

# The social structures of entrepreneurial embeddedness: the influence of market, reciprocity and redistribution

Entrepreneurial  
embeddedness

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Embeddedness has gained prominence in entrepreneurship studies. However, the notion that the embeddedness metaphor relates to “market” structures prevails in studies in the area. Entrepreneurship scholars still know little about whether entrepreneurs are eventually embedded in other structures whose relationships go beyond the restricted dimension of the interested actor’s assumption. This study aims to propose investigating the social structures in which a specific type of entrepreneurship, the religious one, is embedded.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The research was qualitative, using interviews as an evidence collection instrument. A total of 17 entrepreneur-pastors responsible for business churches in Brazil and eight parishioners took part in the study.

**Findings** – Religious entrepreneurs are embedded in market structures, corroborating a perspective that associates embeddedness with the utilitarian notion. At the same time, entrepreneurs are embedded in two other social structures: reciprocity and redistribution.

**Practical implications** – This article emphasizes the relevance of going beyond the predominant perspective associated with the utilitarian and rationalized understanding of embeddedness in relationship networks.

**Originality/value** – This study makes essential contributions. Initially, it attests to the utilitarian perspective of Granovetter’s embeddedness while suggesting incorporating two other dimensions into the metaphor. By highlighting this, this article stresses the need to reinterpret the metaphor of embeddedness and how entrepreneurship scholars use it. Further, by emphasizing the need to consider embeddedness in networks beyond its still utilitarian perspective, this paper highlights unexplored opportunities for entrepreneurship scholars.

**Keywords** Redistribution, Market, Entrepreneurship, Reciprocity

**Paper type** Research paper



## 1. Introduction

The literature on embeddedness has gained prominence in entrepreneurship studies (Bagwell, 2018; Czernek-Marszałek, 2020; Harima *et al.*, 2021; Parkinson *et al.*, 2020; Shaw *et al.*, 2017; Tok and Kaminski, 2019). Some reflections prevail in the association between embeddedness and entrepreneurship literature. The first is that embeddedness relates to social networks (Busch and Barkema, 2020a; Czernek-Marszałek, 2020; Lin *et al.*, 2019; Meister and Mauer, 2019; Tok and Kaminski, 2019). The second is that entrepreneurs are socially embedded in network structures (Abd Hamid and Everett, 2021; Aeeni *et al.*, 2019; Roundy and Bayer, 2019; Zulu-Chisanga *et al.*, 2021). Finally, according to Stam *et al.* (2014, p. 153), scholars “increasingly acknowledge that entrepreneurial activity is embedded in network relationships that direct resource flows to entrepreneurs who are better connected.” This third notion is especially relevant.

The embeddedness metaphor relates to “market” structures, characterized by the rational search for individual gains (Engel *et al.*, 2017; Foster and Brindley, 2018; Leppäaho *et al.*, 2018; McKeever *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, the association between embeddedness and market structure is not necessarily recent and goes back to Granovetter’s (1985, 2018) concept. For this author, every action is embedded in interpersonal relationships networks, including the economic one. When emphasizing and treating two types of relationships in isolation, the economic and the social, Granovetter ended up seeing the social relationship as an essential determinant of economic behavior, reinforcing a distinction between the anonymous market and the social economy (Brailly *et al.*, 2016; Tok and Kaminski, 2019). As individuals are self-interested parts that form and restrict connections to maximize their benefits, the embeddedness metaphor leads to an analytical error of seeing the market and the rational choice as the only explanation for social behavior (Jackson, 2007). In doing so, social relationships end up being “exogenously determined means by which individuals ultimately serve private benefits based on the utility-maximization principle” (Christoforou, 2011, p. 686).

Over time, entrepreneurship studies have appropriated this utility-maximization principle (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020; Engel *et al.*, 2017; Foster and Brindley, 2018; Leppäaho *et al.*, 2018; McKeever *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, according to Clough *et al.* (2019), “market logics of resource access are often the default presumption in the entrepreneurship literature.” McKeever *et al.* (2014) emphasized how social embeddedness is relevant to entrepreneurial performance. According to these authors, embeddedness is a mechanism through which entrepreneurs identify resources of interest. In turn, Stam *et al.* (2014, p. 153) recognized that entrepreneurs can adapt their networks according to their interests. Furthermore, Burt (2009, p. 286) emphasized that entrepreneurs know how to structure a network to provide opportunities, knowing whom to include (Burt, 2009). According to this author, entrepreneurs “play an active role in forming their relationships.” For Shaw *et al.* (2017, pp. 219-220), embeddedness “within networks can increase entrepreneurial success by providing access to resources and competitive advantage without significant capital investment.”

Scholars already know about embeddedness in market structures and how this influences entrepreneurs, and vice versa. However, entrepreneurship scholars still know little about whether and how entrepreneurs embed themselves in social structures other than the market, i.e. whether entrepreneurs are eventually embedded in other structures whose relationships go beyond the restricted dimension of the interested actor’s assumption. Such a better understanding has theoretical, policy and practical relevance. In terms of theory, it can expand the still restricted understanding of embeddedness beyond its utilitarian dimension used in entrepreneurship studies. In terms of policy, it can enable

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policymakers to understand the effects of entrepreneurs' embeddedness in several complementary social structures, stimulating the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems. Finally, in terms of practical and managerial implications, it can promote inputs capable of enabling the formation and training of entrepreneurs. This article inserts itself in these reflections. The following research questions are proposed:

*RQ1.* Which social structures are entrepreneurs are embedded in?

*RQ2.* How do such social structures affect entrepreneurs?

This article seeks to answer these questions in two ways. The first is theoretical, through the appropriation of Granovetter's embeddedness, combined with Polanyi's economic sociology classical propositions (Granovetter, 2018; Polanyi, 2018). This study emphasizes reflections on reciprocity and redistribution structures, still little explored by management scholars, in general, and those of entrepreneurship, in particular. Indeed, Tok and Kaminski (2019) highlighted how the interrelationship between reciprocity and redistribution remains a current debate. The second is empirical, by studying religious entrepreneurship, specifically Brazilian pastors who undertake, in a religious sphere, practices usually common to the most competitive markets (Corrêa *et al.*, 2021b). According to Corrêa *et al.* (2021a, p. 7), "despite the growth of the neo-Pentecostal community in the country and the entrepreneurialism of pastors embedded in it, researchers have rarely sought to understand Brazil's management of religious entrepreneurship." For Smith *et al.* (2019, p. 2), research "focused on how religion shapes and is shaped by entrepreneurship has been extremely limited." Therefore, this study appropriates evidence from pastors-entrepreneurs, corroborated with data collected from parishioners in their churches.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 *Embeddedness: the origin of studies*

The notion of embeddedness dates back to classic authors such as Thurnwald (Dale, 2011), Weber (Migone, 2011) and Polanyi, who considered the term's creator (McKeever *et al.*, 2014). However, the theme's propositions gained relevance through Granovetter (1985, 2018) (Corrêa *et al.*, 2021a; Czernek-Marszałek, 2020; Harima *et al.*, 2021; Vlasov *et al.*, 2018). Granovetter is the founder of new economic sociology (NES), a "research strand that supports the need to consider an economic action as social action" (Corrêa *et al.*, 2021a, p. 5). This author reframed the metaphor of "embeddedness, one of the most influential concepts in the social sciences in recent decades" (Corrêa *et al.*, 2021a). He intimately associated the social embeddedness concept with social networks (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020), stressing that "the behavior and institutions to be analyzed are so constrained by ongoing social relations that to build them as independent is a grievous misunderstanding" (Granovetter, 2018, p. 482).

### 2.2 *Embeddedness according to new economic sociology (NES)*

The origin of Granovetter's (1985, 2018) embeddedness concept is part of the author's criticism of two fundamental theoretical approaches (Aeeni *et al.*, 2019). This first perspective relates to Talcott Parsons's voluntary theory of action (Granovetter, 1985, 2018; Krippner, 2002). The second refers to "undersocialized" and relates to classical and neoclassical economics, in which the actors are self-interested, selfish and hyper-rational (Granovetter, 1985, 1992, 2018). From this perspective, scholars understand the actors as homo-economicus (Aeeni *et al.*, 2019; Barber, 1995). Despite the apparent contrast between the under- and oversocialized views, Granovetter (1985, 1992, 2018) stressed how both have

great theoretical relevance: “the oversocialized approach has in common with the undersocialized a conception of action uninfluenced by peoples’ existing social relations” (Granovetter, 1992, p. 6). Thus, economic actors’ attempt at intentional action would be “embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations” (Granovetter, 2018, p. 487).

### *2.3 Criticisms of the embeddedness metaphor*

Granovetter’s concept of embeddedness has not been exempt from criticisms. Several authors have highlighted the limitations of the embeddedness metaphor. One criticism addresses Granovetter’s (1985, 2018) neglect, and partly of those scholars after him, concerning the relationship between entrepreneurship, for instance, and the social structures of reciprocity and redistribution (Corrêa *et al.*, 2020; Lajqi and Krasniqi, 2017; McKeever *et al.*, 2014). Such structures were central to Polanyi (2018). However, Granovetter (1985, 2018) did not deal with reciprocity and redistribution behaviors alongside the market in modern society (Barber, 1995).

### *2.4 Back to the origins: embeddedness according to Polanyi*

Polanyi (2001, 2108) considered the market structure but also added reciprocity and redistribution. Reciprocity denotes movements between correlative points of symmetric groupings (Martin-Rios and Erhardt, 2017; Polanyi, 2001, 2018). It occurs when significant values and society’s norms, or part of them, establish that individuals have reciprocal obligations (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018). Collectivities, such as family, kinship, friendships, loyalty structures or communities, are examples of reciprocity. Such collectivities’ members have values and norms suggesting that they should give and receive one another’s material and immaterial goods merely through their relationship’s status (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018). In a reciprocity structure, there is the notion that today’s giving will be rewarded by tomorrow’s taking (Polanyi, 2001). It is a social structure whose continuity depends on the cooperative dimension and the trust between its members (Polanyi, 2001): “The closer the members of the encompassing unity feel drawn to one another, the more general will be the tendency among them to develop reciprocate attitudes” (Polanyi, 2018, p. 37).

Redistribution relates to group centrality measures (Polanyi, 2001, 2018). As an integrative system, it “designates appropriational movements toward a center and out of it again” (Polanyi, 2018, p. 35). It manifests when norms and values prescribe that community members contribute fees or goods or services to some central agency (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018). These central agencies can be the government, charitable organizations or churches, among others. It encompasses the responsibility of allocating contributions in favor of collectivity. According to Polanyi (2001, 2018), redistribution can occur in groups smaller than society, as seen within a family. What is essential is a center and its role in integrating means to satisfy collective desires (Gemici, 2008). Redistribution “tends to enmesh the economic system proper in social relationships” (Polanyi, 2001, p. 55). Polanyi’s three forms of integration in which economic action is embedded (exchange, reciprocity and redistribution) do not represent “stages” of development (Polanyi, 2001, 2018). There is no implicit sequence between the forms: “Several subordinate forms may be present alongside a dominant one” (Polanyi, 2018, p. 39). This author emphasized the possibility of reciprocity and redistribution even to market economies whose economic activity is an exchange. Table 1 summarizes the theoretical propositions associated with the reciprocity and redistribution structures.

2.5 *Classic and contemporary perspectives: a proposed integrated conceptual model*

Granovetter (1985) restricted the embeddedness metaphor to the market structure (Barber, 1995). However, even Granovetter (1985) seems to have tangentially shed light on the possibility of embeddedness in other possible social structures. For this author, embeddedness has always been and remains substantial (Granovetter, 1992). It is less comprehensive in periods before the market economy than advocated by “substantivists,” represented by Polanyi and others who defend the notion of economic activity as entirely embedded in reciprocity and redistribution relations. Granovetter partly concurs with economists that the transition to modernity, i.e. the market economy, has not changed the embeddedness level. However, for this author, embeddedness is more comprehensive in the later period than alleged by the economists who support the idea of the economy as a sphere autonomous to the influence of other structures, if not exchanges, such as reciprocity and redistribution.

In other words, Granovetter divides the notion of embeddedness between strong and weak. The strong embeddedness interpretation finds support in authors such as Polanyi. From this viewpoint, market embedding lies in reciprocity and redistribution relations, a context evidenced in primitive societies. In turn, Granovetter (1992) defends the weak embeddedness notion. According to this author, the influence of reciprocity and redistribution would be less than suggested by Polanyi in primitive pre-market societies. However, such an influence would be more significant to market structures than proposed by economists, who disregard the combined influence of both structures (Granovetter, 1992). In this way, Granovetter (1992) implicitly and tangentially suggests the unexplored possibility of actors embedding in relations of reciprocity and redistribution in a market economy. This notion becomes clearest when Granovetter (2009) stresses how we find a significant role for the supposedly archaic categories of ethnicity and kinship today:

The idea that these are superseded in the economy of the modern world by efficient and impersonal institutions is a wishful vestige of enlightenment idealism that careful analysis does not sustain (Granovetter, 2009, p. 269).

In short, the market would not be the only way to organize transactions in today’s societies. Two other regulation modes, reciprocity and redistribution, continue to coexist with the market. Although such social structures allow understanding at the macro analysis level,

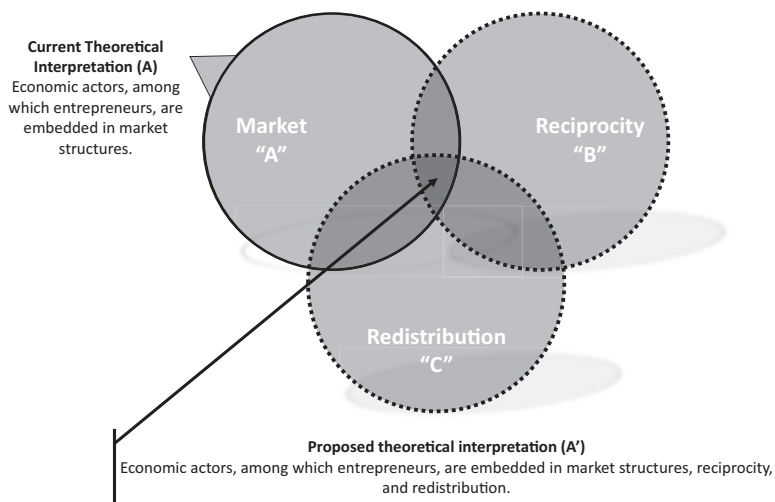
Theoretical dimension	Proposition	Author
Reciprocity	Reciprocity denotes movements between correlative points of symmetric groupings There is the notion that “today’s giving will be rewarded for tomorrow’s taking” It is a social structure whose continuity depends on the cooperative dimension and the trust between members	(Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018) (Polanyi, 2001, p. 53) (Polanyi, 2001)
Redistribution	Refers to group centrality measures The reciprocity manifests on occasions when norms and values prescribe community members make contributions of fees or goods or services to some central agency This central agency has the responsibility to allocate contributions in favor of collectivity	(Polanyi, 2018, p. 35) (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018) Polanyi (2018, 2001)

**Table 1.**  
Theoretical dimension, propositions and authors of interest related to the reciprocity and redistribution structures

such as those associated with the study of the whole society, Polanyi (2001) emphasizes how such forms of integration can also manifest in the phenomena investigation of micro and meso levels. Indeed, this author stresses how reciprocity, redistribution and exchanges are often used to denote personal interrelations (Polanyi, 2001). For instance, reciprocity would become clear on occasions when mutuality between individuals is frequent. Similarly, redistribution would manifest itself on occasions when sharing between individuals is common (Polanyi, 2001). Figure 1 illustrates the proposed analysis model.

*2.6 Religious entrepreneurship and its association with the study of networks*

In recent years, entrepreneurship in the religious context has gained prominence (Corrêa et al., 2021b; Games et al., 2021; Pearce et al., 2010; Wulandari, 2019). We can group studies on the topic into two fundamental categories. The first one emphasizes the entrepreneurial characteristics and attributes of religious leaders, i.e. how entrepreneurs in the religious sphere use some entrepreneurial behaviors explored in the literature (Corrêa et al., 2022; Pearce et al., 2010; Wulandari, 2019). For instance, Pearce et al. (2010) investigated the entrepreneurial orientation of hundreds of Evangelical Lutheran pastors and churches in the USA. The authors concluded that the entrepreneurial behavior of pastors positively affects the performance of their religious organizations, especially those related to the innovativeness and autonomy of pastors. Proactiveness, risk-seeking and competitive aggressiveness had only a marginal contribution. In turn, Wulandari (2019) investigated the same behaviors in the Catholic church in a Muslim nation, analyzing their impact on such churches' performance. This author investigated 19 priests from the Archdiocese of Jakarta, finding that their innovativeness and proactivity behaviors positively affect the performance of Catholic churches. More recently, Corrêa et al. (2022) investigated the motivations that drive the entrepreneurial behavior of evangelical pastors in Brazil, i.e. what drives attitudes related to innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking. The study concluded that opportunity discovery is one of the inducing factors, reinforcing the literature in the area. In addition, the creation of opportunities and the need for survival are among the reasons that affect the investigated pastors' behaviors. Further, Boussema and Belkacem (2022) investigated the factors that encourage social entrepreneurs to innovate in Islamic communities.



**Figure 1.**  
Proposed analysis model

The second category of studies on entrepreneurship in the religious context has a more significant association with this article. It incorporates investigations that seek to analyze the impact of religion and relational networks on the trajectory of religious enterprises (Corrêa *et al.*, 2018, 2021b). For instance, van der Westhuizen and Adalakun (2022) investigated the role of religion as a driving factor in entrepreneurship in developing markets. In turn, Palombaro (2021) analyzed the Protestant values and their influence on communities of Chinese migrant entrepreneurs. However, none of these articles sought to investigate the social immersion of entrepreneurs from the literature derived from the NES in association with the classical perspective of the theme, nor the eventual social structures of their relationships, i.e. structures in which they are embedded. In addition, these articles understood networks as the dependent variable, analyzing their impact on entrepreneurial development, disregarding, e.g. entrepreneurship and its agency in the construction of relationships, which is part of the focus of interest of the present paper. For example, Corrêa *et al.* (2018) analyzed social coupling and decoupling and the importance of an adequate balance between strong and weak ties to entrepreneurs. According to these authors, entrepreneurs must have strong ties, capable of supporting them in different situations, while they must also have some characteristics in relation to such ties that prevent them from abusive behaviors, harmful to the development of their ventures. In turn, Corrêa *et al.* (2021b) analyzed the influence of social capital for the manifestation of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking among religious entrepreneurs. These authors concluded that while bonding social capital helps entrepreneurs innovate, be proactive and take risks, excessive occlusion in networks would discourage entrepreneurial behavior.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Design

This study is qualitative. Tok and Kaminski (2019) emphasized qualitative research's relevance to studying specific types of embeddedness. Although scholars have already extensively explored the literature on embeddedness in relation to market structure and entrepreneurship, the association between entrepreneurship and embeddedness in other structures is still nascent, justifying a qualitative strategy (Edmondson and Mcmanus, 2007).

#### 3.2 Case selection

Yin (2018) highlighted how cases can be more concrete, such as companies or individuals, or less concrete, such as decisions, relationships or communities. In this research, the case is the neo-Pentecostal pastor's social structure. Single cases are suitable when critical (Yin, 2018), and three reasons, two theoretical and one empirical, have led to the choice of this case. The first is theoretical and emphasizes the Brazilian neo-Pentecostal pastor as an entrepreneur (Corrêa *et al.*, 2021a, 2021b). Indeed, neo-Pentecostal pastors create and lead what authors term "business churches" (Corrêa *et al.*, 2021a, 2021b; Mariano, 2013). In the religious context, they use several entrepreneurial practices usually seen in more competitive markets (Corrêa *et al.*, 2021a, 2021b; Mariano, 2013). According to Corrêa *et al.* (2021a), the competitiveness between an increasing number of religious denominations has encouraged pastors to act entrepreneurially to sustain and grow their institutions. As a result, pastors have begun to adopt innovative and proactive practices in the religious context. For instance, Corrêa *et al.* (2022) emphasized how neo-Pentecostal pastors are innovative in creating new services, such as phone visits, which implies providing religious guidance at a distance. Alternatively, they are proactive when they seek to change their strategies and tactics, such as when they reduce the tithes collected from the faithful to

attract the attention of those who want to pay less. For this paper, we follow [Corrêa et al.'s \(2021b, p. 2281\)](#) suggestion to define an entrepreneur as someone “who creates a company, religious or not.”

Second, part of the reflections discussed in this article refers to Granovetter's embeddedness notion, on the one hand, and the criticism of authors who consider their perspective as that of the market, on the other. The choice of pastor-entrepreneurs seems theoretically adequate to test both theoretical propositions. Indeed, although entrepreneurs, churches and neo-Pentecostal shepherds are embedded simultaneously in ethical-religious contexts, such contexts are theoretically not susceptible to maximizing behaviors regarding a utilitarian-economic perspective defended by economists. Although it is a unique case, the choice of the social structure of the neo-Pentecostal pastor as a case is based on a kind of theoretical replication. This study predicts confirming [Granovetter's \(1985\)](#) proposition that economic action is embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations. Due to ethical-religious idiosyncrasies, this research expects at the same time to refute the propositions of authors who criticize Granovetter's notion of embeddedness, stressing that it focuses on an economic-utilitarian perspective ([McKeever et al., 2014](#); [Stam et al., 2014](#)).

Finally, the third criterion is empirical. It derives from the growth of religious entrepreneurship in Brazil. The number of evangelical pastors and churches has grown dramatically in Brazil. Over 30 million people became evangelical between 1991 and 2010 ([Corrêa et al., 2021b](#)). According to [Corrêa et al. \(2021b, p. 2287\)](#), “currently, 25% of the Brazilian population considers themselves evangelical (42 million people, about twice the population of New York).” Among evangelicals, the neo-Pentecostal denomination was the one that grew the most. The neo-Pentecostal evangelical church emerged in Brazil in the 1970s and adopted entrepreneurial, business and marketing practices into a religious context, usually seen in competitive markets, such as industry and commerce ([Corrêa et al., 2021a, p. 7](#)). Despite the empirical relevance, [Corrêa et al. \(2021c\)](#) emphasized how “researchers have rarely sought to understand Brazil's management of religious entrepreneurship.”

### 3.3 Selection of observation units

Several criteria underpinned the selection of pastors and parishioners. Concerning pastors, initially, they should be the creators of churches, allowing authors to define them as entrepreneurs ([Corrêa et al., 2021b](#)). In addition, they should follow the neo-Pentecostal religious denomination, which is rapidly growing and competitive among pastors in Brazil ([Corrêa et al., 2021b](#)). Third, the authors selected full-time pastors whose personal financial income depended on their role in the church with the faithful. Finally, the pastors' churches should be independent, unaffiliated with large neo-Pentecostal denominations. The neo-Pentecostal evangelical church emerged in Brazil in the late 1970s ([Pacheco et al., 2007](#)), and its principal characteristic is the spiritual war against the devil and the preaching of the theology of prosperity ([Rabuske et al., 2012](#)). Currently, the denomination is divided into two large groups. The first is composed of precursor churches, created in the late 1970s, responsible for large denominations, such as the University Church of the Kingdom of God. The second group is the so-called “independent churches,” i.e. churches that are usually small (up to approximately 500 members), based mainly on the charismatic characteristics of the pastors, and present in the suburbs of large urban centers ([Pacheco et al., 2007](#)). According to [Pacheco et al. \(2007\)](#), these independent churches are the fastest-growing among evangelicals in the country. Initially, the authors selected those pastors they knew or had contact with and incorporated the highlighted fundamental criteria. Subsequently, the authors used the snowball technique ([Ramadani et al., 2019](#)), through which respondents suggested new participants for the study. In turn, the selection of parishioners taking part in



the study was intentional (Yin, 2018). The pastors designated some members of their churches who were available for research and were unrelated to the pastors.

3.4 Procedure

The case was integrated, and the empirical units of analysis were: market, reciprocity and redistribution. Two observation units provided field evidence: the church’s shepherd himself/herself; and some parishioners of that church. Two complementary steps comprised the data collection procedures. The first involved selecting, and collecting data from, pastors. The authors selected pastors responsible for creating and leading neo-Pentecostal churches, allowing their identification as “religious entrepreneurs” (Corrêa *et al.*, 2021a, 2021b). Altogether, 17 pastor-entrepreneurs responsible for creating and running 17 different neo-Pentecostal churches composed the first phase of the research (Phase 1). Next, the researchers selected some parishioners from these churches (Phase 2). The aim was to corroborate, refute or expand initial information obtained in Phase 1. Altogether, eight parishioners took part in the semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The authors stopped including new pastors and parishioners when they considered they had achieved sufficient confirmatory evidence when the inclusion of new observation units did not contribute to obtaining extra information (Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018; Yin, 2018). Table 2 shows the identification codes for pastors and parishioners created to preserve their identities, as well as the duration of the interviews. In all, the authors recorded over 43 h (about two days) of interviews.

	Pseudonym	Interview duration (in min)
Shepherds	#Sh1	116
	#Sh2	72
	#Sh3	194
	#Sh4	83
	#Sh5	142
	#Sh6	136
	#Sh7	202
	#Sh8	100
	#Sh9	82
	#Sh10	141
	#Sh11	69
	#Sh12	177
	#Sh13	195
	#Sh14	75
	#Sh15	305
	#Sh16	145
	Parishioners	#pa1
#pa2		19
#pa3		48
#pa4		62
#pa5		41
#pa6		30
#pa7		27
#pa8		53
		54

**Table 2.**  
Coding of  
interviewed pastors  
and parishioners and  
data collection time

### 3.5 Instruments

The researchers used in-depth, semi-structured interviews for data collection (Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018; Lawrence, 2020). The questions sought to capture evidence representing the social structures of market, reciprocity and redistribution. In Phase 1, we carried out data collection in person with the pastors, mainly in their churches. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the isolation measures imposed by public authorities, we conducted Phase 2 via digital communication technologies. Lawrence (2020) defended the use of technological platforms to conduct research. Table 3 presents the research protocol with emphasis on the semi-structured interview script and its association with the study's proposals.

### 3.6 Data analysis

Two analytic strategies guided the data analysis. The first strategy was the theoretical propositions that guided the collection of evidence (Yin, 2018). The specific analytical technique was content analysis (Xie *et al.*, 2019; Yin, 2018), with the following operational steps. First, the authors themselves transcribed the interviews. Subsequently, they progressed to the statements' thematic categorization, grouped into primary and secondary levels. The primary categories were the three theoretical dimensions of interest: market, reciprocity and redistribution. The secondary categories were the theoretical propositions that guided the empirical study (P1 to P10) (Table 3). The authors then grouped each sentence or paragraph of the interviews in a non-exclusive way to be in one or more thematic category. The categorization of empirical data allowed for analytic generalization, in which the authors extrapolated the empirical data in relation to the base literature (Bansal and Corley, 2011). The second strategy was to examine rival explanations (Yin, 2018). The authors applied this strategy specifically to the analysis of embeddedness, following the approach of Granovetter (1985), contrasting it with those authors who criticize it. Note that the explanations are rivals. While Granovetter maintained that social relations influence economic activity (Rival explanation 1), critics have argued that economic action remains essentially utilitarian as a maximizing perspective guides the networks' understanding (Rival explanation 2). If this study shows the influence of both perspectives, this will provide significant support to the notion of a mixed rival (Yin, 2018).

### 3.7 Case tests

The authors used three case tests to increase the study's external and construct validity and reliability. Regarding external validity, Yin (2018) supports the importance of using theory in unique cases. The authors relied on theoretical propositions to deductively analyze the data in the field. In turn, the process of analytical generalization led to findings capable of shedding light on new theoretical understandings. In addition, to increase the construct validity and the study's reliability, the authors sought to establish a kind of chain of evidence, shown in Table 3. This breaks down the research aim into the questions part of the interview script. Table 3 is part of the study protocol, which aimed to increase the results' reliability (Yin, 2018).

## 4. Analysis and discussion

Because of the article's limitations in terms of length, the presentation of the results is integrated with their analysis and discussion. Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam (2018, p. 6) emphasized how "all in all, there is no specific way to report case study research which all researchers accept." The authors followed Yin's (2018) suggestions for single-case designs. The data presentation, analysis and discussion reflect the following thematic

Purpose	Empirical analysis unit	Proposition	Observation unit	Open question
Investigate which and how social structures affect the religious entrepreneurs.	Market	(P1) Economic action is “embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations.” (Granovetter, 2018b)	Shepherds Parishioners	<i>OQ1</i> : How do you decide in the church? <i>OQ2</i> : Are parishioners involved in pastors’ decisions? If yes, how?
		(P2) “Entrepreneurs might need to adapt their networks to accommodate firms’ evolving resource needs” (Stam <i>et al.</i> , 2014)	Shepherds Parishioners	<i>OQ3</i> : What do you do to grow your church? <i>OQ4</i> : What do pastors do to increase church membership?
		(P3) Embeddedness is relevant “for entrepreneurial performance” (McKeever <i>et al.</i> , 2014, p. 228)	Shepherds	<i>OQ5</i> : What aspects impact the growth or not of the church? <i>OQ6</i> : How do you and parishioners mobilize the resources needed for growth?
		(P4) Entrepreneurs “play an active role in forming their relationships” (Burt, 2009, p. 286)	Parishioners	<i>OQ7</i> : Do you help with church growth? <i>OQ8</i> : What kind of contribution can you, as a parishioner, make to the church?
			Shepherds	<i>OQ9</i> : What do pastors do, specifically, to increase church membership?
			Parishioners	<i>OQ10</i> : Why do you take part in this church and not another? <i>OQ11</i> : How was your initial contact with the pastor?
Reciprocity		(P5) Reciprocity denotes movements between correlative points of symmetric groupings (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018)	Shepherds	<i>OQ12</i> : How is your relationship with church parishioners? <i>OQ13</i> : How is the relationship between the parishioners themselves?
			Parishioners	<i>OQ14</i> : How is your relationship with the pastor and other parishioners in the church?

(continued)

**Table 3.**  
Research aim,  
empirical units of  
analysis, theoretical  
propositions,  
observation units  
and associated  
interview script

Table 3.

Purpose	Empirical analysis unit	Proposition	Observation unit	Open question
		(P6) There is the notion that “today’s giving will be rewarded for tomorrow’s taking” (Polanyi, 2001, p. 53)	Shepherds/ Parishioners	<i>OQ15</i> : What drives/stimulates behavior among pastors and parishioners?
		(P7) It is a social structure whose continuity depends on the cooperative dimension and the trust between its members (Polanyi, 2001)	Shepherds/ Parishioners	<i>OQ16</i> : How do you define the relationship between pastor and church parishioners? <i>OQ17</i> : Which people, including family and church members, do you trust the most?
	Redistribution	(P8) Refers to group centrality measures. (Polanyi, 2018, p. 35)	Shepherds Parishioners	<i>OQ18</i> : Are there any central church administrations? If so, what does it do? <i>OQ19</i> : Do you contribute financially to any institution/entity linked to the church?
		(P9) Manifests on occasions when norms and values prescribe community members make contributions of fees or goods or services to some central agency (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018)	Shepherds Parishioners	<i>OQ20</i> : Why do you contribute to central administration? Is participation/contribution optional or compulsory? <i>OQ21</i> : Why did you contribute to the church?
		(P10) This central agency has the responsibility to allocate contributions in favor of collectivity (Polanyi (2018, 2001)	Shepherds Parishioners	<i>OQ22</i> : Why did you contribute to central administration? Is participation optional or compulsory? <i>OQ23</i> : Why did you contribute to the church?

structure. Initially, they are subdivided into the three empirical units of analysis (market, reciprocity and redistribution). Subsequently, they detail, through analytical generalization (Yin, 2018), the ten theoretical propositions abstracted from the theoretical framework and which supported the collection and analysis of data (Table 3), four of which are related to the market (P1 to P4), three to reciprocity (P5 to P7) and three to redistribution (P8 to P10).

#### 4.1 *Embeddedness in market structures*

Empirical data suggest that economic activity is embedded in concrete systems of social relations (Granovetter, 2018). By criticizing the undersocialized conception, this author highlighted how every action, including the economic, is not strictly rational, based on economic utilitarianism. The features of the relationships that individuals, including entrepreneurs, are embedded in influence the actions. Indeed, #Sh5 would not be able to get a car from one of his parishioners were it not for the social relationship he maintains with him (he was unemployed; “I had no salary”). However, the parishioner bought a car in his own name, then giving it to the pastor. Similarly, it would be difficult for #Sh1 to get help; he only got help because of his embeddedness in religious networks that support his relationship with parishioners. The analytical generalization allows the following research finding.

*F1.* Immediate social relations (relational embeddedness) underpin the economic influence of entrepreneurial pastors.

However, field evidence also sustains criticism of Granovetter’s social embeddedness metaphor. By insisting on the intrinsically relational character of economic actions, Granovetter emphasizes social relationships as exogenously determined means through which individuals serve private benefits based on the utility-maximization principle (Christoforou, 2011). Later studies on entrepreneurship have incorporated this utility-maximization principle, endorsing it (Foster and Brindley, 2018; McKeever *et al.*, 2014). Stam *et al.* (2014) highlighted how entrepreneurs might need to change their networks to accommodate firms’ developing resource needs. Such adaptation of the networks occurs when #Sh10 emphasizes the need for churches to reduce their participation rules because of the potential loss of members, for instance: “For a ministry to grow, you cannot apply usage and custom” (#Sh6).

Further, McKeever *et al.* (2014, p. 228) emphasized how embeddedness is relevant for “entrepreneurial performance because it is a mechanism that helps the entrepreneur identify resources.” This capacity for identification is also clear in the parishioner’s statements. #pa6 points out how “there are different churches to please different people. I understand people are looking for identification and satisfaction of interests too.” Burt (2009, p. 286) stressed how entrepreneurs “play an active role in forming their relationships.” They know how to structure a network to provide opportunities; they know whom to include. Pastors act directly and incisively in adapting their religious networks, seeking the members they consider relevant. For example, #pa5 emphasizes how the faithful who hold leadership positions are the most fortunate, with better earnings. Pastor #Sh1 highlights how there are competitors who visit competing churches, seeking to become their leaders. For #Sh16, when the pastor realizes that an individual is a business owner, he does everything to win him over to his church. However, if the person does not have a good income, the effort is not the same. #Sh4 emphasizes that he visits other churches. In one of them, the pastor asked where he lived. When informing him that he came from an upper-class neighborhood, the pastor “gave special attention.” According to #Sh11, religion “is a significant source of

income.” It is an “industry of faith” (#Sh8). Based on the above, the following finding emerges:

- F2. Entrepreneurs act proactively in the formation and adaptation of the embedded networks, understanding embeddedness in networks also from a utilitarian perspective.

Table 4 summarizes the empirical evidence, associating it with the propositions and theoretical dimension of interest.

#### *4.2 Embeddedness in reciprocity structures*

Empirical pieces of evidence suggest pastors are simultaneously embedded in social networks characterized by reciprocity (Polanyi, 2001). In a religious context, pastors and faithful share several norms and values that suggest the relevance of mutual help, primarily among themselves. Pastor #Sh17 quotes the Bible when he says how the churches persevered “in breaking bread. It is a biblical principle.” For #Sh1, “the Bible itself asks us to help domestics of the faith,” i.e. people from the same church. According to #Sh4, “we have to help the members first.” Church members even take precedence over family members (#Sh3; #pa8). Parishioner #pa8 argues how “there are friends who are dearer than brothers.” According to him, there are “people in the church with whom I sit, talk, and cry. However, I have blood brothers who do not have the same openness that I find inside the church.” The following finding thus emerges:

- F3. Religious entrepreneurs establish relationships of mutual reciprocity with individuals from embedded networks.

Two fundamental notions characterize reciprocal relationships. The first is that “giving will be rewarded by tomorrow’s taking” (Polanyi, 2001, p. 53). This notion is apparent in the interviewees’ statements. #Sh5 cites how parishioners help him, just as he helps them in the same way. For #pa1 and #pa3, evangelicals from the same church are always willing to help. #Sh8 exemplifies this in a speech to parishioners: “Today it is me, tomorrow it is you. I am counting on you and you on me.” A second notion relates to trust between members, necessary to maintain reciprocity as a social structure (Polanyi, 2001). Trust between pastors and faithful is extremely strong. #pa7 highlights how his mother voted for a political candidate, not because of his intentions but because he belongs to the same religious community. #pa3 exemplifies the case of a person who consulted the pastor instead of his/her parents about the possibility and permission to date a particular person. For him, “evangelicals have certain credibility among themselves, a mutual trust.” The fact of having the same religion or belonging to the same church generates confidence. #pa4 highlights how, when sitting on a hospital bench, for instance, she identifies with other people who share the same religion. If the person “starts a conversation, I will talk to her because of the same lifestyle we have.” Table 5 summarizes the empirical evidence regarding reciprocity.

#### *4.3 Embeddedness in redistribution structures*

Finally, field data also suggest that pastors and faithful are embedded in redistribution structures (Polanyi, 2018). #Sh7 emphasizes how pastors pass on values monthly “to the regional, state, and national superintendency.” The transfer aims to help train new pastors and open churches, giving them initial support. It is one strategy used for church growth. This movement toward a center and out of it again appears when pastor #Sh14 emphasizes

Approach	Dimension	Proposition	Field evidence
NES	Market	<p>Economic action is “embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations” (Granovetter, 2018b)</p> <p>“Entrepreneurs might need to adapt their networks to accommodate firms’ evolving resource needs” (Stam <i>et al.</i>, 2014)</p> <p>Embeddedness is relevant “for entrepreneurial performance” (McKeever <i>et al.</i>, 2014, p. 228)</p> <p>Entrepreneurs “play an active role in forming their relationships” (Burt, 2009, p. 286)</p>	<p>“I looked for a friend. Is there any way you can buy me a car? I was unemployed. I had no salary. He went there, made the form” (#Sh5)</p> <p>“Even I needed it myself. The parishioners came together and blessed my life.” (#Sh1)</p> <p>Churches “are relaxing a little because they saw they were losing members. It cut a lot” (#Sh10)</p> <p>“For a ministry to grow, you cannot apply usage and custom” (#Sh10)</p> <p>“I here have been cells for a long time. Pastors are opening branches” (#pa3)</p> <p>“There are different churches to please different people. . . I understand people are looking for identification and satisfaction of interests too” (#pa6)</p> <p>“If you look at who the leaders are, they are the most enlightened people and earn the most. They are in positions that decide” (#pa5)</p> <p>“I know a pastor who visits only the leaders of a competing church. He manipulates the leadership, taking it to his church” (#Sh1)</p> <p>“Many pastors are looking at the bank account, the clothes” of the faithful” (#Sh10)</p> <p>“If the parishioner is a business owner, he does everything to win him over to his church. If he is not a business owner, the effort is not the same” (#Sh16)</p> <p>“I visit other churches. I went to a church, and the pastor asked me where I lived. I said a more upscale neighborhood. He gave special attention to me” (#Sh4)</p> <p>Religion “is a significant source of income” (#Sh11). “It’s an industry of faith” (#Sh8)</p>

**Table 4.**  
Field evidence associated with embedded in market structure

**Table 5.**  
Field evidence  
associated with  
embedded in  
reciprocity structure

Approach	Dimension	Proposition	Field evidence
<i>Classical economic sociology</i>	<i>Reciprocity</i>	Reciprocity denotes movements between correlative points of symmetric groupings (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018)	<p>“Evangelical helps people more within their community” (#pa3)</p> <p>“Acts 2 says in verse 42 that they persevered in doctrine, fellowship, prayer, and the breaking of bread. It is a biblical principle” (#Sh17)</p> <p>I am going to quote a verse. He says: “there are friends who are dearer than brothers.” There are people in the church that I talk to, that I cry. However, I have a blood sister who does not have the same opening as I have inside the church” (#pa8)</p> <p>“The Bible itself asks us to help domestics of the faith” (#Sh1)</p> <p>“We have to help the members first” (#Sh4)</p> <p>There is “solidarity because you are a brother in Christ. Will live in the same place” (#Sh1)</p> <p>“The priority is the ones in the house. You cannot stop helping your child to help others’ children” (#Sh12)</p> <p>It is with the same church members that one “ends up creating a family bond” (#Sh13)</p> <p>“We are always willing to help” (#pa1)</p> <p>“Family with me was always complicated. When I need it, I get support from the brothers of the church” (#pa2)</p> <p>“The evangelical helps people more from within the church itself” (#pa3)</p> <p>“Sometimes, I am on a bench in a hospital, and I identify with a person who is a Christian. If he/she starts a conversation, I identify with the lifestyle of these people” (#pa4)</p> <p>“I was talking to my mom. She chose a political vote more for the Christian position than for what the person intended to do” (#pa7)</p> <p>“The sheep are needy. They are there because they are looking for something” (#Sh8)</p> <p>“Sometimes what he/she does not have within the family, we provide for him/her” (#Sh13)</p> <p>“Evangelicals have certain credibility among themselves, a mutual trust” (#pa3)</p>
		There is the notion that “today’s giving will be rewarded for tomorrow’s taking” (Polanyi, 2001, p. 53)	
		It is a social structure whose continuity depends on the cooperative dimension and the trust between its members (Polanyi, 2001)	



that the church has social help to support the members: “The church members’ needs are met.” Similar to reciprocity, some norms and values also suggest redistribution. There is a prescription that community members contribute fees or goods or services to some central agency (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018): “God’s words say: it is by giving that one receives. It is important to live what the word of God tells you to do” (#Sh6). Note how #Sh6 looks to the Bible for an explanation of the parishioners’ support. Pastor #Sh17 also looks to the Bible for support for central help. According to him:

Acts, Chapter 5, says that everyone gathered at the foot of the altar what they had at home, and offered it to the church that shared it and everyone lived well. It was all shared. We work on it. (#Sh17).

According to Polanyi (2018, 2001), the central agency has the responsibility of allocating contributions in favor of collectivity. This responsibility is clear in the role played by the church or its administrations as central agencies. #Sh14 emphasizes how the church offers its members a series of services, such as consultations with psychologists, lawyers, speech therapists and nutritionists, among others. He exemplifies the case of a parishioner who paid only US\$5,000 to carry out an inventory, instead of US\$20,000 charged by other professionals outside the church: “We even now have an employment agency for the use and enjoyment of church membership” (#Sh14).

The analysis of redistribution as a church’s social structure allowed the authors to identify two complementary findings. The first relates to the redistribution level. Complementary to the literature, data suggest the possibility that redistribution can occur at the micro level, i.e. at the level of the church itself, or at the meso level, as a set of different units. Indeed, some interviewees highlighted the church as a central agency (#Sh9, #Sh14, #Sh15, #Sh6, #Sh13). Others emphasized larger structures that comprise several units (#Sh3, #Sh7, #Sh5). #Sh3, for instance, emphasizes how pastors of his religious denomination pass “values to the regional, state and national oversight.” The following finding thus emerges:

*F4.* Entrepreneurs’ embeddedness in redistribution can occur at the micro, meso and macro levels.

A second observation relates to the core of the concept of redistribution. Polanyi (2001) understood redistribution as movements toward a center and out of it again. An antagonistic movement also occurred in the churches, initially going from the “extremities,” returning them to the center. We coined this movement as “relocation.” It is clear in the mini-church practices adopted by pastors, for instance. In these practices, pastors elect leaders from their churches, enabling them to receive in their own homes neighbors and close friends interested in studying the Bible. According to #Sh3, the leader is “just a worker not allowed to serve the supper,” which the pastor must offer in the church. Hypothetically, imagine churches as an octopus with different tentacles. Each church leadership tentacle invites neighbors and close friends to their home and reaches out to different new potential parishioners. These new parishioners meet initially in leaders’ homes, going to the central church on specific occasions, such as collecting tithes and offerings. The following finding thus emerges:

*F5.* Relocation is the movement of embeddedness in networks, antagonistic to redistribution, which goes from the extremities to the center.

Table 6 summarizes the empirical evidence regarding redistribution.

**Table 6.**  
Field evidence  
associated with  
embedded in  
redistribution  
structure

Approach	Dimension	Proposition	Field evidence
<i>Classical economic sociology</i>	<i>Redistribution</i>	Refers to group centrality measures. (Polanyi, 2018, p. 35)	<p>Pastors monthly pass on values “to the regional, state, and national superintendency.” The aim, among others, is to assist novel pastors in opening their churches until gaining faithful (#Sh7)</p> <p>“One thing Pastor Jorge makes a point of always announcing. No one needs to spend a Sunday without having a chicken on the table. He/she who does not have it, speaks to me. The church has social help that supports the brothers” (#Sh14)</p> <p>“The church member is in no need” (#Sh14)</p> <p>“The cell leader is just a worker not allowed to serve the supper. The pastor must offer it in the central church.” The pastors tell the parishioners: “Take an envelope to your home. Keep the money. On the supper’ day, you bring it” (#Sh3)</p> <p>“God’s words say: it is by giving that one receives. I think it is important to live what the word of God tells you to do” (#Sh6)</p> <p>“Everything we are getting in the church is through the faithful. They know that who will bless is God Himself” (#Sh13)</p> <p>“I told the faithful: I need to change chairs in the church. God said I should ask for a donation. One of the faithful said: give me the account number” (#Sh15)</p> <p>“Acts, chapter 5, says that everyone gathered at the foot of the altar what they had at home, and offered it to the church that shared and everyone lived well. It was all shared. We work on it” (Wagner)</p> <p>“The church works to help” (#Sh9)</p> <p>“This responsibility falls more on the headquarters” (#Sh6)</p> <p>The central administration “acts in the church financially until the pastor gains the faithful, the members who support the church” (#Sh7)</p> <p>The church’s central administration that “helped me for two years in how to manage, how to run a church. I understood nothing about the church business” (#Sh5)</p> <p>“We now even have an employment agency for use and enjoyment of church membership” (#Sh14)</p> <p>“We have consultancy in the legal area for the faithful. The lawyer guides him/her. If he/she wants to sue this situation, our lawyer helps in with a price lower than the market charged” (#Sh14)</p> <p>“We give our members psychological support. We have a psychologist, a lawyer, a speech therapist, a nutritionist, a psychoanalyst, among others” (#Sh14)</p>
		<p>Manifests on occasions when norms and values prescribe community members make contributions of fees or goods or services to some central agency (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018)</p> <p>This central agency has the responsibility to allocate contributions in favor of collectivity (Polanyi (2018, 2001) (Barber, 1995; Polanyi, 2001, 2018)</p>	

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## 5. Conclusions

This article proposed answering two research questions.

- (1) *RQ1*: Which social structures are entrepreneurs are embedded in?
- (2) *RQ2*: How do such social structures affect entrepreneurs?

In response to the first question, this study presents two fundamental conclusions. First, religious entrepreneurs are embedded in three social structures, the first being the market, strengthening Granovetter's perspective, and the other two, reciprocity and redistribution, suggesting the need to expand the construct. Second, the social embeddedness explored by the NES is associated with the very economic perspective it criticizes. Regarding the second question, the social structures of market, reciprocity and redistribution affect entrepreneurs in several ways. For example, relationships influence entrepreneurs' economic decisions (Granovetter, 2018). At the same time, the embeddedness in the market structure drives entrepreneurs, even religious ones, to seek networks to maximize their utility, optimizing relationships according to personal interests. However, the embeddedness in the structures of reciprocity and redistribution broadens the understanding of the phenomenon. In effect, embeddedness in reciprocity positively affects the cooperative behavior of pastors-entrepreneurs with their faithful, stimulating genuine mutual aid and support initiatives, among others. At the same time, the embeddedness in redistribution broadens and reinforces in entrepreneurs the importance of collectivity to the development of their enterprises. As a result, pastors understand the relevance and benefits of contributing to a central agency in such a framework. Finally, pastors identify "relocation" as an opportunity to expand the contributions derived from a movement from the edges to the center, influencing how pastors seek to grow their religious enterprises.

### 5.1 Implications

*5.1.1 Theoretical implications.* Initially, this paper corroborates Granovetter's notion of embeddedness. It confirms his utilitarian conception, which has been criticized by several authors (Beckert, 2009; Foster and Brindley, 2018; Jackson, 2007; McKeever *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, even embedded in ethical and moral contexts that are implicitly unaffected by maximizing behaviors, religious entrepreneurs also understand networks rationally. By showing this, this paper endorses the current research that highlights the association of the notion of embeddedness to market relations, criticizing it. Further, this paper sheds light on two other social structures: reciprocity and redistribution. Specifically, entrepreneurship researchers suggest that entrepreneurs are embedded solely in market structures. However, this article highlights elements that suggest they are also embedded in reciprocity and redistribution structures. This paper therefore draws attention to the relevance of broadening the understanding of the construct. By incorporating the dimensions of market, reciprocity and redistribution, entrepreneurship researchers can benefit in essential aspects. Initially, they can better understand the influence of several levels and dimensions of embeddedness in networks on several entrepreneurial phenomena, not only in the religious sphere. Second, scholars can broaden their contextual understanding of entrepreneurship, enabling their studies' practical, social and political implications to be strengthened beyond agency-restricted suggestions (Shaw *et al.*, 2017; Wang and Warn, 2018). Another implication relates to the very embeddedness concept, as coined by Granovetter. Although this author tangentially suggested the possibility of incorporating other dimensions into the embeddedness metaphor, he did not emphasize those of reciprocity and redistribution, nor did he explore them between distinct possibilities. Therefore, this article supports the

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relevance of incorporating market, reciprocity and redistribution structures into the embeddedness concept.

*5.1.2 Practical and managerial implications.* This article has practical and managerial implications. The first relates to entrepreneurship researchers themselves, emphasizing the relevance of going beyond the still predominant perspective associated with the utilitarian and rationalized understanding of embeddedness in relationship networks. Further, this paper suggests that entrepreneurship scholars should research the still little explored religious entrepreneurial phenomenon. Indeed, religious entrepreneurship, as manifested in the role played by neo-Pentecostal pastors, has grown in recent years. Thus, by further investigating religious entrepreneurship, scholars can broaden the understanding of the aspects that influence its growth and shed light on other dimensions, such as the embeddedness in several structures and their influence on the processes of entrepreneurial creation and growth, for instance. In addition, when investigating an emerging phenomenon still little explored, entrepreneurship researchers can identify new concepts and constructs that may apply to the empirical understanding of other entrepreneurial phenomena immersed in different contexts. The second implication is for private programs for training entrepreneurs. Such programs must incorporate themes associated with the different influences and repercussions of reciprocal and redistribution structures on entrepreneurial trajectories. The suggestion is to explore the benefits ultimately derived from reciprocity and redistribution, beyond a rational and utilitarian approach. Such an approach would resemble the market perspective defended by Granovetter. Instead, the proposal emphasizes (among other aspects): how entrepreneurial relationships create values and norms; how and why redistribution structures affect entrepreneurship; and the influence that cultural and social norms, representing the structures of reciprocity and redistribution, exert on the entrepreneurs and their enterprises' decisions, economic or not.

*5.1.3 Policy implications.* Finally, this article also suggests important policy implications. For instance, reciprocity between entrepreneurs may eventually help to explain the differentiated trajectory of clusters associated with a particular type of product trade. Mutual help between entrepreneurs embedded in the same productive segment may ultimately be crucial to their successful trajectory. Understanding in which types of business this reciprocity proves to be more relevant is also politically significant. As reciprocity can contribute to developing or improving an entrepreneurial ecosystem, generating employment and income, policymakers should encourage such a condition. Further, reciprocity may be essential for some types of entrepreneurship, such as social or those developed by immigrants and other minority groups, more common in emerging and developing contexts (Khaw *et al.*, 2021; Muhammad *et al.*, 2021). For instance, studies have shown that most women in most countries also have appropriate reciprocity as the mainstay of their business initiatives. Note, therefore, the importance of better understanding the impact of such structures on these entrepreneurs and their ventures (Bianchi *et al.*, 2016; Foster and Brindley, 2018). Considering these aspects is fundamental to the public encouragement of several types of entrepreneurship. Moreover, the norms and values generated in reciprocity structures can affect the attitudes of individuals toward risk, failure and wealth creation. Understanding such cultural norms and values has various implications for government programs associated with elementary, secondary and higher education. Policymakers can better understand the still little explored relevance of initiatives to encourage entrepreneurship from the early years of educational training. Such initiatives can train young people to enter an entrepreneurial career, enabling them to tackle the challenges and opportunities associated with this context.

By suggesting that entrepreneurs are simultaneously embedded in market, reciprocity and redistribution structures, this study sheds light on the impact and relevance of the effectiveness of public policies to encourage and unblock entrepreneurship in its various spheres. Initiatives such as tax reduction would significantly boost the entrepreneurial ecosystem, especially in emerging and developing countries. Other initiatives are also relevant, such as:

- facilitating the processes of opening and closing companies, reducing the still high rate of informality in emerging contexts;
- investment in commercial and professional infrastructure, facilitating the flow of production;
- less bureaucracy in legislation;
- wider and better access to financial capital and physical infrastructure, such as the Internet, land transport, energy and water, among others;
- greater legal certainty;
- decreasing crime and corruption rates in government agencies, whose manifestation affects entrepreneurial resilience (aspects related to the lack of confidence in the spheres of power, associated with political and economic instabilities, can negatively affect entrepreneurs' access to sources of international investments); and
- wider and better integration between the different public spheres. In the latter context, greater cooperation between national, state and municipal bodies could boost redistribution as a social structure.

Redistribution also gains relevance in the public and private sphere. Associative institutions, business bodies, federations representing the segments of commerce, industries and services, among others, play essential roles as central agencies to support entrepreneurship. Such agencies can positively affect the formation and preparation of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### *5.2 Limitations and direction for future research*

This article is not exempt from limitations. One of them relates to investigating churches only as enterprises, disregarding different ethical-religious norms and values also present in such institutions (Ojo, 2019). In doing so, this article disregards some of the values and norms that underlie the reciprocal structure that pastors and faithful use to support each other. Despite the extensive collection of interviews, another limitation is data collection only through semi-structured interviews. Other techniques could amplify the evidence related to the dimensions. A third limitation is the absence of data from churches and pastors, such as the number of parishioners who regularly attend the church, the average monthly income they get through tithes and offerings, and the other resources that pastors receive to manage their churches. Although questioned, respondents were reluctant to provide such information. In this sense, this study does not allow us to reflect on eventual causalities or linearity between immersion and entrepreneurial performance, limiting itself to identifying associations between the construct and religious entrepreneurship. Novel studies could address such limitations, advancing the reflections outlined here. In this sense, novel studies could:

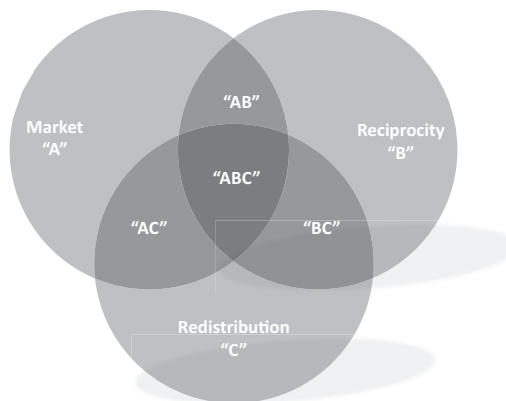
- investigate the dimensions of reciprocity and redistribution in other religious entrepreneurial contexts and explore them in diverse entrepreneurial ecosystems;

- investigate the innovative findings identified regarding several levels of the social structure of redistribution. Plausible empirical evidence of confirmation and expansion would support the idea that central agencies can play a role at the micro, meso and macro levels. Such an observation suggests the need for further studies on levels of redistribution and the strategies related to their necessary integration;
- research the identified movement referred to as “relocation.” Such a movement antagonizes the redistribution (as Polanyi suggests), going from the “extremities” and returning to the center. Studies that associate the network’s structural dimension can shed light on whether the phenomenon is a variation of redistribution or a differentiated manifestation of market structure;
- investigate the causality between the structures of social immersion and entrepreneurial performance, in their different contextual manifestations.
- replicate the findings obtained here in other contexts, seeking to strengthen them as theoretical propositions or refute them.
- decompose the market, reciprocity and redistribution structures into second-order dimensions, identifying and testing, qualitatively and quantitatively, the effects caused by the derived variables; and
- use other specific methodological strategies, such as textual analysis, identifying, for example, the feelings or tone of the interviewees’ speeches (Loughran and McDonald, 2011). Such textual analysis could shed light on new interpretations not identifiable by other strategies.

### 5.3 Proposed research agenda

Although this article highlights the influence of market structures, reciprocity and redistribution, it does so in isolation. This paper does not address the different and potential repercussions of their intersections. These intersections make up the proposed research agenda, represented in Figure 2.

In Figure 2, the “A” intersection groups the elements common to market and reciprocity structures. The “B” intersection brings together elements of market and redistribution structures. The “C” intersection integrates the structures of reciprocity and redistribution. Finally, the “ABC” intersection comprises the notion of embeddedness as supported in this



**Figure 2.**  
Proposed research  
agenda

**Table 7.**  
Proposed research  
agenda

Approach	Dimension	Open question (OQ)	Related literature
Embeddedness	“AB”	OQ1: What is the influence of both structures on entrepreneurial intention? OQ2: What are the influence/ impact of the market on reciprocal relationships and vice versa? OQ3: What is the limit between both structures?	(Georgeou and Haas, 2019; Marques <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
	“AC”	OQ4: Is there a developing relationship between market and redistribution? How do they both relate to each other? OQ5: What is the impact of redistribution on market relations, and vice versa?	(Bull and Ridley-Duff, 2019; Georgeou and Haas, 2019; Jones and Tobin, 2018)
	“BC”	OQ6: How do reciprocal relationships help/impact redistribution, and vice versa? OQ7: How do social enterprises appropriate reciprocity and redistribution to support their businesses?	(Bull and Ridley-Duff, 2019; Georgeou and Haas, 2019; Jones and Tobin, 2018)
	“ABC”	OQ8: Although embedded in the three structures, are there different degrees or levels between them? If so, when? OQ9: Does the entrepreneur have an agency over the structures? How does it occur? OQ11: What is the relationship between structure and agency?	(Bagwell, 2018; Bull and Ridley-Duff, 2019; Busch and Barkema, 2020b; Szkudlarek and Wu, 2018; Wang and Warn, 2018)

paper. It derives from the double notion that individuals and their economic actions (market) are embedded in the structures of reciprocity and redistribution. Table 7 expands on the proposed agenda, highlighting research opportunities and suggestions for related literature.

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