs). It seeks to answer two research questions: (RQ1) How and why do people in necessity conditions start social enterprises? (RQ2) How do people in necessity address social issues in their entrepreneurial efforts? To this end, our study provides an ethnographic account of how necessity-driven ideas have the potential to become income-generation ventures that might support transformative change. In doing so, it responds to calls for more fine-grained research on SE beyond opportunity (Littlewood and Khan 2018) and NE beyond profit-making (Coffman and Sunny 2021; Dencker et al. 2021; O'Donnell et al. 2020).

In this study we describe the drivers, strategies, and transformative change elements of individuals who launched a venture because they had no better or available options. We show how necessity drivers shape enterprises that provide embedded, empowering local solutions. To explain how this process unfolds we draw from the community resilience and transformative change literatures. As all studied NSEs are food-related and started in the entrepreneurs' kitchens, we label them "kitchen rebellions".

2 | Literature Review

2.1 | Necessity Enterprise

The idea of necessity enterprise was first used to conceptualize the efforts of entrepreneurs during the economic crisis of the early 2000s (Bergmann and Sternberg 2007; Dencker et al. 2021; Reynolds et al. 2005). It comprises entrepreneurship in developed countries by individuals who engage in entrepreneurship out of a belief that decent or desirable livelihood alternatives do not exist for them (O'Donnell et al. 2024). Generally, necessity entrepreneurs are regarded as opposite to opportunity entrepreneurs and assumed to engage in distinctive processes. For example, whilst social capital is a main driver for opportunity enterprise, long periods of unemployment are said to induce NE (Nikiforou et al. 2019; Unger et al. 2011).

Quantitative research on NE is often quite critical about its impact on economic growth (Poh et al. 2005; Stoica et al. 2020) and contribution to sustainable development (Venâncio and Pinto 2020). These studies tend to use relatively stereotypical characterizations for the necessity entrepreneur such as "the escapee from unemployment," "the refugee" or "the shopkeeper." Qualitative studies have tried to add nuances by explaining how individuals from disadvantaged groups overcome shortcomings and create profit-making ventures "against all odds" (Li et al. 2020). Publications have paid attention to inter alia illegal immigrants in conflict border zones (Pisani et al. 2017), refugees (Jiang et al. 2021; Zighan 2020), older people (Garcia-Lorenzo et al. 2020), young people (Dvouletý et al. 2018; Simón-Moya et al. 2016), and women (Jafari-Sadeghi 2020), also in conflict zones (Althalathini et al. 2020).

Much of the literature associates NE to for-profit ventures (Stoica et al. 2020) and highlights that necessity entrepreneurs can achieve success by building on "tried and tested" business ideas (Fossen 2020; Shantz et al. 2018). However, some scholars have taken a more expansive view, exploring how innovative, "non-replication" business ideas emerge and thrive in NE. (Dencker et al. 2021). Even when these ventures generate modest profits initially, they can inspire further innovation, leading to broader social and economic impact (Alvarez and Barney 2014; Nikiforou et al. 2019). For instance, some scholars have linked NE to social impact such as the nonprofit sector (Andersson 2018) and the empowerment of women (Sendra-Pons et al. 2021).

The predominant focus on for-profit NE may stem from the reliance on statistical data from sources like Eurostat and the Global Enterprise Monitor (Amorós et al. 2019; Figueroa-Armijos et al. 2012; Li et al. 2020; Xavier-Oliveira et al. 2015). Although these studies have highlighted the role of NE in aiding recession recovery, particularly in fragile state contexts (Amorós et al. 2019), they largely overlook two important aspects: The processes necessity entrepreneurs use to grow their ventures and the potential for transformative change in communities.

Although much of the literature has focused on its antecedents rather than its processes and outcomes (Arrighetti et al. 2016; Dencker et al. 2021; Van der Zwan et al. 2016), it has often framed necessity and opportunity as mutually exclusive paths, with little room for intersection (Baptista et al. 2014; Simón-Moya et al. 2016). However, a growing body of research challenges this dichotomy, encouraging the exploration diversity and nuance rather than binary oppositions. This emerging perspective advocates for a closer examination of the cognitive processes, socio-economic contexts and institutional influences that shape NE (Bacq et al. 2025). In this study, we align with scholars (Coffman and Sunny 2021; Dencker et al. 2021; De Vries, Liebregts, and van Stel 2020;

Kautonen and Palmroos 2010; O'Donnell et al. 2020; Williams and Williams 2014) who argue that necessity entrepreneurs possess the entrepreneurial capabilities to generate meaningful social impact. Encouraged by evidence on high survival rates of NE in the for-profit sector (Dencker et al. 2009), the contributions of NE to crisis recovery (Dvouletý et al. 2018; Fossen 2020; Liñán and Jaén 2020) and urban regeneration (Williams and Williams 2014), we propose avenues to examine how NEs pursue social goals. Given the dearth of fine-grained and processual understanding of NE, in particular those that lead to social impact, we combine insights from the SE and community resilience literatures to describe NSE as a means to pursuing "decent and desirable" work (Andersson 2018; O'Donnell et al. 2024).

2.2 | Social Enterprise

Over the past 30 years, interest in social enterprise as a mechanism for addressing societal issues has grown significantly (Hietschold et al. 2019; Mair 2020; Tortia et al. 2020; Van Wijk et al. 2019; Waddock and Post 1991). SEs generally apply business principles with a focus on mission and intention (Dacin et al. 2010; Mair and Noboa 2006; Miller et al. 2012). These studies generally emphasize opportunity recognition, often guided by moral principles (Hemingway 2005; Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2018), as the main driving force (Anand et al. 2021; Dufays and Huybrechts 2014; Shaw and Carter 2007). Although some social entrepreneurs are primarily driven by morality, it is important to recognize that moral convictions, though well-intentioned, can also introduce challenges (Tucker et al. 2019). Research suggests that a strong moral drive may sometimes lead to increased stress and lower life satisfaction (Kibler et al. 2019) or foster a sense of entitlement (McMullen and Bergman Jr. 2017).

The link between SE and morality is thus problematic. Hence, a broader perspective is needed to acknowledge a more nuanced view of entrepreneurship, one that is more complexity-sensitive (Bacq et al. 2023; Keim et al. 2024; Weiss et al. 2023) and pragmatic (Certo and Miller 2008; Hota et al. 2020; Tracey and Jarvis 2007; Tracey and Phillips 2007; Zahra et al. 2009). According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, for example, 24% of Dutch entrepreneurs—our empirical context—reported being motivated to start a business to earn a living or due to scarce employment opportunities (De Kok, Van der Zeijden, et al. 2020). This percentage rises to 38% among SEs, where addressing a problem in the private sphere was identified as a primary motivating factor of founders (Social Enterprise NL 2019). Increasingly, we are gaining insights into these motivating factors, particularly the identification of social entrepreneurs with specific vulnerable groups. Recent data from the Netherlands show that 29.1% of social entrepreneurs identify with individuals from low-income or financially vulnerable backgrounds, 19.6% with those from migration backgrounds, 18.9% with disabilities, and 12.8% with refugees or asylum seekers (Social Enterprise NL 2024).

It stands to reason that these entrepreneurs seek to create change that extends beyond their livelihoods, whilst also influencing not only the social issue at hand. Since neither the SE nor the NE literature fully explains these dynamics, our study draws on the concept of community resilience.

2.3 | Transformative Change Through Community Resilience

Entrepreneurs in resource-limited contexts contribute to the broader economy not only through employment or financial support but also by becoming mentors and community leaders (Narayan et al. 2009; Sridharan et al. 2014; Tobias et al. 2013; Viswanathan and Venugopal 2015). The concept of community resilience helps explain how enterprises in resource-limited contexts become drivers of positive change within their communities (Morrison et al. 2017). Rather than focusing solely on individual elements, community resilience emphasizes collective well-being, adaptation, and the capacity for learning in the face of challenges. Communities, particularly those with limited resources, become resilient by responding to changing environments through self-organization, collaboration, and interactions between the individual and the group (Adger et al. 2005). These interactions collectively bring about a distinct form of community resilience shaped by the recognition of the need for change, confidence in its feasibility and benefits, willingness to adapt, access to resources, and the capacity to overcome external challenges (Brown and Westaway 2011).

In this context, communities are not just passive beneficiaries of entrepreneurial action but can also take on the role of active social change agents, driving entrepreneurship themselves (Bacq et al. 2022). In this collaborative approach, transformative change is achieved through active participation (Lumpkin and Bacq 2019; Morrison et al. 2017; Sonnino and Griggs-Trevarthen 2013).

3 | Methodology

3.1 | Empirical Setting

We scrutinize the emergence and evolution of three NSEs, analyzing their biographies to reveal the drivers and social impact indicators underpinning their potential for transformative change within urban areas of the Netherlands. This context, the Netherlands, a well-established welfare state, faces challenges particularly concerning the "precariat" and "uncertain employment" groups (SCP 2021). Despite ranking high in the EU for health and wellbeing, concerns linger over subjective wellbeing and mental health (CBS 2023), brought to light by relatively high suicide rates. Inequality, household debt, and the risk of poverty are also pressing issues.

3.2 | Research Design

We took a qualitative case study approach with purposely selected cases to allow contrasting insights to emerge and study the phenomenon as it developed (Suddaby et al. 2016). More specifically, and due to the lack of extant research on NSE, we adopted an abductive reasoning approach. This approach is seen as a preferred method for conceiving ideas that may explain

TABLE 1 | Characteristics of the informants and NSE information.

Case	Gender	Education	Dependents	Age	Necessity driver
1. Vegan baking	F	Higher continued education	Two daughters	57	Severely disabled young person
	F	Higher education	Cares for her sister	25	
2. Meals for schools	F	Higher continued education	Three young children	35	Young person with long-term health issues
3. Food foraging	M	Higher education	None	67	Unemployed older person

complex and uncertain phenomena through systematic combining of empirics and existing models. A main characteristic is a reiterative process of converting observations into theories and then assessing these theories through action (Dubois and Gadde 2002; Kistruck and Slade Shantz 2021).

Our approach refines existing theories, collecting ethnographic data to explore transformative indicators in the NSE phenomenon through biographies. These types of biographies offer a main theoretical advantage (Chandra and Shang 2017; Martin et al. 2019) they "complicate" the subject, revealing the social structural influences on the subject's life, opportunities for agency, and the successes and failures of the subject to change their world (Lawrence et al. 2011, 55). The interview protocol captured the complex relations between the individuals and their context. Informants were shielded from concepts irrelevant to them. As NSE is an understudied phenomenon rooted in individual circumstances and real-life interactions, ethnographic data were collected through participant and nonparticipant observations. Our ethnographic data collection protocol focused on collecting contrasting sources to confirm or refute interview data (Vom Lehn 2019). Ethnographic data were used to achieve a more nuanced representation of the NSE phenomenon. Participant and nonparticipant observations aimed at capturing the essence of contextual interactions, as personal views may not be triggered by interview questions only. Our observations particularly focused on discovering instances where processes vary and co-occur (i.e., though reformulation, second thoughts, and/or spontaneous contradictions) (Ayala and Koch 2019).

3.3 | Sampling Procedure

Our sampling procedure addressed challenges in accessing data on NE through a structured, multi-phase approach. Between January and March 2019, we conducted preliminary interviews with 11 institutional actors, which helped identify potential informants. We then interviewed 29 social entrepreneurs who, in the view of these institutional actors, could meet a NE criteria—individuals who had founded their ventures due to a lack of alternative employment options. We then conducted further interviews to assess their operations and willingness to participate in the study. Some cases were not included because the informants were unwilling to take part in an ethnographic study. To ensure focus on sustainable cases, we selected three ventures that met specific criteria: they had been operational for at least three years, generated income, even if modest, and remained engaged after the COVID-19 crisis, reflecting a level of resilience and relevance in their communities. This approach allowed us to exclude cases lacking long-term viability and increase the reliability of the data collected. The characteristics of the selected ventures are summarized in Table 1.

3.4 | Data Collection

Data collection spanned March 2019 and February 2020. In the initial phase (March–July 2019), the first author conducted 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with founders, face-to-face, lasting 50–90 min each, to inform a venture biography for each and to obtain insight into the successes enjoyed and the challenges faced. In order to facilitate communication, the interviews and interactions were conducted in the respondents' preferred language: Dutch or English (languages sufficiently mastered by all three authors).

Additional rounds of ethnographic data collection took place between March 2019 and February 2020. The first author observed internal meetings, volunteered at events, and witnessed client negotiations. Data were also gathered from internal communication channels (WhatsApp and Slack) and social media (Facebook and LinkedIn). Secondary sources included video footage, internal and external documents (see Table 2). The venture biographies can be found in Table 3.

3.5 | Data Analysis

The analysis employed an abductive approach, moving between framework, data sources, and analysis (Dubois and Gadde 2002). Through the process of systematic combining, we developed the new theoretical framework. The abductive logic of this research implies that theory was confronted with the empirics to generate a valid exploration of the empirical material. Case narratives were constructed to untangle variables, problematize data, and confirm interpretations (Alvesson and Sandberg 2011).

Stage 1 involved generating an interpretative understanding from primary and secondary data focusing on SE literature. In *Stage 2*, empirical material underwent in-depth analysis through NVivo software coding (QSR International), allowing for multi-level analysis. We used systematic data coding and extracted patterns from the data using SE, NE, and transformative enterprise literatures. Examples of these codes are: (1) *NSE inception*: human capital, needs, rebellion, self-devised solutions,

TABLE 2 | Overview of the data.

Data source	Vegan bakery	Healthy meals	Food foraging
Primary data			
Interviews (I)	4 interviews with 2 individuals (219 min)	3 interviews with 1 individual (185 min)	3 interviews with 1 individual (217 min) 1 page of follow-up emails by the informant
Field notes (FN)	3 pages of field notes from participant observations	3 pages of field notes from nonparticipant observations	6 pages of field notes from participant observations
Secondary data			
Video footage (VF)	Educational videos documenting the work in the kitchen. 5 videos (5 min average each)		Project video documenting an event (26 min)
Internal documents (ID)	54 pages of internal documents (reports to social care, impact measuring interviews, client feedback and marketing emails) NSE website	6 pages of marketing documentation. 33 pages of business plan documentation	47 pages of internal documents (meeting minutes, reports to funders, planning documents, business plans and marketing emails). NSE website
Internal communication channels (ICC)	Participation in the NSE internal communication channel (Slack). Transcripts of relevant entries		Participation in the NSE internal communication channel (Whatsapp). Transcripts of relevant entries
External documents (ED)	4 pages of archival documents (participant call-outs, local press articles)	5 pages of archival information on the funder's website	3 pages of archival information on external support agencies' websites and local press articles
Social media channels		The informants personal Facebook profile and business page. Transcripts of relevant entries	The informants personal Facebook profile and business page. Transcripts of relevant entries
Publications (P)			Food foraging and conservation guide published by the informants.

system deficiencies, undesired dependency on social welfare; (2) *NSE evolution*: problem solving, uniqueness of venture, locality; (3) *transformative change*: family, financing, fraternity, locality, emancipation, learning new skills, life circumstances, network.

Stage 3 involved critical interpretation, problematizing initial coding and adding a repertoire grounded in community resilience literature. At this stage, we deliberately sought to challenge and refine the assumptions made in the previous stages by

TABLE 3 | Case descriptions and venture biographies.

Case 1. Vegan baking
Founded in 2011. Catering venture specializing in vegan baking
Founded by a mother and daughter team who care for their severely disabled daughter/sister in need of 24-h care. The daughter/sister (now in her 20's) was one of the first severely disabled children in the Netherlands to attend a mainstream primary school. They now employ a team of freelancers and work in the kitchen attending orders. The salaries of both the freelancers and the mother-daughter team are covered by the carers allowance. The venture operates from the family kitchen and has an active client base of private and corporate clients.
First conceived as a home education project. In 2000 the mother gave up her job to look after her daughter. The father and daughter actively joined the home education project after the father sold his business and the daughter finished her theatre studies at university. Given the family's environmental concerns and their daughter's interest in food-related activities, most of their home education activities revolved around work in the kitchen. In 2011 they set-up a charity and formalized their status. The team cooked and delivered meals and vegan cakes to the local Salvation Army Centre located next door to their family home. The Salvation Army covered the costs of the ingredients. Gradually, the family started delivering orders from other clients from their family kitchen.
During the Covid-19 pandemic, the venture shifted its focus from catering to home education and is now working to establish a living cooperative for young adults with disabilities.
Case 2. Meals for schools
Founded in 2010. Catering venture specializing in healthy meals for schools.
The founder started the venture when in receipt of long-term sickness benefits. In 2012, the founder won a national prize for entrepreneurs in disadvantage. The venture employs family members and a team of four volunteers. It operates from a professional kitchen in the city outskirts and has an active client base of schools and charities.
The venture operates in a deprived neighbourhood, where the founder was born and resides to this day.
Through her work as assistant school principal, the founder witnessed the impact of racial inequality. In order to provide additional support to children from disadvantaged families, she volunteered as cook for in out-of-school arts and music activities. The venture developed gradually from this voluntary work after the founder faced severe pregnancy complications which resulted in long-term health issues. Since 2015 the venture caters for local schools and after-school clubs, sometimes in collaboration with social care providers.
The founder has since received a substantial payout from the *Toeslagenaffaire*[a], which she plans to reinvest in a new building offering mental health and development support for families in the neighbourhood.
Case 3. Food foraging
Founded in 2013. Venture specializing in delivering workshops in food foraging
The venture was initially co-led by two keen food foragers and food bank users teaching other food bank users about all the free food that can be found the city.
Between 2015 and 2019 the venture was run as a non-profit providing free food preservation workshops for other food bank users and people receiving benefits, with some financial support from small local funders.
The lessons from these workshops were published in a book in 2018.
After one of the founders left, the venture continued under the leadership of the other founder.
The venture was granted a € 15,000 national charity donation in 2019 to develop a social enterprise business model. It now runs a weekly pop-up restaurant in the city centre and works with a team between 15 and 20 volunteers, some of them are also food bank clients. The venture operates from kitchens in community centres across town and also from the founder's home kitchen.
During the Covid-19 pandemic, the venture adapted by continuing to cook and offering takeaway meals made from foraged ingredients, while the pop-up restaurant remained closed. Post-pandemic, the takeaway meal program continues, and the venture has expanded to include a marketing employee. In early 2023 the founder announced their intention to step down as director, prompting the creation of a task group to facilitate the transition. After a thorough selection process, a new director was appointed in February 2025.

[a](Dutch: Toeslagenaffaire) Scandal in the Netherlands involving the country's tax authority. Thousands of families were falsely accused of fraudulently claiming childcare benefits between 2013 and 2019. These accusations were based on flawed computer algorithms that flagged families, particularly those from lower-income and immigrant backgrounds, as fraudulent even if they had not committed any wrongdoing. As a result, many families were forced to repay significant amounts of money, often leading to financial ruin, emotional distress, and family separations. Our informant was one of those wrongly accused.

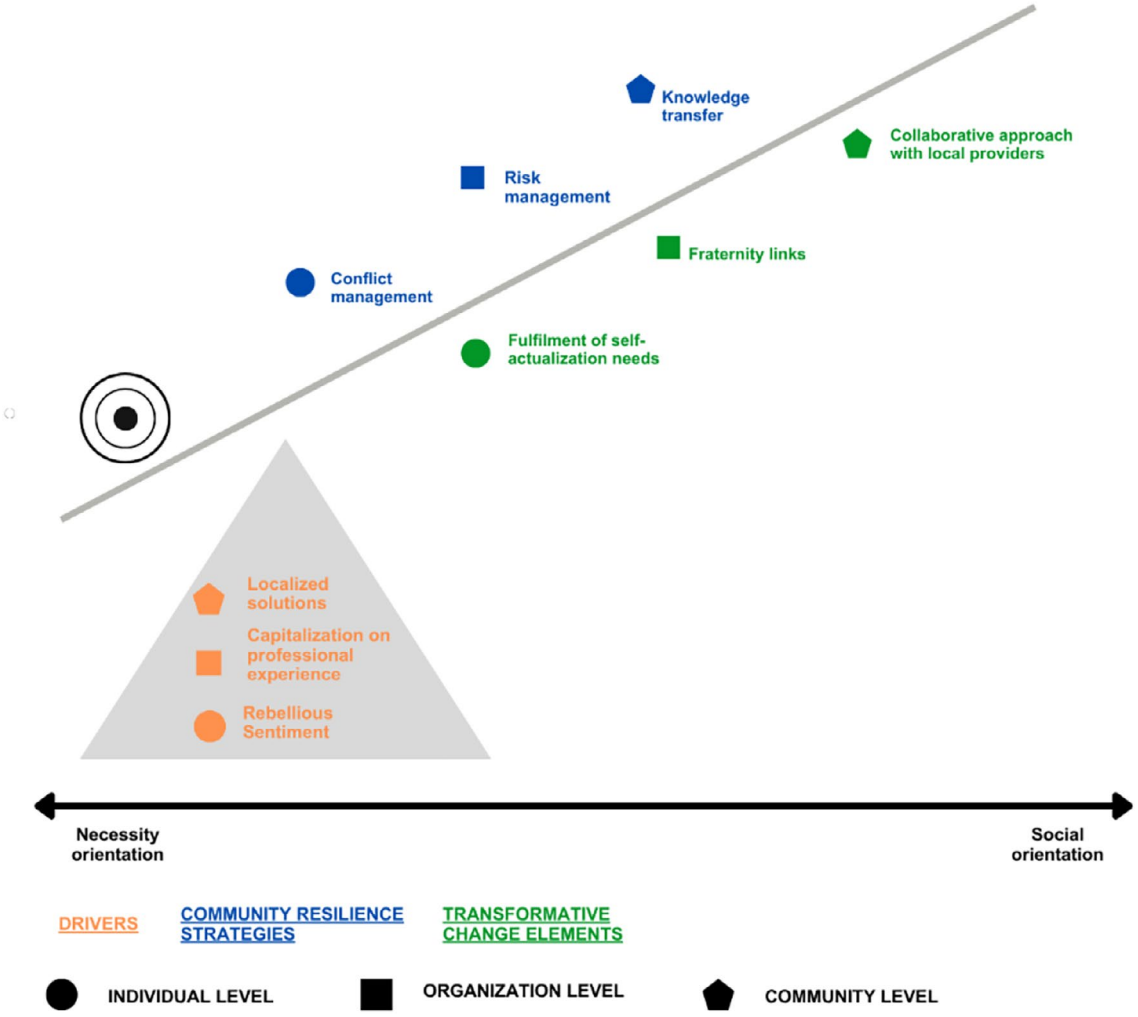

FIGURE 1 | Toward transformative change in necessity social enterprise.

adopting a more critical lens, exploring potential contradictions, ambiguities, and overlooked dimensions of the data.

Through iterative comparison and triangulation of primary and secondary data, the analysis aimed to identify underlying mechanisms, reveal discrepancies, and construct a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between necessity drivers and transformative elements. Cross-referencing interviews, observations, and documentary sources was instrumental in tracing venture development over time and in detecting inconsistencies between reported perspectives and actual practices. This approach helped reveal dynamics that were not always explicitly mentioned in interviews or documented in written sources. This critical interpretation illuminated the feedback loops and dynamics at play within NE, which led to potential transformative change. The final model incorporates three levels of analysis: individual, organization, and community, which offers practical insights into how NEs can achieve transformative change in their communities.

4 | Findings

Below we analyse the conditions under which people in necessity increasingly aim for positive change over time in their entrepreneurial efforts. We explore how initial drivers, such as rebellious sentiments and professional experience, contribute to the development of localized solutions. More broadly, we examine the role of community resilience strategies in shaping their entrepreneurial journey. Furthermore, we assess how risk management, knowledge transfer, and fraternity links facilitate a transition from necessity-driven enterprises toward socially impactful ventures. The findings are synthesized in Figure 1.

4.1 | Drivers for NSE

4.1.1 | Individual Level: Rebellious Sentiment

The founders speak of their desire to reject conventional paths which have led to their adverse personal circumstances: unemployment, poverty, personal debt, and lack of personal assets (Supporting Information: Appendix A.1a, A.4, A.5). Our informants recall being driven by a rebellious sentiment when they call to mind founding their ventures. Issues such as the racial achievement gap in schools, deficiencies in government care policies for disabled young people, and disempowerment of people with mental health issues are present throughout the informants' recollection of the venture biography (Supporting

Information: Appendix A.1b). This sentiment persists from inception to evolution stage and permeates interactions with internal and external stakeholders.

4.1.2 | Organization Level: Capitalization on Professional Experience

The founders of the vegan baking and the meals for schools NSEs had worked in education as a music teacher and assistant to the director, respectively. The founder of the food foraging NSE had worked as a mental health consultant. They were forced into unemployment as a result of an economic downturn, severe health issues, and/or caring responsibilities. Their past professional experiences were leveraged to gather resources (secure seed funding, premises and municipality support) and shape their value proposition (Supporting Information: Appendix A.2).

4.1.3 | Community Level: Localized Solutions

ounders describe the unexpected nature of their entrepreneurial journey, which began in their home kitchens, as enactment of their rebellious sentiment. Although their ventures were not immediately profitable, they received positive feedback from a small group of local community members, some of whom they knew well. Over time, they became integrated into the community through a "shared fate" relationship with their beneficiaries (Supporting Information: Appendix A.3).

4.2 | Community Resilience Strategies in NSE

The interview data and observations suggest a correlation between rebellious sentiment and frustrating interactions with institutions (Supporting Information: Appendix B.4a and B.4b). For example, the informant for the meals for schools NSE offers detailed insights into the frustration experienced after securing a municipality start-up subsidy for a community center. Despite months of negotiations, the plan failed to materialize, and the subsidy was instead allocated to fund their professional kitchen thereby limiting their potential for transformative change in the community. Our data hint at the difficulty in reconciling policy priorities with the bottom-up localized solutions offered by NSEs (Supporting Information: Appendix B.4c).

4.2.1 | Individual Level: Conflict Management

In relation to cognitive aspects pertinent to the implementation of community resilience strategies, our data point to conflict management strategies aimed at balancing the impact on beneficiaries and organizational efficiency. Over time, our informants endeavored to enhance organizational efficiency, generating a modest income and remunerating themselves and volunteers. The shift to an income-generation model was pivotal. For example, NSEs introduced new pricing policies and began compensating practitioners who were recipients of social welfare payments. This transition was not without conflict, leading to instances where some practitioners felt they were treated unfairly.

Conflict management strengthened fraternity links between stakeholders (Supporting Information: Appendix B.1a). These links are crucial for fostering community resilience but also susceptible to "breaking" and leading to stakeholder exclusion. Informality and economic constraints are associated with such exclusion. For instance, when the food foraging NSE promoted a volunteer to a paid position, internal conflict emerged as some volunteers accused the board of denying equal opportunities (Supporting Information: Appendix B.1b). To address transparency concerns, conflict management and a collaborative approach were adopted, culminating in an updated remuneration policy (Supporting Information: Appendix B.1c). Nevertheless, despite these efforts, some members resigned, and others felt excluded. Recognizing this risk, the informant identified trust and conflict resolution as crucial for progress (Supporting Information: Appendix B.1d).

4.2.2 | Organization Level: Risk Management

Data indicate moderate adaptations to mitigate resource scarcity (Supporting Information: Appendix B.2a). However, unstructured management, marketing practices, and inadequate premises hinder the potential of NSE (Supporting Information: Appendix B.2b). Although risk management is essential for all NSEs, observational data reveal founders perceive its importance differently. For the food foraging and the meals for schools NSEs, risk management was an imperative to meet funders' requirements (Supporting Information: Appendix B.2c). Interestingly, the vegan bakery NSE resisted formal risk management recommendations, for instance, those aimed at standardizing operations, when such suggestions conflict with their rebellious sentiment (Supporting Information: Appendix B.2d).

4.2.3 | Community Level: Knowledge Transfer

NSE practitioners enhance their skills through training programmes and networking events. For instance, the food foraging NSE was nominated by the municipality for an annual prize for organizations that contribute to poverty reduction. The meals for schools NSE pitched in social innovation events by the municipality and the university of applied sciences. The vegan bakery NSE was showcased in social enterprise events. These knowledge transfer programmes are crucial for communicating social value, increasing visibility within the community, and maximizing their potential for transformative change.

However, observational data suggest that NSEs struggle to effectively communicate their social value, necessitating mediation through trusted institutional actors. This trusted mediator is particularly significant for the vegan bakery and meals for schools NSEs. When given the opportunity, these cases eloquently depict scenarios in which the NSEs advocate respect for the underprivileged. Their narratives passionately envision future scenarios where the poor are not voiceless (Supporting Information: Appendix B.3). Similar perspectives were observed in participant observations on the food foraging case but were not reported in interviews.

4.3 | Transformative Change Elements in NSE

All three NSEs received grants and pro-bono support to reformulate and implement their social value proposition, validating their transformative change potential. However, while the food foraging NSE has been particularly successful in accessing funding, the healthy meals for schools and vegan baking NSEs operate with minimal institutional financial support. Crucially, practitioners from all three NSE consulted in this study, especially the meals for schools one, view institutional support with skepticism. They argue that it often focuses on income generation models and lacks understanding of the specific challenges faced by the NSEs. In their view, Dutch agencies aimed at addressing social challenges through entrepreneurship are not attuned to the unique hurdles encountered by these ventures and tailor their programs primarily to opportunity entrepreneurs.

4.3.1 | Individual Level: Fulfilment of Self-Actualization Needs

Despite limited income generation, meaningful employment contributed to a perceived improvement of personal circumstances, encouraging continued involvement (Supporting Information: Appendix C.1a). Working within the NSE enabled founders to meet their growth needs through self-actualization, gaining control, richness, and self-sufficiency. In the case of the vegan bakery, self-actualization and self-sufficiency contribute to the wellbeing and emancipation of all family members (Supporting Information: Appendix C.1b).

Improved mental health resulting from fulfilling self-actualization needs is linked to place-based, hands-on work. Depression and anxiety are proactively addressed by all ventures, as noted in participant observations, explicit mentions in interviews (Supporting Information: Appendix C.1c) and secondary data (only in the case of food foraging). Although mental health issues may initially hinder entrepreneurial activities, they foster emotional connections with beneficiaries, maximizing potential for transformative change in the community (Supporting Information: Appendix C.1d). Gradually, improved mental health positively influences practitioners and beneficiaries, fostering a culture of dedication to developing the NSE for professional satisfaction and relief.

4.3.2 | Organization Level: Fraternity Links

All three ventures offer volunteering opportunities to the long-term unemployed. The food foraging NSE reports a life-changing outcome for one beneficiary, over fifty years of age and long-term unemployed as a result of redundancy. Mentorship from the NSE lead enabled the beneficiary to retrain as a home care worker and assume a paid project coordinator position within the NSE, leading to the termination of social welfare support. Generally, all three case narratives report positive impacts on stakeholders through social activation and fraternity links (see also the next item in this subsection) (Supporting Information: Appendix C.2a). We found three key elements in relation to organizational actions towards positive impact.

Firstly, NSEs have demonstrated strong capabilities in effectively engaging and retaining stakeholders. The beneficiaries involved in this study typically remained engaged for an average duration of three years. Newly formed relationships between founders, volunteers and beneficiaries are grounded in mutual trust and respect, fostering confidence and contributing to consistently high retention rates. As succinctly put by the vegan baking NSE: "We achieve our mission, to be seen and valued." Similarly, the healthy meals NSE reports increased food intake among non-Western residents in sheltered housing when served food tailored to their preferences "nice and spicy, the way we like it, not like the boring Dutch food they used to serve before."

Secondly, our data consistently indicate that founders and beneficiaries are bonded by shared rebellious sentiments. Founders often recruit both beneficiaries and practitioners from within their personal networks, particularly among friends and family members (Supporting Information: Appendix C.2b). For example, the vegan bakery NSE primarily recruited workers through personal networks, valuing their rebellious sentiment over professional experience with disabled youth. Volunteers and beneficiaries for the food foraging NSE are engaged via informal institutional networks, such as food markets and the local food bank. The practitioners for the meals for schools NSE are recruited through a combination of informal personal and institutional networks. In all cases, these fraternity links become central to the wellbeing of the founder. Notably, even when recruitment occurs through institutional pathways, strong bonds rooted in a shared identification with the founder's rebellious sentiment tend to emerge quickly (Supporting Information: Appendix C.2c).

Finally, NSE practitioners report feeling little to no pressure to adapt to align with market trends or produce formalized social impact reporting. Although some informants engage in occasional benchmarking, systematic measurement is largely absent. Instead, their confidence is rooted in practical experience, grounded in the belief that their value proposition offers the most effective solution to social issues they know intimately (Supporting Information: Appendix C.2d). Our informants consistently view their NSE as a more effective agent of change than traditional top-down actors, that is opportunity-driven social entrepreneurs, charities, or social care providers, which, in their view, disempower rather than empower beneficiaries (Supporting Information: Appendix C.2e).

4.3.3 | Community Level: Collaborative Approach With Local Providers

NSEs adopt a collaborative approach by forming alliances with local community providers, including charities, food banks, and local authority social care programmes. For example, the vegan baking NSE partnered with a local education charity to deliver workshops for disadvantaged children. The healthy meals for schools NSE provides cooking workshops for food

bank beneficiaries. The food foraging NSE engages in activities through the municipality leisure programme for welfare recipients.

Over time, NSEs become embedded within tightly connected networks of community-based care providers. Two NSEs report plans to deepen collaboration further through cooperative models (Supporting Information: Appendix C.3a). These community alliances are crucial to organizational resilience, helping to mitigate challenges such as unreliable suppliers, uncooperative stakeholders, underperforming staff, and substandard premises. For example, the meals for schools NSE recovered from a major financial setback through a new partnership under the municipality's urban regeneration strategy.

Importantly, our findings show that NSEs are more successful in overcoming setbacks when founders actively channel rebellious sentiment into community engagement (Supporting Information: Appendix C.3b). This approach reinforces their social mission and fosters a sense of personal self-actualization, which in turn sustains collaboration despite limited resources.

5 | Discussion

Our study explored necessity social enterprise as driven by rebellious sentiments and a need for self-actualization. Unlike traditional SE and NE perspectives that focus on prosocial motivation and empathy, our findings indicate how these entrepreneurs channel their frustrations into impactful ventures, despite the difficulties of generating sufficient income to cover basic needs. Their success lies in leveraging previous professional experience, employing a bottom-up approach, and maintaining strong ties within their communities. These ventures contrast with oft-stereotypical notions of heroic social entrepreneurs or desperate necessity entrepreneurs by drawing attention to the significance of community resilience strategies. Below we reflect on the key questions in relation to existing literatures and the contributions of our work.

5.1 | Under What Circumstances Do People in Necessity Conditions Start Social Enterprises?

Our research highlights that the enactment of rebellious sentiments is a driving factor in the interaction between SE and NE, which in turn fulfills self-actualization needs. This finding offers a different perspective on the role of motivation in SE and the role of income generation in NE. Previous research on the motivational elements of SE (Hockerts 2017; Mair and Noboa 2006) has highlighted the link between prosocial motivation, empathy, moral judgment, and self-efficacy. Our data show that channeling a rebellious sentiment leads to social impact in NE. As ventures evolve, founders experience improvement in their life circumstances through emancipation, self-actualization, completion, richness, and self-sufficiency. We also found that the income generated is not enough to cover basic needs. Despite this, practitioners persist with their ventures as it remains their only option for meaningful employment. Our informants succeed in capitalizing on their previous professional experience, and their success is attributable to their distinct community-based approach. These findings make three contributions to recent SE and NE literatures.

Firstly, our study finds empirical evidence for the diverse ways necessity entrepreneurs define and pursue "decent and desirable" work, highlighting the need for a more contextualized approach to NE research (O'Donnell et al. 2024). We find, for instance, that needs lie along a continuum, in which differing needs lead to different entrepreneurial processes and outcomes (Coffman and Sunny 2021). The findings also confirm that necessity entrepreneurs utilize previous professional experience to shape their new ventures (Dencker et al. 2009). Adding to this literature, our data highlight that this experience is leveraged to enhance their visibility in the community. First-hand experience with the social problem is used by NSEs to perform mission checks and balances to provide community-grounded solutions. This element becomes key to their social dimension.

Secondly, our study highlights the importance of recognizing the diversity in the ways entrepreneurship can lead to impact (Chliova et al. 2020; Littlewood and Khan 2018; Mair 2020; Tiba et al. 2019). Research on the potential for socio-environmental impact of SEs and the interplay between mission and collective social action (Mair 2020; Markman et al. 2019; Saebi et al. 2019) encourages a broader perspective on the link between entrepreneurship and socio-environmental change. This shift in focus is important given that diversity in mission, motives, and ethical challenges lead to diversity in outcomes (Di Domenico et al. 2010; Mair 2020; Zahra et al. 2009). Additionally, our findings question the common idea that social entrepreneurs are heroic figures with strong moral values, working to create big changes altruistically. Although many studies have focused on highlighting the success of these heroic figures (Teasdale 2012; Thompson 2002), some scholars caution that these idealized portrayals may pressure individuals to present themselves as social entrepreneurs primarily to secure funding and resources (Dey and Teasdale 2016). This can also make it harder for them to stay true to their original mission as they grow (Ometto et al. 2019). As a result, there may be power imbalances, suboptimal social impact, and unfair distribution of resources (Corner and Ho 2010; Dacin et al. 2011; Dufays and Huybrechts 2014; Hietschold et al. 2019). We find support for these concerns and provide evidence of alternative approaches that serve as potential countermeasures.

Thirdly, social impact in NE is linked to fraternity links between stakeholders. Previous research on the role of a shared feeling of belonging in successful community-based enterprises signals the pivotal role of connection (Dentoni et al. 2018; Hertel et al. 2019; Li et al. 2023). Our empirical evidence contributes to understanding how relations of fraternity lead to improved mental health and lead to potential transformative change. This interplay is central to understanding the social impact potential of NE.

5.2 | How Do People in Necessity Address Social Issues in Their Entrepreneurial Efforts?

Our cases provide embedded and empowering localized solutions that effectively attract stakeholders and cater to a small

group in the immediate community. These organizations thrive as they integrate into informal community networks. In line with existing knowledge on SE, these dynamics entail the idea of embeddedness (Dacin et al. 2011; Dufays and Huybrechts 2014; Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2018). In our cases, entrepreneurship is driven by the needs of individuals who create small-scale SEs that operate in small networks. In this context, embeddedness serves both as the inspiration for innovation and the foundation for developing new social solutions. This exemplifies a form of SE where communities are supporters (rather than mere beneficiaries). Entrepreneurship is done *with* communities, rather than *for* communities, implying longer-term, broader, and more empowering community involvement (Bacq et al. 2022).

In alignment with existing literature on community resilience strategies (Berkes and Davidson-Hunt 2007; Morrison et al. 2017), subsistence contexts (Sridharan et al. 2014; Viswanathan and Venugopal 2015) and refugee entrepreneurship (Jiang et al. 2021), our study identifies three community resilience strategies: conflict management, risk management, and knowledge transfer. First-hand experience with social issues serves as the cohesive force that strengthens informal community networks through proactive strategies employed by necessity entrepreneurs to address mental health challenges, thereby reducing their reliance on the welfare system.

We found evidence suggesting that NEs have the potential to act as key agents for social change, offering an innovative approach to address social inequality. Their contributions deserve, therefore, to be studied and understood. Although the social impact of entrepreneurship has traditionally been situated within the SE literature, where its effectiveness in tackling social problems is well-documented (Mair et al. 2012; Mair 2020; Markman et al. 2019; Saebi et al. 2019; Tortia et al. 2020), emerging critiques have raised important concerns about the inclusivity of SE research, including issues of opportunism and conflict of interest (Agafonow 2019; Saebi et al. 2019). Our argument for considering the community resilience strategies of NSEs, and thus their effectiveness in addressing social issues, aligns with SE scholars advocating for more equitable and context-sensitive interactions of SEs (Mair and Martí 2009; Littlewood and Holt 2018; Tobias et al. 2013) and for more studies on the intersection between SEs and social movements (Dacin et al. 2011; Dufays and Huybrechts 2014; Keim et al. 2024).

6 | Conclusions

This study explored the link between NE and SE and how necessity can lead to social change. Our main goal is to improve our understanding of how and why people in necessity conditions aim to achieve social change in their entrepreneurial efforts. Our ethnographic data, analyzed abductively, uncover the relevance of community resilience strategies. Crucially, rebellious sentiments are the main driver at the individual level and permeate in interactions with internal and external stakeholders. These rebellious sentiments are enacted in the interactions with the community, which leads to the fulfillment of self-actualization needs of founders. By adopting a collaborative approach, NE becomes meaningful employment for their founders, with positive implications in the immediate community, a term we conceptualize as necessity social enterprise.

These findings challenge and expand the prevalent link between opportunity recognition and SE. By taking a needs-based approach, we problematize previous NE and SE studies (Alvesson and Sandberg 2011; Sætre and Van de Ven 2021) that depict SE as heroic efforts of visionary individuals (Bacq et al. 2016) or NE as survival strategies of those in a desperate position (Stoica et al. 2020; Venâncio and Pinto 2020). Instead, we extend evidence on the emancipatory potential of SE (Chandra 2017; Kim 2014; Rindova et al. 2009) by highlighting the interplay between social values (Dufays and Huybrechts 2014; Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2018) and emancipation (Dey and Steyaert 2016).

Although impactful at the individual, organizational, and community levels, NSEs struggle to bring about broader institutional change. Our research extends the understanding of the emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship and suggests that policies should recognize the transformative capacity of necessity-driven entrepreneurs. By shifting the discourse from a deficit-oriented view of NE to one that acknowledges its social potential, scholars and policymakers can better support entrepreneurs. This includes developing tailored policies, access to microfinance, and capacity-building programs that enhance their ability to innovate and scale their impact. Recognizing necessity entrepreneurs as agents of social change rather than merely economic actors expands our understanding of entrepreneurship as a diverse and multifaceted phenomenon (Bakker and McMullen 2023; O'Donnell et al. 2024).

Our study has implications for the NE and SE literatures and contributes to research into the interplay between individual circumstances and social mission implementation (Dey and Steyaert 2016; Kimmitt and Muñoz 2018; Saebi et al. 2019). More specifically, our findings echo research on the false dichotomy between necessity and opportunity enterprise (Coffman and Sunny 2021), community dynamics (Bacq et al. 2022), opportunity exploitation (Choi et al. 2008), entrepreneurship in adversity contexts (Shepherd et al. 2020) and aspirational resilience (Sridharan et al. 2014). The latter is defined as "the mindset of wanting to significantly improve one's lot in life and persisting in the face of tremendous personal adversity" (Sridharan et al. 2014 494).

We posit that adverse circumstances are not exclusive to developing economies. It is clear that adversity manifests differently in welfare economies, but this phenomenon is understudied. This paper aims to address this gap in our understanding by exploring entrepreneurial responses to adversity in welfare economies. We made a start in this paper and invite others to follow in exploring the nature of adversity in welfare economies. Other promising avenues for future research include investigating specific issues which may influence the legitimacy of NSEs, such as gender (Zhao et al. 2021), power (Dey and Steyaert 2016), wellbeing (Kimmitt and Muñoz 2018; Stephan et al. 2020) and mental health (Agafonow and Perez 2020; Nikolova 2019; Wiklund et al. 2018). These factors are likely to affect the perceived legitimacy of NSEs, as individuals facing hardship may initiate ventures that contribute positively to their communities. However, such efforts may be dismissed by the public as merely attempts

to generate income masking as SE. However, if these ventures receive guidance in effectively articulating and substantiating their social impact, they may enhance their legitimacy over time. Future research should explore how necessity entrepreneurs navigate these legitimacy dynamics and how external support mechanisms can facilitate their missions (Adomako and Tran 2025).

From a practical perspective, our findings provide empirical backup to practitioners interested in innovative approaches to social welfare, and more specifically, agents campaigning for minimum income policies (EAPN 2023; Vonk and Olivier 2019). We suggest that policies to support social entrepreneurial activity in welfare states may want to consider the transformative potential of those entrepreneurs who are pushed by dissatisfaction with their present situation. To our knowledge, policymakers in welfare states seem reluctant to facilitate enterprising among the unemployed. Our approach invites policymakers to see (social) entrepreneurship more broadly by also considering the potential of the unemployed as community catalysts, instead of disempowered individuals.

Although our findings are limited to the context, which leads to questions about generalizability, they are a source of opportunities for future theorizing and empirical work. We studied a small sample. There is scope for further research to test our framework with larger samples and in different institutional contexts. In our sample procedure, we selected necessity entrepreneurs amongst those who identify as social entrepreneurs. Further work could focus on necessity entrepreneurs who have not yet considered the social potential of their ventures. Another important question is how well NEs can deliver social outcomes in times of crisis and how opportunity elements co-exist with necessity elements. Both qualitative and quantitative studies are needed in these areas.

As the unemployed continue to face challenges in the labor market and are under-represented or disadvantaged in (social) entrepreneurship, practitioners have been interested in the potential of individuals with no other employment opportunities to deliver positive social impact. Progress is being made in the Netherlands, where SE policy is progressively recognizing its potential. A 2024 program, supported by Social Enterprise NL, focuses on fostering neighborhood entrepreneurship. As institutional support strengthens, further insights are anticipated to emerge. Building on our framework, researchers in other welfare states can explore how necessity entrepreneurs in different institutional and socio-economic settings deliver social impact. Comparative studies using this framework could reveal how varying support systems and cultural contexts shape the potential of necessity-driven ventures to create social value. In this way, our research serves as both a conceptual lens and a methodological guide for extending the inquiry into NE and its capacity for social innovation. Unfortunately, a lack of data prevents us from further exploring interactions at community and institutional levels and drawing more detailed conclusions, which warrants further (longitudinal) research. Future investigation is also needed to further extend knowledge on needs-based theories of motivation, legitimacy strategies, and the driving factors of resilience in NSE, either from their kitchens or beyond.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Appendix S1:** csr70095-sup-0001-AppendixS1.