

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

LORD ASHCROFT INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL

**START-UP INCUBATION: A RITE OF PASSAGE OF
ENTREPRENEURS AND THEIR SOCIAL VENTURES**

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requirements of Anglia Ruskin University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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This dissertation presents a socio-anthropological investigation of social venture incubation: a process of providing enterprise support aimed at creating social change. Most previous research on incubation has focused on venture development and growth, and the efficacy of incubation in terms of the economic contribution firms make. In this study I contribute by investigating the process of incubation, conceptualising it as a rite of passage of both the entrepreneur and the venture.

I conducted an ethnographic study following the rites of passage of one cohort of social entrepreneurs and their ventures - from selection to incorporation into the business world. The insider perspective provided access to both the organisers and designers of the process as well as the entrepreneurs over a period of 15 months. I thematically analysed my data with NVivo using an a priori and emergent coding system.

The key finding of the study was the dual nature of the incubatee, the liminal entity in this rite of passage. As opposed to most incubation studies, I found that the process was as much a transition of the ventures as it was for the entrepreneurs. The rite of passage framework enabled me to identify the transition to becoming a social entrepreneur. In addition the study contributes theoretically showing the importance of social exchanges in participants' relationships as well as the variety of different engagement patterns in the entrepreneurial rite of passage. Engagement also influences incubation outcomes and evaluation.

The value of the research findings for managers of such initiatives include designing relevant evaluation systems and strengthening the case for social incubation. Policy makers and funders of such initiatives thus need to take into account the different outcomes and impact of the programmes when allocating resources. The dual nature of the incubatee and impact on the incubatee should thus be taken into account when setting expected outcomes.

Key words: social venture incubation, social entrepreneur, incubator, start up, social innovation, social extrapreneurship, ethnography, rite of passage, impact, social exchange

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List of acronyms

BA - Business Advisor

BI - Business Incubator

BS - the Business School

FG - Foundation Group

NBIA - The National Business Incubator Association

RoP - Rite of Passage

SEBC - Social and Environmental Business Centre

SIC - Social Innovation Centre

SIF - Social Incubator Fund

SV Social Venture

SVI - Social Venture Incubator

SVW - Social Venture Weekend

Chapter 1: Incubation, social ventures and social entrepreneurs

1. Rationale, research aim and emerging questions

'they're [social incubators in the UK] start-ups as well and we want them to learn from their experiences, we want them to...if they do need to change things for the good of the programme, and for the good of the incubatees, then we definitely let them do that... I'm kind of feeling my way through what is the most useful thing for all of the incubators... A lot of what we do is basically experimental....we get people from all over the world asking us about this programme, and about the incubators. And it's one of the things that interests me is that people are genuinely coming to the UK to be incubated,...because they see the social investment infrastructure that now exists'

(James, HM Treasury, interview)

In 2012 the UK government wanted to boost the demand and supply of the social investment market as well as enable the environment (through legislation) for supporting the social sector. This was confirmed by James, Social Investment Finance Team at HM Treasury, in an interview midway through my fieldwork. The intention to decentralise public services through support programmes for social ventures were perceived as the key to 'tackling some very stubborn and expensive problems' (CO, 2011: 11), part of the Big Society agenda to empower communities, open up public services and provide a channel for social action. The £10m Social Incubator Fund (SIF) launched in 2012 has led to the establishment of ten social incubators across the UK which aimed to increase social venture start-ups via incubation support (Big Lottery Fund UK, 2014).

The SIF is part of the Investment Readiness Programme together with the Investment and Contract Readiness Fund. The latter is a grant-based support aimed at investment ready, growth stage social ventures, whereas the SIF is aimed at early stage social ventures. Together they aim to build an investment pipeline through providing support to the whole spectrum of social ventures. The SIF provides support with space, advice and debt or equity finance to start-up social ventures. The Investment Readiness Programme itself is part of a broader government initiative called 'Building demand for social investment' (Cabinet Office, 2012) which is part of the government policy for 'Growing the Social Investment Market' in the UK (Cabinet Office, 2011; 2013). The role of the government is to develop the social investment market acting as a 'steward' (Cabinet Office, 2013).

The political discourse centred around finance, capital and investment readiness. The broader national aims were geographical reach, an increased number of social ventures able to show an increase in revenue, an increase in jobs created by social start-ups, and

finally an increase in social start-ups that progress to the Investment and Contract Readiness Fund, win public contracts or follow-on investment (see Chapter 4). In order to help social ventures scale and become investment ready the government selected incubation as a support approach borrowed from 'the tech base in the West Coast of America, and we decided that appropriate intervention to support early stage social ventures would be to set up a fund that would finance social incubators' (James, HM Treasury, interview).

In literature failure of new ventures has already been identified as common (Spinelli and Adams, 2012), governments have committed to creating environments to help people start and grow businesses (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2011). The obstacles and uncertainty in the early stages of new venture creation make government interventions seem appropriate (Patton et al., 2009). There are various mechanisms and policies including business support organisations, training schemes, venture funds and incubators. Incubators generally are the oldest and most invested in intervention tools by local governments as they facilitate entrepreneurship by providing business support (Aernoudt, 2004). Incubators are normally non-profit organisations and until recently have been represented by the two most common types: the regional incubator and the university incubator. They were generally funded and established by local governments or organisations with similar interests: regional development or technology transfer. This scheme was supported by the launch of the £75 million 'Incubator Fund' in 2001 in the UK.

Previous studies of business incubators (BI) and incubation aimed to theorise the incubator-incubation phenomenon (Hacket and Dilts, 2004a) and the incubation process model (Hacket and Dilts, 2004b). These efforts offer a functionalist view of the incubation process, its elements (configuration) and the incubator itself. Business incubation is a dynamic process of business enterprise development (Aernoudt, 2004). The distinction between the BI as a facility and the business incubation process is evident in the BI literature. Initially focus was concentrated on the facility and its configuration. Later studies shifted attention to the process of incubatee development and outcomes (Hackett and Dilts, 2004a). Studies underplay the more intangible aspects of BIs as key factors in facilitating entrepreneurship. These include co-location in an environment of peers, social inputs, and the possibility to obtain legitimacy and psychological support (Bøllingtoft and Uthøi, 2005). Furthermore very few studies focus on the indirect and social aspects of BI (incubation outcomes), the focus is primarily on the directly measurable outputs (Bearse, 1998).

In addition the role of incubators in the entrepreneurial process has been investigated previously in terms of enterprise development and growth only (Hackett and Dilts, 2004b,

2008; Aernoudt, 2004; Barrow, 2001; Bearse, 1998) methodologically biased to take the incubator management perspective. Very few studies include the entrepreneurs in their research design (Peters et al., 2004; Gertner, 2013). Furthermore Bearse (1998) criticises the outsider stance in the methodology used by NBIA¹ for reporting incubator impact. He supports participant-observer stance and related methodologies when it comes to generating information useful to management, also advocated by Patton (1997) and Schon (1991).

This thesis presents a socio-anthropological analysis of social venture incubation. Social incubators are an example of social extrapreneurship, defined as 'the process of inter-organizational action that facilitates alternative combinations of ideas, people, places and resources to address social challenges and make social change' (Tracey and Stott, 2017). It is a complex and dynamic space supporting social entrepreneurs create new ventures and become investment ready. Social extrapreneurship is positioned in the broader field of social innovation². Tracey and Stott (2017) categorise social innovation as three core organisational processes - social entrepreneurship, social intrapreneurship and social extrapreneurship. This classification thus helps conceptually locate social incubation, a case of social extrapreneurship, as a 'process of inter-organisational action' (ibid.). This has ontological implications on theorising the phenomenon which I explore and explain. In addition extrapreneurship is inherently relational activity, 'a partnership approach that goes beyond co-ordination or co-branding. It starts with the network and leverages [resources]... to create a disproportionately greater development impact' (Algozo, 2015).

Social ventures have their own specificities and encompass a broad range of business types. Achieving their social mission takes longer than reaching economic sustainability which can disturb the venture's strategic management process (Smith et al., 2013; Smith and Lewis, 2011). This has implications for social venture growth and how that is defined. Some think that ventures can have negative impact on the achievement of social mission, drifts in the organisational values and mission, and increases in the social mission cost (Smith et al., 2013). Others argue that growth for social enterprises means broadening their social mission. Hence the size of the venture does not matter as much as scaling the social impact. In addition social entrepreneurship literature focuses predominantly on established ventures, thus their creation and early development has been the subject of a

¹ The National Business Incubator Association which was founded in the US currently named INBIA - International Business Innovation Association.

² 'Social innovation – like many other forms of innovation – is a process of collective innovation involving many players: social enterprises, companies, service users, regulators, funders, politicians.' (Leadbeater, 2007: 15) It is harnessing the potential of all or some of those players to solve social issues: such as inequality, education, health and inclusion. It usually refers to private initiatives.

'Social innovation' seeks new answers to social problems by: identifying and delivering new services that improve the quality of life of individuals and communities; identifying and implementing new labour market integration processes, new competencies, new jobs, and new forms of participation, as diverse elements that each contribute to improving the position of individuals in the workforce.' (OECD, LEED Forum on Social Innovations website)

few empirical studies (Gras et al., 2011). One such example is Katre and Slipante's (2012) study of 32 social ventures which shows that social entrepreneurs blend behaviours from mainstream business ventures and nonprofits. The importance of heterogeneous knowledge and networks of social entrepreneurs is emphasised in literature as they need to cope with diverse business and mission logic (De Carolis & Saporito, 2006; King, 2004). These specificities of social ventures and entrepreneurs suggest particular needs and type of support. My study thus investigates the role incubation plays in social venture creation and the entrepreneurial process as a whole, thus adding to the scarce literature on social venture start-ups.

I used an ethnographic approach, making it possible to connect multiple levels of analysis (Phan et al. 2005) in incubation - its elements and emergent processes. Those levels include companies located in the facility, the incubator itself, the systemic level (university, region or country), and the entrepreneurs themselves. I started fieldwork in March 2014 as an observer, changing my research identity to participant-observer in May 2014 when I joined the SVI programme as a paid part-time administrator. SVI is a UK-based social incubator which was set up in 2014. I interviewed leading SVI partner management staff and some of the tenant companies' founders in the business centre where SVI was later embedded. Initially advertised as an incubator itself it turned out to be only a hub for social and environmental enterprises. I thus joined from the outset and later managed to focus my study on the incubation programme. I was based in the Hatchery, the free open plan office, where incubation happened. I also carried out three rounds of interviews with entrepreneurs recruited in cohort 1 - July 2014 to July 2015. I participated and interacted with entrepreneurs and organisers alike on a daily basis. Further to that I facilitated fortnightly cohort meetings and participated in partner steering group meetings taking minutes. This provided an opportunity to access all participants in the incubation process. The research presented in this thesis aims to contribute methodologically to the literature through an ethnographically-oriented, longitudinal study taking into account the entrepreneurs as the main participants in the process of social venture incubation.

Apart from ontologically establishing the nature of social venture incubation, this research investigates the role of incubation in becoming a social entrepreneur in addition to social venture creation. To achieve this I have used the socio-anthropological conceptual framework of the rite of passage (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). Conceptualising incubation as a rite of passage provides an opportunity to theorise inter-organisational activities in the context of social entrepreneurship and to conduct the first study of incubation which integrates multiple levels of analysis. It offers an explanation of process based organisations such as incubators. Van Gennep defined 'rites de passage' as 'rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age' (cited in Turner,

1969: 94). The process explains the functional aspects of the transitional rites whereas the structural elements of the theory include the participants and artefacts involved. This makes it a suitable lens to theorise the incubator-incubation phenomenon which contains processual and structural elements too. Business incubators would seem to represent the liminal organisational form par excellence, since they are designed to induct the neophyte and support the initial stage of a growing business. Once mature enough, it is expected to leave, and cross over to the next threshold: self-sufficiency. The concept of the transitional phase of the rite of passage framework, called liminality, has found wider applications in organisational studies literature. However most studies have been criticised for making two obvious omissions. The first one is not taking into account its processual nature, as a phase in a rite of passage (Beech, 2011), and the second one is ignoring the concept of *communitas* which reduces the social ties between liminars to nothing (Meira, 2014). I however apply both the processual and relational aspects of the theory as they provide insights into the process of incubation and its role for social venture creation and becoming an entrepreneur.

Thus the aims of the research are distilled into three research questions. The first research question concerns the ontology of incubation (Chapter 2, section 2.1):

1) What is the nature of social venture incubation?

The following two research questions emerged during the fieldwork through my engagement and increasing involvement with the participants at SVI. Thus their practical implications for incubation management are inherent.

2) How and why do entrepreneurs engage with the social incubation process?

This question was developed as a result of the fieldwork and the organisers preoccupation with the level of engagement with the programme. As per the contract offered to entrepreneurs (Chapter 4, section 3.2.1) they were supposed to engage with all the elements of the programme, particularly the business advisors, in exchange of the support they received - free office space, advice and peer networks. Engagement was strongly emphasised and monitored which made me question the explanatory power of the rite of passage theory. The weak authority structures and *laissez-faire* approach to incubation were contrary to the strong authority structure described in traditional contexts. The conceptual framework thus developed as I engaged in the fieldwork. I started with the theory of rite of passage and as the fieldwork progressed realised that I needed to include engagement as entrepreneurs showed different engagement patterns than liminars. I thus connected the theory of rite of passage with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) in order to understand the new phenomena I was observing. It contributed to explain how relationships in an incubator develop as 'social exchange theory explains how people

obtain valued resources (information, status, love) through their interactions with others' (Flynn, 2005, p. 746; Blau, 1964). That is also in line with the assumption that firm gaps (which Rice (2002) considers as resources, knowledge and skills) can be addressed by the incubator managers. Rice however assumes that incubator managers can only address such gaps which this thesis disproves in the context of social venture incubation. I therefore add a social exchange dimension to the rite of passage conceptual framework outlined above.

Finally the third research question concerns incubation impact and its influence on the entrepreneurial process. The organisers worried about whether incubation makes any difference in the process of venture creation and growth (venture incubation impact):

3) What are the impact and outcomes of this rite of passage on entrepreneurs and their ventures?

Not only were the organisers worried about their impact on the ventures but the entrepreneurs themselves perceived the impact of incubation differently. Thus it was clear that the outcomes of incubation were more diverse than originally planned. This provides an insight into the social incubation process and its outcomes as well as offers practically oriented knowledge which can help incubator management.

2. Key definitions

There are three concepts I use in this thesis that are used to denote varying ideas both in academic and practitioner literature. I would thus like to point out hereafter what I mean by social venture, incubator and (social) entrepreneur.

According to official policy documents social ventures encompass a wide variety of entities including community organisations, charities, social enterprises and social firms (Cabinet Office, 2011) - spanning the spectrum from non-profit to for-profit. Social ventures are diverse and at the same time united by one common goal - to produce social change or more specifically they share a passion for discovering innovative solutions to social problems. The social entrepreneurship literature uses the term social venture and social enterprise interchangeably (Ruvio and Shoham, 2011). However social enterprises are just one of the multiple forms social ventures can adopt. In this thesis I have used the term social venture in the policy document sense, encompassing the variety of entities above, as the SVI programme adopted that definition too. The common denominator between all those ventures was social impact, they included ventures spanning all market sectors, legal forms and business models (Cabinet Office, 2011). Social impact is key for attracting social investment (Hazenbergh, 2015). In order to understand social impact a

shift of perspective from focusing on outputs to focusing on outcomes is needed (Buckland et al., 2013). Compared to outputs which focus on statistical measurements as they relate to the tangible results of activities, outcomes are 'the wider changes, benefits and knowledge that they attempt to elicit in the world in the medium and long term (e.g. reduction of social exclusion, decrease in inequalities)' (Grieco, 2015: 44).

A similar issue was registered with regards to incubation impact (Chapter 2, section 2.4). What counts as a business incubator 'is a shared office space facility that seeks to provide its incubatees with a strategic, value-adding intervention system (i.e. business incubation) of monitoring and business assistance' (Hackett and Dilts, 2004b: 57). Moreover a business incubator is more than just a physical arrangement (ibid.; Bøllingtoft and Uthøi, 2005) as it provides access to networks (Hansen et al., 2000). It is a nurturing business environment (Bøllingtoft and Uthøi, 2005) with the main goal 'to produce successful firms that will leave the incubator financially viable and free-standing within a reasonable delay' (Aernoudt, 2004: 128). In the findings chapters I explore how incubation was applied to social ventures, thus featuring the first account of incubation in such a context.

Finally some researchers have already questioned the distinctiveness of social entrepreneurship as a field of study separate from other forms of entrepreneurship - institutional, cultural and economic entrepreneurship (Dacin et al., 2010; Mair, 2010). Others argue that it deserves its body of theory as mission motives and challenges are different (Austin et al., 2006; Murphy and Coombes, 2009). Dacin et al. (2010) see it as a context where one can 'investigate how existing theories apply to social mission-related phenomena' (p.43). I adopt the same view here as its interdisciplinary focus 'intersects a number of boundaries drawing explicitly from anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology' (ibid.). Thus this perspective on social entrepreneurship provides more room for being creative as it enables interdisciplinary theorising. I also agree with Watson (2013b) and understand the entrepreneur as an 'entrepreneurial actor'. The entrepreneurial action approach is a response to the overly individualised and psychologically based theorisation of entrepreneurship. It is influenced by the disciplines of economics and psychology which have dominated entrepreneurship studies (Watson, 2013a, 2013c; Hjorth et al., 2008) thus accounting for what Watson would call scientific view of entrepreneurship which focuses on the individual as some sort of special type of person. Watson considers that attention should be given to entrepreneurial action as part of all aspects of social life, not limited to venture creation only, thus referring to the individuals engaging in such action as entrepreneurial actors. This conception of entrepreneurs (as entrepreneurial actors) thus broadens the scope and focus of social entrepreneurship literature too and is able to encompass the diverse group of people (in terms of background) that engage in social venturing (Chapter 5, section 2). Down (2006)

depicted entrepreneurs as ordinary people in his ethnography 'Narratives of Enterprise', herein I use the rite of passage framework to analyse the process of social venture incubation and consequently shed light on the ordinariness of social entrepreneurs too.

3. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organised into eight chapters. Chapter 2 starts with a review which aims to contextualise social venture incubation. The purpose of the chapter is not to review all incubation studies just for the sake of comprehensiveness but rather to highlight the areas of incubation that my study contributes to. I situate social venture incubation in current academic literature and present the theoretical framework for my study. I start with an ontological discussion of incubation reviewing some of the most popular process models which are venture-centric. Then I suggest that the socio-anthropological theory of Van Gennep and Turner provides a new organisationally focused conceptual framework from which incubation can be understood, emphasising its processual and relational aspects. In addition I critically review current organisational studies literature applying the concept of liminality, *communitas* and rite of passage.

In addition I discuss Blau's (1964) concept of social exchange which is used to interpret the findings of this thesis. I then look into the nature of the incubatees. Entrepreneurship literature is reviewed to assist interpretation as to why entrepreneurs engaged differently with the process (the second theme and research question). Finally, since one of the key objectives of this study is to evaluate the impact of the incubation programme, I look into evaluation of impacts and outcomes of incubation showing the difficulties in this endeavour.

Chapter 3 sets out the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning my thesis. I explain the abductive approach to reasoning I have adopted and engage into a discussion of the quality criteria demonstrating rigour. I explain why I have chosen an ethnographic methodology and then present the research design. I also analyse my access journey, personal identity work in the field and the respective ethical implications for the collected data and knowledge produced. Finally I discuss data recording techniques and analysis methods I used.

Chapter 4, 'Designing Social Incubation', is the first empirical chapter. It analyses the organisers' perspective on social venture incubation. It presents the aims of the programme and the expected outcomes as set by the funders as well as how those were planned to be achieved. I start with an overview of the organisers of the incubation process, their role and organisational intentions as designers of the process. I also analyse their intentions for the programme, explaining who the incubation programme was

designed for and what it intended to achieve. The following section focuses on the incubation structures and activities designed to achieve the aims of the programme. I analyse the organisers' perspective of the social venture journey.

Chapter 5, 'Incubating', analyses how the designed incubation rite of passage worked in practice as well as the entrepreneurs' engagement with the programme. Firstly I present the entrepreneurs and their ventures. I focus on entrepreneurs' background, stage of venture development, team, expected challenges and aims. Following this I turn to an analysis of the engagement of entrepreneurs with the programme elements. I show how the incubation process and its impact depend on the exchanges taking place between entrepreneurs and the elements of the programme. I analyse how entrepreneurs engaged with the Hatchery, training, the cohort, the business advisors and incubation networks.

Chapter 6, 'Incubated', is the last findings chapter. Here I discuss the impact on venture development and growth. In addition I also analyse how prepared entrepreneurs felt to incorporate into the business world and thus how successful the incubation rite of passage was. The chapter is divided in two parts. The first part focuses on the rite of passage to becoming investment ready and scaling the ventures. The results focus on the progress of the ventures along the expected outcomes and underpinnings of a successful business set out by the organisers and discussed in Chapter 4. In the second part of the chapter I focus on the entrepreneurs and incubation impact on them. I conclude the chapter with what graduation meant for entrepreneurs. I analyse the entrepreneurs' rite of passage and their readiness for incorporation into the business world.

In chapter 7, 'Bringing it together: the social entrepreneur-venture rite of passage', I return to the research questions and discuss my findings in the light of the extant literature. I also indicate the opportunities for further research, implications for managers and contributions to knowledge.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I reflect upon my learning journey and what doing the ethnography had done for me. It changed the way I perceive the PhD process - applying the rite of passage framework to my experience of becoming an academic.

Chapter 2: Contextualising social venture incubation

1. Introduction

In the current study the theory of rite of passage (RoP) (Van Gennep, 1960), extended by Turner (1969), is used as a theoretical framework to illuminate the role of incubation in the entrepreneurial process and social venture creation. The purpose of my literature review is to situate social venture incubation in current academic literature and to present the theoretical framework for my study.

I start with a discussion of the ontological problem of incubation. I critique some of the most popular incubation process models as they focus only on efficacy adopting a venture-centric perspective. Whereas that is understandable considering the main purpose of incubation it offers little insight into how that purpose is achieved and why. In adding the RoP concept to these models I aim to reposition incubation as a support process for entrepreneurs in comparison to an economic justification. One of the major issues with current models is their ignorance and lack of interest in the entrepreneur which implicates understanding how the process works.

Next I position incubation as a rite of passage, elaborating on the liminal phase and the concept of *communitas*. Those concepts are analytical tools used in the current dissertation to study incubation as a RoP in social venture creation which provides an interesting opportunity to enrich theories of organisation. Thus here I turn back to the sources, Van Gennep and Turner, to define and present the theoretical constructs as I apply the theory in its entirety. The socio-anthropological perspective provides a new conceptual framework from which incubation can be theorised and thus focuses on its processual and relational aspects. In addition I critically review current organisational studies applying the concept of liminality, *communitas* and RoP. I point out how they use particular aspects of this theory to explain certain aspects of organisational life, sometimes applying constructs such as liminality out of context. In addition the RoP theory contributes to entrepreneurship studies, grounded in cognition and rationality, by presenting the difficult transitional experiences of entrepreneurs, emphasising the emotional aspects and the impact of the process on the whole person, not the venture only. I also elaborate on the exchange aspect of RoP and further to that introduce the concept of social exchange which I use to explain how relationships form between participants in the process. I draw on Blau's (1964) theory of social exchanges to distinguish them from purely economic exchanges explaining how social exchanges

contribute to *communitas* formation and entrepreneur-advisor relationship development. That is necessary due to the different power relations between entrepreneurs and business advisors - they are not the typical liminar-instructor ones as in a RoP.

I discuss the nature of the incubatees in the research literature. I define entrepreneurs as entrepreneurial actors (Watson, 2013a, b, c) as it is a term better suited to the findings in this thesis (Chapter 5). I consider social entrepreneurship as a context in my study. The findings of my thesis add to that body of literature offering a less heroic account of social entrepreneurs. Indeed a RoP framework sheds light on the assistance and help needed by social entrepreneurs. In addition I give voice to less successful social entrepreneurs and those who failed to counterbalance heroic representations in literature. I looked for insights in entrepreneurship literature to help with interpretation as to why entrepreneurs engaged differently with the process. I reviewed some mainstream entrepreneurship literature on entrepreneurial background for that reason. It shows that the liminars in this rite of passage are not empty vessels entering the incubation process. Thus how they engage with it and benefit from it, I find, is influenced by their background too.

The analysis of data and my fieldwork illuminated another theme which was pertinent to social venture incubation and that is the theme of engagement. I point out the limited knowledge with regards to entrepreneurial engagement and its relevance for incubation impact and outcomes. Finally, since one of the key objectives of this study is to evaluate the impact of the incubation programme, I look into evaluation of impacts and outcomes of incubation showing the challenges in this endeavour. I discuss the diverse outcomes of incubation and the preoccupation with venture outputs in literature, a consequence of the venture-centric orientation of incubation studies.

2. The problem with theorising incubation

2.1 The ontology of incubation

Herein I discuss the lack of ontological clarity vis-a-vis incubation in current academic discourse. Despite the novelty of social incubation initiatives, they share a lot of common characteristics with mainstream incubation programmes. There is a lot of literature on what incubators are, describing the 'what' of incubation (Hackett and Dilts, 2004a). However most of it has been atheoretical. The authors contributed theoretically by positioning incubation in the field of finance thus giving primacy to resource munificence in venture development. I argue that the nature of incubation is ontologically different than currently portrayed in literature. In this section I also point out what currently is understood as incubation/incubator.

Smilor (1987) defined two broad approaches to incubation: (1) providing inexpensive office space, where success was determined by the entrepreneur's ability to pay monthly expenses, and (2) building companies, or helping companies grow, where the ability to stand on their own was considered success. The European Commission considered the former as the first generation of incubators of the 80s and the latter as the second generation of 90s (CSES, 2002; Lalkaka, 2001). Later Hansen et al. (2000) defined the networked incubator by adding access to networks to incubators' value proposition. This third generation of incubators (Bruneel et al., 2012) initially focused predominantly on new technology-based companies (Aerts et al., 2007). The evolution of the incubation/incubator concept is marked by a shift in focus from the more tangible aspects of incubators to the less tangible aspects of incubation (also pointed out by Dee et al. (2011); Bøllingtoft (2012); Ebberts (2014)). That evolution of the conception of incubation is in line with my focus on the process - its dynamics and structure, rather than the facility and measurable outputs only.

It is needless to argue that the phenomenon has been established processually. One needs to simply look at the literature where incubation has been described as:

'complicated and organic process by which valid business ideas and entrepreneurs emerge into real businesses' (Campbell et al., 1985: 46)

'an ability or desire to maintain prescribed and controlled conditions favourable to the development of new firms' (Smilor, 1987: 146)

'to allow entrepreneurs to take advantage of the greater knowledge and experience of the incubator manager' (Rice, 2002: 170)

'a strategic, value-adding intervention system of monitoring and business assistance... incubatees are selected from a pool of incubation candidates, monitored and assisted, and infused with resources while they undergo early stage development' (Hackett and Dilts, 2004a: 41)

'a process enacted by business incubators, angels, and venture capital organisations in order to facilitate the entrepreneurial process' (Hackett and Dilts, 2008: 440)

Across those definitions there is a clear notion of a process designed with the purpose to assist nascent entrepreneurs and thus contribute positively to new venture creation and development. Some emphasise the transitional aspect of the process (Campbell et al., 1985) and others the importance of the incubator managers as experts whose function is to help the incubatees. Smilor (1987) refers to the special conditions within incubators which are favourable for start-ups. All of them are venture-centric though, something I

counterbalance with this study, re-introducing the entrepreneur as an essential participant in the process.

Later definitions also specify the target group of incubators to include startup companies emphasising the 'dynamic process of business *enterprise development*' (CSES, 2002: 5). Incubators aim to 'reduce the failure rate of early stage companies and *speed the growth of companies* which have the potential to become substantial generators of employment and wealth' (ibid.). What incubators offer is thus expanded to include: 'an entrepreneurial and learning environment, ready access to mentors and investors, visibility in the marketplace' in addition to 'shared office services, access to equipment, flexible leases and expandable space — all under one roof' (ibid.). The two key words in those definitions specify the purpose of incubators as enterprise development and speed of growth (acceleration) of companies. Those objectives are also aligned with the intentions of the organisers in the social venture incubator analysed throughout this study. In addition the structure and provision of the process is alluded to, also adopted by the social incubator in my study.

2.2 Incubation process models and theorising

Despite the clear depiction of incubation as a process, attempts to theorise the phenomenon have largely ignored its nature. A lot of effort had gone into developing incubation process models based on theories which do not emphasise its processual nature.

Hackett and Dilts (2004b) for instance use real options-driven theory to conceptualise the incubation process and more specifically to explain and predict the survival of new ventures. Business incubation performance, they explain, is a function of the ability of the incubator to create options via the selection of intermediate potential firms and to exercise those options via counselling, monitoring and the infusion of resources while at the same time containing the potential terminal option failure cost. The model includes three constructs: selection performance, monitoring and business assistance intensity and resource munificence. Later they tested the model empirically (Hackett and Dilts, 2008) to find that the selected incubation process constructs were correct but the dimensions which describe those constructs were different. They tested their model quantitatively by interviewing incubator managers only - adopting a venture-centric, top-down approach to their study.

Peters et al. (2004) develop a model which explains the factors affecting graduation rates of incubatees. The lack of the explanatory power of their first model was determined after an empirical study of 49 US incubators based on secondary data from websites and four

interviews with incubator directors. Then they decided to draw upon organisational learning, resource-based view and social networks literature. The authors suggest that all three models explain incubator service characteristics and hence the need for a multi-model approach. They are interested in the factors accelerating the graduation rates and propose that there are two factors that might affect it: reduction of transaction costs or/and learning made available in incubators. In their new model they suggest that companies are affected by the services provided and the filtering process. Both correspond to business assistance and selection performance in Hackett and Dilts's (2004b) model. However Peters et al. propose the idea of a learning process which signifies more than just business assistance intensity as in the previous model. This process includes the acquisition of knowledge and information through networks and interactions among co-tenants. This is a very important shift towards the active role of the tenants in the process rather than the more financial focus in the options-driven model where the role of the tenants is passive – a receiver of resources and assistance. The focus is on two processes – filtering and learning. A shift in focus is observed from the more static factors – services, resources and objectives match to the more dynamic ones – processes, this is something I elaborate on and contribute to in my account.

Hansen et al. (2002) have used network theory to suggest that the primary value-added feature of incubators are 'institutionalized processes that carefully structure and transfer knowledge throughout the incubator network in order to create conditions that facilitate the development of incubatees and the commercialization of their innovations' (Hackett and Dilts, 2004a: 70). Whereas network theory points out the importance of network building it does not explain the process of social exchanges that underpin building relationships with advisors and other tenants and their importance in the incubation process. They see the incubation process as building networks which include and transcend the incubator, but there is more to it. My study focuses on those micro-processes of relationship formation and engagement within the incubation process (see chapter 5).

Rice (2002) manages to capture both the entrepreneur's and incubator manager's perspectives in his study shining light on the co-productive relationship between the two. He distinguishes between three coproduction modalities of: passive environmental intervention, counselling and networking. He established that training/education were only recognised as a helpful coproduction modality by very few entrepreneurs. Hence he focuses predominantly on the counselling modality and emphasises its importance for dissemination of knowledge and advice to entrepreneurs. He differentiated three approaches to counselling: reactive and episodic, proactive and episodic, and continual and proactive. Another important finding of the study is the idea that the incubation process is affected by entrepreneurs' readiness to engage in the support process,

because it once again suggests that entrepreneurs are active actors in the incubation process. The model explains in depth how business support is delivered and it is empirically based. It is based on the theory of co-production. However Rice (2002) assumes that the firm gaps, which he considers as resources, knowledge and skills, can only be addressed by the incubator managers and not through any of the other two modalities. Whereas I agree that addressing those gaps is a central purpose of incubators, my study shows that this does not happen only through a co-productive relationship with the programme manager/advisors. Chapter 6 sheds light on the multiple sources of knowledge, skills and resources entrepreneurs received and the ways incubation impact is achieved.

2.3 Incubation complexity and engagement

To add to the complexity of the incubation phenomenon it should be registered that incubators are multileveled and dynamic³ (Phan et al., 2005). Most studies, I have discussed above, focus on one level of analysis which could be either the companies located in the facility, the incubators themselves, the systemic level (university, region or country), or the entrepreneurs themselves. Phan et al. (2005) conclude that the efforts to connect all those levels have not been fruitful and thus there is not 'a systematic framework to understand the connection between these multiple levels of analyses' (ibid.: 169). My study aims to propose one such framework (see section 3) which includes the multiple levels of analysis of social venture incubation and how they are interrelated. I use it to explain how the process works in practice and why.

One of the main issues for the organisers was to ensure that entrepreneurs engaged with the process. Others have also recognised that entrepreneurship programmes experience problems with engagement, context (failing to recognise the needs of the entrepreneurs) and value (Pittaway and Thorpe, 2012). In addition Ahmad (2014) points out that the incubation process outputs are impacted by the readiness of the entrepreneurs to engage in the process of business assistance co-production. Those studies indicate the relationship between engagement with the process and the outcomes of incubation - something I contribute to both empirically and theoretically (Chapter 5, 6 and 7). I show how engaging with the process is related to the outcomes of the process (Chapter 6) and the entrepreneurial background (Chapter 5). Ahmad (2014) bases his study on Rice's (2002) conception of business incubation as co-production of the incubator manager-entrepreneur dyad. Ahmad and Ingle (2011) add that it is driven by the nature of the *relationship* between the two. The conception of incubation as occurring in a co-

³ Dynamic here refers to the mission and operational procedures in an incubator - they are known to change over time (Phan et al., 2005) However current incubation models do not reflect this dynamic nature.

production dyad dismantles a previous assumption in research that the incubator is the orchestrator and initiator of incubation whereas the incubatee is considered as a passive recipient. Therefore Ahmad's (2014) basic assumption is that entrepreneurs differ in their responsiveness to engage in incubation. These studies consider engagement in incubation in terms of the relationship between incubator manager and entrepreneur. I explore that in detail applying the theory of RoP which expands the scope of entrepreneurial engagement beyond the incubation manager - to include peers, training, and office space. Engagement is important as it relates to impact and thus the difficulty management encounters (McAdam and Marlow, 2007) is worth understanding.

2.4 Incubation impact and outcomes

'Practitioner publications often claim the benefits of BIs. There is, however, little systematic evidence of BI's efficacy in promoting job and wealth creation. Furthermore, research has found little or no evidence of BI's contribution to university-industry interaction, innovation activity, or firm performance' (Bruneel et al. 2012, 110).

Since one of my main questions is what the impact of social incubation RoP is, it is important to see what previous studies have shown with regards to impact and incubation outcomes. Hackett and Dilts (2004) report on five different outcomes for companies as a result of incubation: incubatee is surviving and growing profitably; surviving and growing but not yet profitable; surviving but not growing or profitable; incubatee operations terminated while still in the incubator (losses minimized); and finally terminated (large losses). In my empirical study I relate those various outcomes to the different needs and engagement patterns of entrepreneurs thus explaining the various outcomes of this rite of passage (Chapter 6 and 7).

The role of incubators in the entrepreneurial process has been questioned and studied previously (Peters et al., 2004; Aernoudt, 2004; Barrow, 2001; Bearse, 1998). Peters et al. (2004) point out the importance of learning in the entrepreneurial process by drawing on the idea of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). The former develop a model which 'aims to understand whether it is the reduction of transaction costs or the increase in learning made available by incubators, or a combination of both that accelerates the graduation rates in incubators' (p.89). I differentiate between the two - the former is regarded as impact on the venture and the latter impact on entrepreneurs (Chapter 6).

The evaluation challenge of business incubation performance was brought to attention by Bearse (1998), clearly distinguishing between two levels of evaluation: the incubator as an enterprise evaluating its financial health/sustainability and the incubated enterprises, evaluating the difference the incubator makes to the firms' performance. He points out that

they have not managed to evaluate 'incubators in terms of their main purpose' (ibid.: 327). I agree with Bearse (1998) who makes the distinction between growth and development, the former expressed in terms of revenue and jobs created and the latter represented by indicators such as quality of management team, product innovation, strategic alliances accomplished. I analyse both in Chapter 6. Indicators such as time to market, time to establish an enterprise and time to reach positive cash flow (i.e. become financially viable) show the acceleration of enterprise development. However incubators and incubator agencies do not report that data and thus make it difficult to defend the case for business incubation for further public funding (ibid.; Barrow, 2001), 'the measurement of success needs to be broader than a set of statistical outputs' (Voisey, 2006: 460). The most important implication from the above studies for the current research is their significance for evaluating the impact of incubation on both the entrepreneurs and ventures (a key objective of the study). Thus the purpose and intentions of the incubator management are presented first (Chapter 4) and then the outcomes are evaluated in Chapter 6. Furthermore Bearse (1998) criticises the outsider stance in the methodology of impact studies. He supports participant/observer stance and relevant methodologies when it comes to generating information useful to management, also advocated by Patton (1997) and Schon (1991).

Voisey (2006) focused on measuring success of an incubation programme differentiating between hard outputs, soft outcomes and distance travelled where 'the term "distance travelled" refers to the progress that an individual makes towards the harder outcomes as a result of the project intervention' (ibid.: 457). In terms of set outputs those statistical measurements are relatively easy to collect and report, as they are targets set out at the beginning of the project (Chapter 6, section 2). The soft outcomes include improved financial/business planning, management skills, increased confidence in self and business, increased productive networking with peers, increased client knowledge and professionalism, cost savings due to use of business incubator resources, positive publicity (ibid.). Bøllingtoft and Ulhøi (2005) distinguish between tangible and intangible resources and opportunities they provide, thus also shifting the attention to the soft aspects of business incubation. They list the environment of peers, social inputs, the possibility to obtain legitimacy and psychological support as some of those aspects provided by incubators. That makes the intangible, soft outcomes essential to the evaluation of incubator impact. Moreover soft outcomes are the intermediary stage of achieving hard outcomes. And on their own, soft outcomes achievements are considered a great leap forward for some individuals (Dewson et al. 2000, Voisey, 2006). Those studies identify the need to include soft outcomes of incubation into their evaluation of impact. It is an important outcome of incubation which I contribute to (Chapter 6 and 7). I

thus offer empirical evidence for making the case to include the intangible impact of incubation in impact evaluation.

The above discussion again raises the question of the level of analysis. Most studies so far have focused on the incubator and enterprise level of analysis, reporting on statistical outputs (Bearse, 1998). My research aims to evaluate the soft impacts on entrepreneurs too (Chapter 6, section 3).

Having described the current ontological position of incubation in literature and the theoretical efforts employed I next argue that adopting a process-relational lens can better depict its nature.

2.5 Communities of practice and identity theory

Situated Learning Theory (SLT) explains that learning and development takes place in communities of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998). Theodorakopoulos proposed SLT 'to examine the role of incubation management in the entrepreneurial development of their incubatees' (2014: 611). As much as learning is part of the incubation process it does not depict its multi-level and complex nature (see sections 2.2-2.4 above). It focuses on one aspect of the incubation process rather than trying to understand how and why incubatee firms grow in a processual and longitudinal mode (Theodorakopoulos, 2014). Hence the theory is not able to depict the incubation process but only one aspect of it. Considering my research questions and the current theoretical endeavours (section 2.2 above), SLT and CoP cannot help to connect all the levels of analysis in incubation (see section 2.3) and understand the role of all its aspects and elements. In section 3 I lay out the theoretical lens used in this research which is better suited to achieve that. It also has an element of collective learning through the concept of *communitas* and I show how that happens in Chapter 6 (section 3.2).

The concept of liminality has been extended and developed by Beech (2011) into identity change/work literature. He suggests that 'liminality can be defined as a reconstruction of identity' (p. 287). Becoming an entrepreneur in a social incubator context however is closely linked to transforming a business idea into a viable venture. Beech links liminality in identity work to practices of experimentation (the liminar constructs and projects an identity), reflections (the liminar considers the views of others and questions the self) and recognition (the liminar reacts to the identity that has been projected on them). He explains that liminars engage in one or more of those in liminality. The purpose of my study was not to explore identity change but to offer a theorization of incubation as a process. My research focuses on the transition and the process which leads to numerous outcomes (incubation impact). In addition the engagement patterns and processes of

exchange are explored. Whereas identity change is part of the process for some entrepreneurs, it is not the aim of this research. However further research into identity work in an incubation context can certainly build on Beech's work. There are a number of points of deviation from the RoP liminality in organisational life (Beech, 2011): 'the lack of boundaries provided by ritual and the lack of support meant that the liminal experience of ambiguity became extensive and was not easily resolved' (p.299). On the other hand the incubator is a particular organisational context which offers all that (Chapter 4 and 5).

3. Positioning incubation theoretically as a RoP

The theory of RoP, initially developed by van Gennep (1960), is a suitable theoretical processual-relational framework to explain the nature, structure and role of the incubation process in social venture creation. This socio-anthropological perspective provides a new conceptual framework from which incubation can be theorised highlighting the processual and relational aspects of the phenomenon rather than its financial and functionalist depictions in extant incubation studies (Hackett and Dilts, 2004b; Bergek and Norrman, 2008). The application of new theory raises new questions about the process, namely about the importance of engagement and social exchanges. It also provides an opportunity to enrich the theory itself by looking at the engagement and exchange processes taking place and the nature of the outcomes (see Chapters 5 and 6). Here I discuss the theory's central concepts and ideas which I employ throughout the thesis.

3.1 van Gennep and the Rite of Passage schema

van Gennep, an ethnographer, is considered a member of a generation of French sociologists who demonstrated considerable knowledge of the theoretical and empirical literature on religion and society in most European languages (himself having mastered 18 languages). He published *Rites de Passage* in 1909 which was dismissed by his academic contemporaries and became popular only in 1960 when the book was translated into English. Thomassen (2009) explains in detail 'how and why van Gennep had been ostracized by the academic world' (p.7). Durkheim's central figure and the academic power politics had resulted to van Gennep's outside position in French academic life - he never got an academic position in France despite his impressive publication list. He criticized Durkheim's lack of critical stance towards his sources and labelled his views as entirely erroneous in his review of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Not surprisingly Durkheim considered van Gennep as a competitor. As Thomassen (2009) points out van Gennep's work can be understood in contrast to the intentions and ambitions of Durkheim:

'The point of departure for Van Gennep's approach was constituted by real human experiences, "living facts", and moments of transition, in contrast to Durkheim's social facts, which became "facts" exactly to the extent that they were external to the individual.' (p.12)

van Gennep's basic assumption is that human life follows a linear progression with different rites of passage from one age to another and from one occupation to another. The phenomenon of a transition may be noted in many human activities. The transitional nature of becoming an entrepreneur and founding a venture has already been alluded to by McAdam and Marlow (2007) using the term entrepreneurial transition to refer to the change of the firm stage over the period of incubation without theoretically explaining it. In my study I offer a rich in-depth analysis of that transition in the context of social entrepreneurs.

Van Gennep, through extensive field work, studied individuals' transitions from one category to another to join individuals in another section of society. In pre-modern societies, one must submit to ceremonies which facilitate the transition. Society consists of a few distinctly separate social groups. The difference between modern and pre-modern societies is the accentuation of differences and the increase of the level of autonomy of those groups in the latter. One clear difference in modern society is the distinction between the secular and the religious worlds. In modern society to pass from group to group one needs to fulfil certain criteria, which are purely intellectual or economic. On the other hand to become a priest or be unfrocked one is accompanied by ceremonies. As van Gennep has emphasised in such societies every change in life includes actions and reactions between profane and sacred. And those are 'to be regulated and guarded so that society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury' (p.3). Life, van Gennep argues, consists of a succession of stages with similar beginnings and ends - birth, puberty, marriage, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialisation and death. For each of those events there are ceremonies which aim is to 'enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined' (ibid.).

To pass from the sacred to the profane worlds one needs to go through an intermediate stage. In pre-modern societies the sacred permeated nearly every phase of life - birth, hunting, marriage etc. The idea there is that a transition from one state to another cannot be accomplished without precaution. In this thesis I analyse the passage of social entrepreneurs from employment to being entrepreneurs through the lens of a RoP thus pointing out the ceremonial aspects in that transition rather than the purely intellectual and economic aspects which have been emphasised in current entrepreneurship literature, grounded in the disciplines of psychology and economics (Watson, 2013b).

In fact there is no evidence that a secularized urban world has less need 'for ritualised expression of an individual's transition from one status to another' (Kimball, 1960 cited in

van Gennep, 1960: xvii). He goes on to infer that in modern society critical problems of becoming female, male, passing into old age etc., directly related to the devices which society offers the individual to help her achieve the new adjustment, have been forgotten. Individuals now are forced to accomplish their transitions in relative isolation. This has been illustrated recently by Meira (2014) who concludes that the guiding and supportive role of the RoP has not been adopted by capitalism as a way to help those involved in alternatives to the labour market. He brings an example from Brazil where factory workers are abandoned after bankruptcy of the company and have to take over its management or face unemployment. Those are part of the solidary economy⁴ emerging in the country from the necessity to produce for survival. Thus he criticises modern societies and capitalism for avoiding taking responsibility for such transitions. In fact there are rare organisational contexts where rites of passage are specifically designed to assist transitional experiences. That happens in education for instance (Simpson et al., 2009; Hawkins and Edwards, 2015). However the process of incubation, as pointed out in the previous section, is intended to serve a supportive role which I explore in depth (Chapter 4).

Positioning becoming an entrepreneur as a transition and incubation as a RoP has implications for discussing its structure and the relationships between actors and their engagement with the incubation process. In order to assist my analysis in achieving that I now discuss the schema of the RoP and the participants involved as they are analytical concepts used in my thesis.

3.1.1 The tripartite RoP schema

Van Gennep defined 'rites de passage' as 'rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age' (cited in Turner, 1969: 94). The passage from one state to another is through a 'limbo of statuslessness' (p.97), a 'moment in and out of time' (p.96). However not all rites are part of the rites of passage. There exist numerous rites which serve a different function on their own apart from that to facilitate a passage (rite of protection etc.). Transitional periods in individual life or group life however are always characterised by the clear distinction of all three types of rites of separation, transition and (re)incorporation⁵. In order to better understand rites of passage and to understand the meaning of each phase it is necessary to elaborate on their content. I find the schema useful in analysing the structure of incubation and apply it to my data to explore the

⁴ It comprises of a number of productive arrangements—'cooperatives, associations, small companies, informal and non-legalized firms, and so on—which are usually called 'non-capitalist production' (Santos, 2002 cited in Meira, 2014), 'other economy' (Cattani, 2003 cited in Meira, 2014), or 'economic alternatives' (Lisboa, 2006 cited in Meira, 2014)' (Meira, 2014).

⁵ Van Gennep uses the word schema as it presupposes a dynamic character. It signifies both a process and a structure – dynamics and a pattern. These three subcategories are not developed equally in every set of ceremonies – for example at a funeral the emphasis is on the separation rites and at marriages this is the reincorporation phase.

passage from organisers' (Chapter 4 and 6) and entrepreneurs' (Chapter 5 and 6) perspectives. I use this RoP schema of separation, transition and incorporation as an analytical tool to discuss the process of incubation and the rites included in each of these phases. Here I present their function and application as introduced by van Gennep (1960).

Separation rites - pre-liminal phase

Separation includes symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the person or group either from their previous fixed place in the social structure or from a set of cultural conditions (a state) or from both. Rites of separation usually involve removing parts of the body or mutilating them as part of the rite of separation from the common mass which also automatically incorporates liminars into a defined group. Mutilations are permanent differentiations however in a RoP temporary differentiations are mostly employed such as wearing a mask, body paint or dress. The pattern and principles of a RoP would probably best be illustrated and comprehended by employing an example. An initiation rite into a totem group for instance includes separating boys from their families and mothers. The rite lasts for a long time and includes mental and physical weakening which intend to make him loose recollection of his childhood.

Transition (margin) - liminal phase

During the intervening 'liminal' (transition) period, the ritual subject's (passenger's) characteristics are ambiguous. She goes through a cultural realm that has none of the attributes of the past or future state. A positive part follows the rites of separation which is the transitional period where the novice is instructed into tribal law, recitation of myths and witnessing totem ceremonies. The sacred state of the people in a RoP is not an absolute value, it is relative to the situation. The person who enters in a state different than the previously held becomes 'sacred' to the others who stay in the profane state. The dichotomy between the sacred and profane is a central concept for understanding the transitional stage. This new condition calls for rites which incorporate him back to the group and returning him to the normal routines of life: 'The transitional period is met with rites of passage which cushion the disturbance' (van Gennep, 1960: ix). This idea of sacredness is useful in understanding the position of entrepreneurs during their incubation. It also suggests the special condition of liminal beings during a RoP, something Turner (1969) expands on.

(Re-)Incorporation Rites - post-liminal phase

In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation) the passage is completed. The ritual subject is in a relatively stable state again and thus has rights and obligations which are

clearly defined and 'structural'. The final part, the incorporation into the totem group, is a religious ceremony accompanied by a special mutilation 'which makes the novice forever identical with the adult members' (p.75). Two notions need clarifying when it comes to (re)incorporation rites. They intend the facilitation of the social return. In childbirth rites the mother socially returns from childbirth, and it does not coincide with the physiological return from childbirth. The need is to socially incorporate the mother into her sex group, family and society. In modern society social return from childbirth coincides with the physical return. Hence the significance of rites of re-incorporation had been diminished to a point that they are not performed in most cultures. Generally rites of cutting are associated with rites of separation and rites of tying are rites of incorporation - the knot, the sacred bond, analogous forms include the belt, the ring, the crown the bracelet. Rites of incorporation may include various forms of greeting or contact clasp hands, eating and drinking together, sharing of wives, removing shoes, coat, head-dress. The meaning of those is for the new person to identify herself with the ones she meets. During most ceremonies and during transition periods especially, special language is used, a phenomenon with the same significance as change of dress, special foods and mutilations. The vocabulary is unknown or unusual in society.

The variability in rites details, van Gennep points out, is great between different cultures however 'the series which conforms to the general pattern of rites of passage can always be discerned' (1960: 75). This general pattern I use herein. There is apparently some flexibility to the schema itself too. Pregnancy rites include a long, gradual return to ordinary life, thus showing that the transitional period continues beyond the time of delivery. Simpson et al. (2009) have also identified the permeability of the boundary between liminality and post-liminality 'as experiences and emotions from the liminal phase (ambiguity, anxiety, uncertainty) seep into post-liminality' (p.67). That is something I analyse too, as incorporation into the world after incubation has proven difficult and is not discussed in incubation literature either.

3.2 Victor Turner's extension of RoP

Turner was trained in functionalist anthropology, analyzing schism and conflict as part of the social structure. Van Gennep's book helped him redirect his work beyond the functionalist paradigm. As a social anthropologist, he lived amongst and studied the rituals of a particular sub-Saharan tribe and extended van Gennep's analytic framework. It is Victor Turner who re-discovered the importance of liminality. One of his contributions was 'to "liberate" van Gennep's framework from both the functionalist and structuralist straight-jackets, inserting van Gennep's book on ritual passages where it truly belongs: in a processual approach' (Thomassen, 2009: 14). Turner also argued against Durkheim that

rituals are much more than plain reflections of social order. They were moments of creativity that 'freshened up the societal make-up' (ibid.). Many accused Turner of blurring differences between simple and complex societies as concepts of his analysis were used widely. He focuses on the relationships between people in the liminal phase, eliciting their attributes as liminal beings, through the *communitas* concept. In his ethnographic accounts, he repeatedly identified parallels with non-tribal or "modern" societies, clearly sensing that it had relevance far beyond the specific ethnographic context.

3.2.1 Liminality

According to Turner liminality refers to any "betwixt and between" situation or object. This understanding expands the possible uses of the concept far beyond what Turner had suggested (Thomassen, 2009). The first and third phases include symbolic behaviours embedded in well-defined social positions. During the liminal period the liminar undergoes ambiguity and imprecision passing through a culture realm detached from her past or coming state. Turner (1969) explicitly notes the 'structural' and spatial characteristics of the rites of passage. The structural aspect is denoted by the use of the terms separation, margin and (re)incorporation with their reference to ritual content and function. The terms preliminal, liminal and postliminal are used with reference to the spatial transition. These terms are concerned with units of space and time 'in which behaviour and symbolism are momentarily enfranchised from the norms and values that govern the public lives of incumbents of structural positions' (Turner, 1969: 166). Hence liminality is applicable to both space and time according to (Thomassen, 2009):

'Single moments, longer periods, or even whole epochs can be liminal. Liminal places can be specific thresholds; they can also be more extended areas, like "borderlands" or, arguably, whole countries, placed in important in-between positions between larger civilizations. Liminality can also be applied to both single individuals and to larger groups (cohorts or villages), or whole societies, or maybe even civilizations.' (p.16)

Thomassen (2009) clarifies that when temporal and spatial dimensions of liminality are present then liminal experiences are closer to 'pure liminality'. And in rituals those experiences are 'artificially produced' whereas in other circumstances they happen without being planned - as in natural disasters and crises. Moreover current applications of liminality as a concept apply it as a position/condition out of what 'van Gennep had indeed made clear: that liminality needs to end somehow' (p. 18). I will explore those current applications of the concept in section 3.3.

In its anthropological usage the liminal state is clearly defined, spatially and temporally: 'there is a way into liminality and there is a way out of it' (p.21). Members of the society are aware of the liminal state: it will end sooner or later, and they know that 'ceremony masters' will guide them through the rituals. The conditions of liminality and marginality

generate myths, symbols, rituals, works of art and philosophical systems (Turner, 1969). Those 'incite men to action as well as to thought' (p.129). That explains the creative potential of liminality also studied by other organisational scholars (see section 3.3). The playfulness of that period is at the same time unstructured and highly structuring - it is the origin of structure - 'some kind of "original state", the stuff out of which everything is born, that formless reality out of which forms emerge, the beginning of everything' (p.23). This is how Turner's quote should be interpreted:

'Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.' (Turner, 1967: 97)

3.2.2 *Communitas*

For Turner liminality is closely related to the development of *communitas*. It emphasises the importance of the relational aspects of RoP and the experiential sharing taking place, also valid in the context of social incubation (Chapter 5 and 7). *Communitas* is considered to emerge spontaneously during the transitional period of a RoP. I however elaborate on the process of its emergence and show how that happens in the context of social venture incubation (chapter 5 and 7, section 3). *Communitas* have a specific territorial locus and it often is limited in character, referred to as the seclusion lodge. The seclusion lodge is used throughout the rites of transition in the liminal phase and that is the place where individuals or groups of liminars are isolated from the rest of society. I also explore the relationship between the development of *communitas* and entrepreneurs engagement with the physical space (Chapter 5).

In order to understand *communitas* Turner describes two 'models' of human interrelatedness which are alternating and juxtaposed to one another. The difference between the two is in the unit of analysis. As opposed to the social-structuralist tradition which views society as a system of social positions with a hierarchical structure, in *communitas* the units of social structure are the relationships between roles, statuses and offices. The first model is of a society which is differentiated, structured, and often is a hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic roles with a system of evaluation, which separates men in terms of 'less' or 'more'. The second model emerges in the liminal period – it is a model of society which is unstructured or only structured rudimentarily, as '...relatively undifferentiated *communitas*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders' (p.96). Turner uses the Latin *communitas* instead of community as the former implies a modality of social relationship rather than simply an area of common living: '*Communitas* is a

relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals' (p.131). Communitas emerge where social structure is not present. I analyse the incubation process as a whole as well as the micro-processes of exchange between the participants in the RoP.

Another important finding in Turner's work is the emotional, and not only the cognitive, aspect of symbols in rituals. Symbols are not only a set of cognitive classifications but also 'a set of evocative devices for rousing, channelling, and domesticating powerful emotions, such as hate, fear, affection, and grief' (p.43). As he summarised the whole person, not just the mind, is existentially involved in the rite. In the rite each symbolic item is related to an empirical item of experience. This is something I elaborate on in the context of becoming an entrepreneur. In our modern age and time, especially in the disciplines of entrepreneurship and management, emphasis had been placed on cognition and rationality. In fact the account presented here shows another aspect of entrepreneurship which similarly to Turner points out the emotional aspects of the passage, and its impact on the whole person. However most symbols (terms) used by the organisers pertain to the measurable outputs and the firm as we shall see in Chapter 4.

3.3 Masters of ceremony and liminars

During a RoP, in pre-modern societies, masters of ceremony, or instructors, or intermediaries are needed. They act as the links or bridges 'to facilitate the changing of condition without violent social disruptions or an abrupt cessation of individual and collective life' (van Gennep, 1960: 48). They impart wisdom upon the liminal subjects which is more than just words, it has ontological value as it 'refashions the very being of the neophyte' (Turner, 1969: 103). The masters thus possess the authority and power to enact the change, the transformation (Boland, 2013): 'Rituals alter structures', they 'define and give meaning to the change' (ibid.: 229). Rigg and O'Dwyer (2012) further discuss the role of mentors in identity construction during an education programme for high-growth potential start-ups, emphasising the emergent and relational aspects of becoming an entrepreneur. Thus the concept of masters of ceremony is a useful tool in my study as business advisors and partners adopt such a role (Chapter 4).

In a Rop the liminars or liminal beings, the people undergoing the transition, are subordinate to the masters of ceremony. They follow their instruction as the masters are people who have already been through the passage themselves. This position of the liminars and the masters of ceremony presuppose a specific type of engagement. However the relationship and engagement between entrepreneurs and business advisors is not based on such a top-down and strong authority structure. This is something that I contribute to theoretically by employing the concept of social exchange to explain how

relationships between them develop (Chapter 7) during incubation. In order to explain the different patterns of engagement I look into relevant entrepreneurship literature and discuss the nature of the incubatees in section 5 as some of the research conducted in that field contributes to my interpretation of the findings.

3.4 Current applications of liminality and the rite of passage schema

The increased interest⁶ and application of the liminality concept out of its original context suggests its wider usefulness especially in organisations which offer temporary organisational experience. Tempest and Starkey (2004) point out that careers generally are becoming increasingly liminal 'with contractual patterns of employment and project teams creating and recreating networks within and between organisations' (Beech, 2011: 288). However Beech (2011) criticises current organisational literature (such as Sturdy et al., 2006) because liminality is used mostly as a position between and betwixt, of ambiguity and uncertainty. Currently 'in application to organizations, the definition of liminality incorporates instabilities in the social context, the ongoing ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings, the lack of resolution (or aggregation) and the substitutability of the liminar' (p. 288). Those situations are numerous. However the processual characteristics of a RoP as well as its relational dimensions are ignored at large by organisational scholars. That is because organisational life does not offer experiences of liminality close to 'pure liminality' as in rituals where those are 'artificially produced' (Thomassen, 2009).

Sturdy et al. (2006) apply the notion of liminality to the interstice between work time and non-work time. They argue that this adds another level of liminality. They suggest that eating offers a moment of liminality which is not only at the heart of consultancy but organisational life in general. Business dinners are another instance of liminality for organisational life where the actors make use of the liminal space in different ways. Another contribution is that they found that degrees of liminality exist directly proportional to the distance from the work place and conclude that liminality is not an absolute quality. Thus liminality in those instances is spatially applied (Thomassen, 2009) to the place and location of the business dinner. The former write about structures and layers of the liminal space created in that moment of the shared meal. Despite being criticised for applying the concept out of its context in the RoP schema, the idea that liminality is not an absolute quality is applicable to my study as well (see chapter 7). I use the RoP schema in its entirety as a conceptual framework which offers the possibility to integrate all levels of

⁶ Some of the organisational contexts that the concept of liminality has been applied to include MBA courses (Simpson et al., 2009), understanding the student experience during leadership learning (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015), temporary employees (Garsten, 1999), hotels (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006), management consulting (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003), identity reconstruction (Beech, 2011), waiting (Lahad, 2012) to name but a few.

analyses of the business incubation process and also identify degrees of liminality in that context (Chapter 7).

One very important aspect of RoP is that since the goal is the same the ways of attaining it would also be similar if not identical. Turner (1969) points out that there actually are some rites of passage where the ways of achieving the goal vary from performance to performance. In my study I explore the goals of the entrepreneurial RoP (Chapter 4) and why they lead to different outcomes (Chapter 6). Simpson et al. (2009), applying the RoP schema, have already established the 'complex nature of outcomes from the MBA—outcomes that we argue go beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills' (p.54) and thus suggest that the RoP does not produce the same results for all undergoing it, contrary to its common goal in pre-modern societies. Hirschman et al. (2012) apply the theory to goods and consumer possessions 'recognizing that all matter and spaces themselves pass through transitions' (p.372). They find that such passages may be multi-directional as opposed to the unidirectional liminal events currently examined in literature such as funerals, weddings, childbirth etc. The authors also look at the possibility of failure for the first time. According to them that is a weakness in Turner's model as 'some attempted transformations may result in failure, postponement, or revision by the individual' (ibid.). This once again suggests the possibility of a variety of outcomes of a RoP, something I empirically contribute to too (Chapter 6).

In another organizational context Lindsay (2010) determines that interstitial creativity is facilitated by organizational liminality enabling organizations to draw on multiple resource streams and to undertake activities not always allowed by central actors in the field. Liminality is considered as a time and place of withdrawal from the regular modes of social action and it might be seen as a period of scrutinization of the central cultural values, 'wherein everything is open to question and structures appear as external and meaningless' (Boland, 2013: 222). In addition Shortt (2015) conceptualises less dominant spaces in organisational life as liminal where workers retreat for privacy, creativity and inspiration. The creative aspect of liminality is something that is desired by organisers of venture incubation too.

Meira (2014) has also illuminated the potential of *communitas* as a 'meaningful analytic device to decode organizational emergence and structuring processes in deprived social contexts'. Here I propose they are useful in analysing and understanding the organizing processes and functioning of entrepreneurial spaces such as incubators too (Chapter 7). Turner's anthropological concepts of *communitas* and liminality, Meira shows, define the ontology of social interstices⁷. Meira uses the concepts and explains how they are related

⁷ 'Communitas breaks through in the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edge of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority.' (Turner, 1969: 128)

to contemporary societies. Liminal episodes are considered crises in social processes. Meira, similarly to Beech (2011), also criticises previous attempts of organisational studies scholars to apply the concept of liminality 'as the ambiguous condition of individuals and groups within organizations' (p.719). However Meira notes another aspect as a reason for this inadequacy. Emphasising ambiguity, individuality and imprecision leads to reducing the social ties developed among liminars to nothing, ties crucial to the anthropological conception of liminality. Moreover the obsession with structural references confuses the organisational analyst. He insists that in order to reframe liminality in organisational studies *communitas* need to be brought back to the scene. In fact I apply the theory of RoP in its entirety, making use of both the schema and its concepts of *communitas* and liminality (as a condition between and betwixt, of ambiguity and uncertainty), thus joining Beech (2011) and Meira (2014) in their criticism of applying liminality out of its context.

As part of a ritual passage, liminality is followed by reincorporation rituals that re-establish the state of the new personality, part of the social order that she re-enters. Without reincorporation liminality is pure danger (Thomassen, 2009). Czarniawska and Mazza (2003) have found the schema of RoP a useful analytical tool to explain situations of organisational change. They apply the schema of a rite of passage and explore the liminal condition of management consultants, depicting consulting as a liminal space for both clients and consultants. Consultants organise the rites of passage for the organisation that needs to change. Two parallel and causally related rites of passage occur: those of the employees and those of the consultants. The order of the phases is inverted for the consultants. The rites of passage for employees in the consultancy act start with separation, followed by a transition phase/liminal phase and finish with reincorporation. The order of the phases for the consultants is inverted starting with reincorporation into the organisation, transitional phase and finally separation from the organisation. Thus they change the perception of the masters of ceremony, in a position of power, who enact the change. In my thesis the role of business advisors and partners (Chapter 4) is explained in terms of organisers of the entrepreneurial RoP. That offers a different view of organisers than the one depicted when the theory was first developed. I also explore how the weak authority structure impacts engagement in the process (Chapter 7).

4. Social exchange theory

I would like to turn the reader's attention to another aspect of the RoP theory that has not been taken into consideration by organisational scholars. However it is an important aspect of RoP which I explore and contribute to. This is the relational aspect, emphasised by Turner, which implies exchange relations. Van Gennep (1960) points out that foreigners and people who do not belong to a particular group or house are subject to a

RoP usually involving a preliminary stage where they are met by the chief first or special delegates who are immune against the contact. Then a transitional period follows which is characterised by exchange - of gifts, food and provision of lodging. The incorporation rite includes a shared meal, formal entrance and exchange of handclasps. Exchanges therefore are a significant part of transitions. Further to that I explain how and why exchanges are important in an incubation context (Chapter 5 and 7). Van Gennep noted that exchanges have a bounding function - 'to accept a gift is to be bound to the giver' (p.29). Moreover 'the movement of objects among persons constituting a defined group creates a continuous social bond between them in the same way that a 'communion' does' (p.31). This notion of the importance of exchanges will be explored in this account. Van Gennep also alludes to the importance of exchanges for creating those social bonds long before Blau (1964) developed his theory of social exchanges.

I use Blau's (1964) theory of social exchange to explain *communitas* formation process and the development of relationships between masters of ceremony and liminars. The concept of social exchange is useful to extend and elaborate on the theory of RoP (Chapter 5 and 7) by focusing on those micro processes. Similarly to Watson (2001) I draw on Blau's (1964) theory of social exchange as it explains how people obtain valued resources. As noted by Rice (2002) entrepreneurs' gaps in knowledge, skills and resources are addressed by the incubator and social exchange theory offers an explanation how (chapter 5). In contrast to economic exchanges, unspecified obligations are incurred during a social exchange. Trust is both necessary for and promoted by social exchanges. The institutions of gift giving in primitive societies show the principles of social exchange underlying them. Those are the principle of reciprocated benefactions which creates social bonds among peers and un-reciprocation which leads to differentiation of status. On a continuum social exchange lies between pure economic exchanges, based on pure calculation of advantage, and support in profound love. Social exchange thus includes elements of intrinsic significance and benefits of some extrinsic value.

The economic institutions of the contract and the impersonal market specify the exact terms of the exchange and are designed to determine the exact obligations incurred in a transaction, maximising the chance of rational calculation. Social exchange involves unspecified obligations and trust. Trust has already been found as more important between tenants in an incubator than formal contracts (Bollingtoft and Ulhøi, 2005). On the other hand McAdam and Marlow (2007) found that spatial proximity in the incubator gave rise to tensions around sharing, mutuality and trust. Additionally Totterman and Sten (2005) find that physical and mental proximity increase the levels of credibility and trust among tenants. Only in cases of fierce competition between two companies, physical proximity might increase mental distance. Acceptance into an incubator signals a degree

of confidence that the company has potential and 'acts as a proxy of credibility and so enhances trust' (McAdam and Marlow, 2007: 366) with stakeholders (a critical issue for new ventures is precisely lack of credibility with stakeholders like customers, suppliers and employees (Smilor 1997, Totterman and Sten, 2005)). In my study I go further into theoretically explaining how trust and social exchanges during incubation are employed to create and maintain *communitas* and further to that to establish the relationships between business advisors and entrepreneurs.

According to Blau (1964) social associations between people proliferate through social space and time. And most importantly social relations unite individuals in groups, groups in communities and communities in societies. Hence in addition to a processual view of incubation, a relational one is also useful as most incubators seek to develop a community of tenants/incubatees sharing knowledge, ideas and supporting each other through challenges. For this relational dimension of incubation, processes of social exchange are key. It is important to note how social interactions start before common norms and goals, or expectations develop. According to Blau (1964) the reciprocation principle for the received benefits is the starting mechanism of social interaction and leads to a rudimentary group formation. Discharging one's obligations for receiving needed services is a necessary condition of exchange. Those sort of favours involved in social exchanges create 'diffuse future obligations' (Blau, 1964: 93). There is no assurance that the favour will be returned and hence trust is required that others will discharge their obligations. That is why exchange relations develop in a slow process, starting off with minor transactions where little trust is necessary and little risk is involved. In that case if the former fails to reciprocate the loss is minimal. By discharging one's obligations an individual demonstrates her trustworthiness. A gradual expansion of mutual services follows which is paralleled by growth of mutual trust: 'Hence, processes of social exchange, which may originate in pure self-interest, generate trust in social relations through their recurrent and gradually expanding character' (p.94). Interestingly Blau makes a parallel between exchange rituals in pre-modern societies and social exchange in ours. The exchange of services and gifts in both societies serves the purpose to create bonds of trust and friendship among peers, those are also prerequisites for *communitas* to be established and beneficial relationships between entrepreneurs and masters of ceremony fostered in an incubator.

5. The nature of incubatees

Another gap in previous attempts to understand incubation is a lack of clarity about what unit of analysis is key. Is it the individual entrepreneur or their venture? Most studies have focused on the venture (Aernaudt, 2004; Bergek and Norrman, 2008; Grimaldi and

Grandi, 2005; Hackett and Dilts, 2004a,b, 2008) since they are concerned with efficacy and economic contribution firms make. For my purposes because I am interested in the social phenomena of incubation in order to better design incubator spaces, I focus on the entrepreneur. Adopting a RoP framework positions the entrepreneur as a liminal being, a novice on the journey to becoming an entrepreneur and creating a venture. Here I present some entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship literature which I have used to interpret my findings - as engagement is related to entrepreneurial background. I also contribute to entrepreneurship literature by offering a relational-processual view on entrepreneurship and new venture creation.

Despite acknowledging the position of entrepreneurs in the process of incubation as early as Smilor (1987)⁸ most literature in the field 'disregards the perspectives and characteristics of incubatee entrepreneurs' (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014: 610). Thus the authors request further research regarding the 'how' and 'why' incubatee firms grow in a business incubator (also noted by Voisey et al., 2006). These are certainly questions that require attention and further research. However how and why firms and/or entrepreneurs grow can be best understood in a processual and longitudinal mode (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). These questions are explored and addressed in this study.

5.1 Entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship

As entrepreneurs are one of the levels of analysis in my study, it is necessary to define them and discuss their impact on new venture creation. Entrepreneurs are depicted as 'hard-nosed and long-hour working individuals born with a special creativity as well as an ability to spot and exploit opportunities in the environment' (Ulhoi, 2005: 943). This view of entrepreneurs most certainly does not convey any sort of assistance (incubation) needed to start a venture, as they seem to know it all. That depiction does not fit the description of a liminal being either. It is influenced by the disciplines of economics and psychology which have dominated entrepreneurship studies (Watson, 2013a, 2013c; Hjorth et al., 2008) thus accounting for what Watson would call scientific view of entrepreneurship which focuses on the individual as some sort of special type of person. He argues that attention should be given to entrepreneurial action as part of all aspects of social life, not limited to venture creation only, thus referring to the individuals engaging in such action as entrepreneurial actors. The theoretical move to use the concept of 'entrepreneurial actor' instead of 'entrepreneur' is a significant shift which rejects the idea that entrepreneurial activity is something exclusively engaged in by a special type of person, the entrepreneur (Watson, 2013b). Embedding entrepreneurship in psychology and economics constricts

⁸ 'A new business incubator is an innovative system designed to assist entrepreneurs, particularly technical entrepreneurs, in the development of new firms.' (Smilor, 1987, p.146)

researchers from using insights from philosophy, sociology and anthropology (Hjorth et al., 2008; Watson 2013a). The authors stress the importance to pay attention to the context of entrepreneurship if we are to move 'beyond the non-contextual, individualistic and rational economic actor assumptions of orthodox entrepreneurial research' (Watson, 2013a: 20). Thus here I intend to offer an alternative account of entrepreneurs, as entrepreneurial actors who come from different walks of life (Chapter 5). Such accounts depicting the ordinary in entrepreneurs are very few, such as in Down (2006). This perspective justifies incubation as a needed process for social entrepreneurs. As most incubation literature and social entrepreneurship literature use the term entrepreneur to identify the people starting ventures I would use it too hereafter. However my definition and understanding of the term is identical to the concept of entrepreneurial actor explained here.

I use some empirical insights from mainstream entrepreneurship literature to explain how entrepreneur's background impacts on her engagement with the process of incubation and her advisors specifically (Chapter 5). That was necessary because the nature of the relationships between them is not subject to strong authority structure and thus influences their engagement with the process as a whole (Chapter 7). Entrepreneur's abilities, skills and decisions have already been associated with success (Low and MacMillan, 1988; Venkataraman, 1997). Prior entrepreneurial experience, education and industrial experience positively affects new venture creation (Gertner, 2013⁹). Prior entrepreneurial experience for instance can provide useful knowledge of the venturing process (Dimov, 2010), make it easier to obtain external financial resources from banks and venture capitalists (Westhead et al., 2004), provide initial access to broader and deeper networks (Shane and Khurana, 2003) and find more business opportunities (Ucbasaran et al., 2009). Cooper and Park (2008) point out that prior work in organisations develop entrepreneur's skills and expertise which in turn will affect her opportunity recognition and exploitation abilities. Conversely novice entrepreneurs will be negatively affected by limited knowledge, resources, human capital and information resources. Industrial experience will also positively impact new venture creation as it provides knowledge of markets and customer problems as entrepreneurs recognise opportunities related to information they already possess (Shane, 2000). It also increases the opportunity confidence (Dimov, 2010), and again it can provide knowledge, skills, and networks, both personal and professional (ibid.; Cooper and Park, 2008). Finally the literature suggests that education may also benefit the venture creation process (Dimov, 2010; Cooper and Park, 2008). It provides technical knowledge which contributes to opportunity recognition and development (Park, 2005) and it also influences the ability to understand, interpret,

⁹ In addition to that Gertner also found that entrepreneurs acquire knowledge during the incubation process (Patton and Marlow, 2011) through workshops and seminars provided by incubation management.

extrapolate and apply new information (Shane, 2000). All these studies are brought together to show that entrepreneurs are not empty vessels entering the incubation process and thus how they engage with it and benefit from it will be influenced by their background too. This is something the current study explains and contributes to (Chapter 5 and 6).

5.1.1 Enterprise and social exchanges

Similarly to Ulhøi the current study assumes that 'all economic activity is embedded in social relations and that such relations influence the establishment of businesses and the art of running a business' (2005: 941). Furthermore the socio-cultural and emotional context where entrepreneurial decisions are made is important. For instance, he notes, business incubators can indirectly contribute in terms of business and advice ties (social capital). That conception of entrepreneurship matches Watson's as a 'socially and historically situated manifestation of the general human propensity towards creative exchange' (2013a: 25). Watson emphasises that the principle of exchange is central for any enterprise. Furthermore regardless of its size, the enterprise long-term survival depends on exchange relationships with a range of stakeholders. Thus the exchange relational perspective on incubation is suited to theoretically explain the phenomenon as its nature is both processual and relational. Dacin et al. also point out that research in conventional entrepreneurship suggests a strong link between organisational success and social ties: 'relational resources provide opportunities to exchange information, leverage interpersonal relationships, and realize objectives' (2010: 49).

As opposed to conventional entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs do not mobilize resources in a way that creates competitive barriers. They rather utilize resources in a cooperative fashion and share them with other organisations (ibid.). As a particular feature of social entrepreneurs this might have implications on the way social entrepreneurs engage with each other in an incubator setting. Gross (1998) provides an example from a for-profit incubator where entrepreneurs did not share resources with one another as there was no equity stake involved in the exchange. When the author set up Idealab he assumed that the owners of the ventures would share knowledge and ideas with one another but they did not. He then solved the problem by giving them shares in the incubator which held equity stakes in its incubatees in turn. He pointed out that this immediately translated into sharing of proprietary information between two owners. One of them pointed out that he would not have shared the information if they did not have indirect financial interest in the other company. I explore the exchange, relational aspects of incubation and social entrepreneurs in particular in detail in my thesis thus contributing to the limited engagement empirical studies discussed above.

5.2 Social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs

My main question concerns the ontology of social incubation exploring it through a RoP lens hence the nature of social entrepreneurs needs clarifying too, as they are the subjects of the rite of passage I argue (Chapter 7). I join Dacin et al. (2010) and Mair (2010) who question the distinctiveness of social entrepreneurship as a field of study separate from other forms of entrepreneurship - institutional, cultural and economic entrepreneurship. Despite that mission motives and challenges in social entrepreneurship are different (Austin et al., 2006; Murphy and Coombes, 2009) it is more beneficial to explore social entrepreneurship as a unique context and 'investigate how existing theories apply to social mission-related phenomena' (Dacin et al., 2010: 43). This offers more opportunities for being creative as it enables interdisciplinary theorising. Such is my endeavour adopting a process-relational perspective on social venture incubation.

The inherent tensions in social entrepreneurs, stemming from the paradoxical tensions between the competing social and commercial logics inherent in them (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Smith et al., 2012; Tracey et al., 2011), have impact on what constitutes success for them and hence for social venture incubators. Some authors consider social entrepreneurship in terms of the social mission and ignore the necessary economic outcomes associated with the concept, others on the other hand view economic outcomes as part of the mission of social entrepreneurship (Mair and Marti 2006, Zahra et al., 2009). Dacin et al. (2010) suggest that there exists 'a hierarchical ordering of social and economic value creation' (ibid.: 1205). In fact economic value is crucial to social venture sustainability and the creation of their social impact (Dacin et al., 2011). Performing tensions emerge from aiming to achieve both (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Consequently what constitutes success for a social venture varies. For some that might mean achieving commercial sustainability and others may view success as accomplishing the social mission. I address that dilemma too (chapter 4 and 6) as it is important for evaluating the outcomes of incubation.

In addition competing demands and tensions inherent in social entrepreneurship give rise to emotional reactions such as anxiety, defensive reactions, dissonance, and feeling of a deadlock (Lewis, 2000; Vince & Broussine, 1996). This suggests that the journey of starting a social venture can be emotional due to the paradoxical tensions listed above. Emotions have not received any attention in business incubation research. I thus contribute by analysing the emotional impacts of incubation and how being part of an incubator addresses emotional volatility (Chapter 6).

Social entrepreneurship accounts focus on heroic characterisations and success stories (Dacin et al., 2011) and this has already been deemed misleading (Ruebottom, 2013).

Such practices in social entrepreneurship limit the ability to learn from entrepreneurial failure (Light, 2006). Social enterprise award ceremonies are designed to celebrate the accomplishments of successful social entrepreneurs (Dacin et al., 2011). The authors suggest it can be conceptualised as a rite of enhancement with the purpose to enhance social entrepreneurs' status and identities (Trice and Beyer, 1993). In fact embarking upon an in depth ethnographic study offered an opportunity to challenge such practices and give voice to less successful entrepreneurs and add failed ventures to the empirical account. Ethnographic research has already been suggested as a way to overcome heroic representations of social entrepreneurship (Berglund and Skoglund, 2015; Mauksch, 2017). My study also shows the contrasting nature of social entrepreneurial journeys - some success stories and some less glorious ones (Chapter 6).

5.2.1 Social Impact and investment readiness

One of the key aims of social incubation is developing enterprises that generate social impact. That is one of the key preoccupations of the organisers (Chapter 4) and I explore what it implies. That is probably the key distinctive aspect of social ventures that mainstream for-profit ventures do not need to monitor and generate. In order to understand social impact one needs to shift perspective from focusing on outputs to focusing on outcomes (Buckland et al. 2013). Outputs and outcomes have already been discussed in the context of incubation (section 2.4). Similarly here outcomes are 'the wider changes, benefits and knowledge that they attempt to elicit in the world in the medium and long term (e.g. reduction of social exclusion, decrease in inequalities)' (Grieco, 2015: 44). Outputs are generally enumerations that an organisation can easily measure as they relate to the tangible results of its activities. Outcomes relate to changes which are determined by a wide range of actors and external conditions, thus an organisation's contribution to impact should not be overestimated. Social impact is thus a portion of the total outcome that happened due to the activities of an organisation above what would have happened anyway (Clark et al., 2004). Social impact is very important for attracting social investment and it is evaluated in Chapter 6, section 2. Hazenberg (2015: 868) has found out that the 'key perceived elements of investment readiness in the social investment market relate to financial sustainability; robust governance structures; broad and complimentary management team skillsets; clearly defined and scalable social missions and impacts; and a willingness and desire to seek investment and become investment ready'. Thus the understanding of investment readiness in the UK social investment market is aligned to the mainstream finance concept of investment readiness with 'the additional need to focus upon social impact'.

Another aspect of social ventures which might have implications for their incubation is the divergent time horizons needed for achieving their social mission and economic sustainability. The former requires longer than the latter which can lead to disturbance of the venture's strategic management process (Smith et al., 2013; Smith and Lewis, 2011). This has implications for social venture growth and how that is defined. Some think that ventures can have negative impact on the achievement of social mission, drifts in the organisational values and mission, and increases in the social mission cost (Smith et al., 2013). Others argue that growth for social enterprises means broadening their social mission (ibid.). Hence the size of the venture does not matter as much as scaling the social impact of the venture. I explore the idea of growth as a venture transition in Chapter 4.

7. Research questions and objectives

Based on this analysis of extant research my overall research aim is to reposition incubation as a process adopting a processual-relational theory borrowed from social anthropology - the rite of passage. I have argued here that it is a suitable theoretical lens depicting the nature, structure and role of incubation thus making it possible to see how the process works in practice and why. Therefore the first research question is:

1) What is the nature of social venture incubation?

The objectives are to explore the purpose, meaning and texture of the social venture rite of passage. In doing that the position of the entrepreneur is illuminated theoretically as well as empirically embedded in the process.

There are a few other implications stemming from this theoretical positioning. First of all a discussion of the nature of the incubatees, suggests their complex nature - entrepreneurs *and* ventures. I have pointed out that entrepreneurial background and the paradoxical tensions inherent in social entrepreneurs are both factors that can impact entrepreneurial engagement with the incubation process. The problem of engaging with the incubation process has not been addressed in literature and the RoP framework offers insights into the nature of the relationships between participants in the process, which explain the different engagement patterns in this context. Thus the second research question is related to engagement:

2) How and why do entrepreneurs engage with the social incubation process?

The objectives here are to explain the process of *communitas* formation as well as relationships between business advisors and entrepreneurs using the theory of RoP and the concept of social exchange.

The last question relates to the impacts and outcomes of the incubation rite of passage:

3) What are the impact and outcomes of this rite of passage on entrepreneurs and their ventures?

The objectives here are to explore the possible and diverse incubation outcomes as well as to evaluate and explain incubation impact. Adopting a RoP lens I also aim to enhance the efficacy of business support to incubatees as it shifts the attention to the entrepreneur, not the venture only.

Chapter 3: Investigating social incubation

'There is no need to show one's hand, not in defence of ethnography as a general mode of inquiry but in regard to the more specific choices made.' (Down, 2006)

1. Introduction

Similarly to Down (2006) herein I aim to discuss the choices I have made with regards to conducting the research. Given that I am seeking to study the process of social venture incubation through a process-relational theoretical framework presented in the chapter above the research philosophy and design need to exhibit the following attributes: process ontology which navigates towards non-representationalist epistemology. I have adopted the pragmatist world view which is processual, open, ephemeral, emergent, non-deterministic and non-general (Jackson, 2013). Thus through a process of abduction I creatively explore and explain the process of incubating social enterprises and extend the theory of rite of passage as a result too.

I engage in a discussion of quality criteria demonstrating rigour looking into alternatives appropriate to qualitative research and how I have achieved them in practice. I also define what I understand as ethnography - a methodology to study the business incubation process. I present my research design discussing the way I collected the data and the three distinct phases of the research. My access journey was accompanied by a sequence of role changes necessary for becoming a participant - embedded into the incubation process. That led to some awkward moments in terms of personal identity work in the field - managing the multiple roles I found myself in - the researcher, the administrator, the yoga teacher, the writer and finally the liminar. I conclude the chapter by discussing data recording techniques and analysis methods as well as the organisation of the writing.

2. Ontology, epistemology and truth

'Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world.' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.33)

'Our entire intellectual life consists wholly in substituting a conceptual order for the perceptual order in which... experience originally comes' (James, 2009: 51).

I have established the problem of theorising and positioning incubation in current academic literature (Chapter 2, section 2). Process philosophical thinking is suitable as it views organisations, people and social entities as emergent, ceaselessly changing and transformative. What exists are 'not things made but things in the making' (James, 1925: 263). As Nayak and Chia (2011) point out, process thinking lends itself particularly suitable for entrepreneurial logic, organizational identity and organisational sense making. That is because 'the entrepreneurial worldview is always becoming' (ibid: 303) as there are 'deep processual issues underpinning entrepreneurship' (ibid., p304), 'we act and then we know' not the other way around. In contrast positional thinking gives primacy to planning, forecasting etc. before acting which proved a difficult endeavour for entrepreneurs as Sandra's struggle with her business planning (Chapter 6, section 2.2.1). As business incubators are designed to facilitate the entrepreneurial process, also referred to as tools for entrepreneurship, it makes sense to adopt process thinking, or 'becoming' ontology in order to establish the nature of social venture incubation and answer the first research question.

Framing my study as a rite of passage has implications for the epistemological assumptions, or in other words 'how we know what we claim to know' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2011: 9). Process ontology navigates the research towards what the authors call 'non-representationalist' forms of knowledge. Epistemologically, formal knowledge can never represent reality as it is a secondary intellectual product according to process philosophy (Nayak and Chia, 2011). Accounts of the world can be evaluated to be true 'to the extent to which it provides understandings which will be more or less effective in informing the practices of people pursuing their projects (whatever these might be) in the aspect of life covered in the account' (Watson, 2013c: 65). Truth is not about representation but about increasing the power to act in a specific environment (Joas, 1993; Watson, 1997). Therefore my aim in this account is to increase the power to act of those involved in social venture incubation and thus enable them to cope successfully in that environment. That is related to the third research question related to impacts and outcomes of incubation, explored in-depth in Chapter 6. Opening 'the black box' of business incubation, I claim,

can thus go beyond contingency models of the type 'If A, then B, in circumstances Z' (Donaldson, 2001).

Here I have followed a pragmatic pluralist strategy proposed by Watson (1997) which he developed in contrast to the 'dualistic mentality of the paradigm-mongers' (p.5) encouraged by Burrell and Morgan (1979). The latter support an 'isolationist strategy' which does not relate to the diverse and practical activity of management (and in my case entrepreneuring). Watson criticises the constrictive nature of such endeavour as it hampers gaining a fuller picture of management, one where "subjective" actors are seen as important as the "objective" constraints and opportunities associated with their employment in a work organization operating within social, political and economic structures external to them' (p.5). According to pragmatists the experiencing subject and the experienced object become one and thus cannot be studied separately (Hatch, 2013). Pragmatic pluralism is an approach which allows the researcher to draw on elements from different disciplines and produce their own personal paradigm 'with its own ontological, epistemological and methodological integrity – to stand as the conceptual foundation of that particular piece of research' (Watson, 1997: 6).

The type of reasoning employed in my thesis is neither inductive nor deductive. I adopt abduction which is 'a process of forming an explanatory hypothesis' (Peirce, 1965: 106). Feibleman (1960: 123) clarifies, in the context of Peirce's abduction, that a 'hypothesis is where we find some very curious circumstance, which would be explained by the supposition that it was a case of a certain general rule, and thereupon adopt that supposition'. Translated into business incubation, I explain it by the supposition that it is an entrepreneurial, modern case of a 'rite of passage' (Van Gennep, 1960). According to Peirce (1965: 106) abduction is 'the only logical operation that introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis'. Kelemen and Rumens (2013: 13) further point out that Peirce's abduction is 'a form of guessing that requires creativity and imagination... and it is the only form of reasoning that makes novelty and imagination possible'. It generates 'inventive solutions, explanatory propositions and theoretical elements' (Locke et al., 2008: 908-9).

It is not my task to prove if the theory is true or false but as Whitehead (1933: 257) put it to 'note its scope of usefulness application and its failure beyond that scope'. Through my research I have identified the usefulness of 'the rite of passage' schema and in this account I apply it to a modern phenomenon, the incubation process, through abduction, which 'is a link between the empirical and the logical and it is a link between events and theory' (Jackson, 2013: 51). The rites of passage theory is my 'tool for interrogating reality'

(Tsoukas and Chia 2011: 4) and I do not claim it is the truth that explains the business incubator as theories 'are not irrefutable truth claims' (ibid.: 4). I rather try to combine 'ideas that no one expected were combinable' (Mills, 1959: 211) in this case ideas from social anthropology (the rite of passage schema) and social exchange theory and then apply them to the business incubation process to shed light on its nature. That 'playfulness of mind' is what distinguishes a social scientist from a technician, as our goal is to make sense of the world (ibid.), or more modestly of the social venture incubation process in my case.

Finally according to Pragmatists knowledge is dynamic, unfolding, instrumental, and never complete. Knowledge develops 'through interaction within a changing environment', and is itself in a constant state of becoming (Jackson, 2013: 49). It is then important to lay out the quality criteria, how rigour can be ensured, and how I have sought to achieve it.

3. Demonstrating rigour and quality

'The formal 'methodological rules' that one finds in quantitative research are largely absent in ethnography; the qualitative researcher is left to produce insight by whatever creative means.' (Fine et al., 2011: 612)

Despite Fine et al.'s daring statement above a discussion of the quality criteria, considering the nature of ethnography, is needed. Even though some authors resist addressing issues of validity and reliability, as they have originated in the positivist paradigm (Bryman, 2000), there are ways to demonstrate rigour in qualitative research. The paradigm wars have lead to a proliferation of alternative quality criteria (Bryman, 2006; Gray, 2014). What follows is a discussion of the quality criteria related to my research practice at the incubator.

Objectivity vs. Confirmability

With regards to objectivity a more appropriate qualitative term that can be used is confirmability which refers to 'addressing the degree to which the steps of the study can be audited, confirmed or replicated' (Gray, 2014: 186) or 'whether personal biases have been kept in check' (Bryman et al., 2008: 266). I cannot claim objectivity and detachment from the phenomena I studied and that is not the aim of ethnographic research as it is contextual. Researchers become participants and 'internalize the norms, values and beliefs of the field community' (Koning and Ooi, 2013: 27). In fact I myself was part of the process as were the subjects, the entrepreneurs. My role in it was administrative, rather than being involved as they were, undergoing the process of incubation. I experienced the

impact I had on the field and subjects. Initially when I was asked to make a decision or a judgement I was extremely cautious not to interfere too much. That battle in my head between the participant and the observer troubled me in the beginning only, trying to learn how to manage both. Most of the times I would resume researcher mode or administrator mode. This was my way of coping with personal biases. An example I can remember was when we had to place some furniture that had just arrived. I was asked what I thought about that and I struggled to pick a side but rather gave a response which the programme director classified as indecisive. I thought that my opinion might have determined, in this case, the outlook of the physical space and I didn't want to do that. Later on reflecting upon it and being faced with a similar situation I just placed some white boards randomly around the office hoping that people would wheel them wherever they want (which in fact happened the following day). I was less cautious of the impact of my actions at that time. Through this awkward experience for me I realised I was a participant as well as an observer. That meant I had to participate, do things and decide things that would impact the field. A participant is involved in the situation and refraining from action is impossible. It is the observer who tries to be reflexive though about such experience which 'enriches our understanding of the local and also of how we are part of the knowledge production' (Koning and Ooi, 2013: 29).

Reliability vs. Dependability

Reliability is the second evaluation criterion which is used to demonstrate rigour in the positivistic paradigms. The alternative term which is employed in qualitative research is dependability. It refers to the stability of the findings over time (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). It can be improved in qualitative studies by triangulation – either by gathering data from multiple sources or using multiple tools for data collection or audit trails (Skrtic, 1985; Bowen, 2009). Of the four kinds of triangulation suggested by Denzin (2006) I have implemented three. Data triangulation means data gathered using multiple strategies for sampling. This includes time, space and person triangulation. These refer to data collected over a period of time on the same phenomenon, from multiple sites and at different levels in an organisation (individuals, groups and departments) respectively. These also correspond to Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) dimensions along which sampling in ethnography occurs. Those are time, context and people. In order to represent the entire range of persons and events 'an adequate coverage of temporal variation' should be adopted (ibid: 36). I chose time sampling/triangulation covering all periods of the process – from selection to graduation of the incubatees. My fieldwork followed the timescale of cohort 1 including the period before their selection as well as time sampling on different days of the week over a year and a half. I also participated in

special events (also part of the time sampling strategy) – Christmas party, graduation ceremony, social venture weekends, talks and networking occasions at the incubator.

Space triangulation or context sampling reveals different behaviour of the people in the setting. The location of the incubator within the business centre for established social, environmental and commercial enterprises (Photograph 1, Appendix 1) provided a few contexts where people behaved differently. Within the incubator itself there were a few distinct areas indicated by furniture which never really remained fixed – a quiet work zone with the incubator team desks at the back corner (Photograph 2), the built-in meeting room (Photograph 3), the café tables and single desk area (Photograph 4), the 'garden' - a sofa corner with grass carpet and lounge chairs (Photograph 5) and the NDA (one of the ventures which occupies three desks - Photograph 6) area. In addition part of the incubation process takes place at the university partner premises – that is the weekend which cohort members attended before being selected for the programme (Chapter 4, section 3.1.2). Furthermore incubatees did not spend 100% of their time in the open plan office space. They engaged in venture-related activities beyond the boundaries of the Hatchery and also had their part-time jobs as well as other activities. Hence my insight into their lives was inherently partial.

Person triangulation/sampling ensures the adequate representation of the people involved in a particular case. There are a number of different people involved in an incubator–incubatees and incubator staff on a daily basis and a wide range of other people involved in the long-term strategic management of the programme. The study focuses on the incubation process taking into consideration both the incubatees' (the cohort members) and the organisers' (staff and management) perspectives. In this case sampling the entrepreneurs was crucial. Business advisors, programme director as well as the programme partners' perspectives were also presented in order to ensure person triangulation. Being part of the process has helped identify these categories of participants in the incubation process - incubatees, programme manager, business advisors and partners. For instance whereas the first two categories are quite obvious in (especially the managers of business incubators who have been the main source of interview data for previous researchers (Hackett and Dilts, 2004; 2008)) business incubation literature, the third category of people involved in those settings is not mentioned at all, entrepreneurs are also discussed scarcely. That is one of the advantages and contributions of a participant-observer research approach.

Internal validity vs. Credibility

Emphasizing internal validity has been a main approach to generalisation in qualitative research 'as though what really matters is the quality of the original piece of research

providing the platform on which generalization can be built' (Payne and Williams, 2005: 297). The alternative term used by qualitative researchers is credibility, that is 'the use of persistent observations, triangulation (of data, methods, theories and investigations), and member checks (where data and interpretations are tested with research participants)' (Gray, 2014: 185). Triangulation was already discussed in depth above, now I elaborate on the rest.

Persistent observation is at the heart of the methodology adopted in this research. Ethnographic research is characterised by fieldwork and data is collected from a range of sources however participant observation and informal talks are the main ones. As Van Maanen (1988: 3) points out participant observation is 'less a definition for a method than it is an amorphous representation of the researcher's situation during a study'. With that in mind and the nature of my participant role in the organisation (administrator) I generated field notes through persistent observations of the day-to-day life in the incubator. However to find out why people did particular things and also what they did beyond the boundaries of the incubator required to supplement observation with conversations, talks and interviews. 'Pinning people down proved harder in practice' (Down, 2006: 122) as entrepreneurs dipped in and out of the office as they pleased. Thus I had to take advantage of the opportunities as they arose. Both the informal talks and the more formal interviews served the purpose to back up, explain or refute what I had observed. In that sense they were also a check of my understandings of the incubation process and its significance for the participants.

External validity vs. Transferability

External validity mainly concerns the extent to which one can generalise from the data to other situations or cases. Lincoln and Guba (1994) define generalisations as context-free assertions of enduring value. An alternative term that they offer is transferability. Transferability is achieved through purposive sampling to exemplify pertinent issues and factors while comparing two contexts and also thick descriptions to offer evidence for making conclusions about similarities between cases (Skrtic, 1985). This criterion explores whether findings are context bound and to what degree by examining the characteristics of the sample (Gray, 2014). The sample was chosen with the specific purpose to study the incubation from an entrepreneurial perspective as it has not been done before (only Gertner (2013) interviewed entrepreneurs in incubators).

An important thing to consider is that 'the nature of the generalization will be conditional upon the ontological status of the phenomena in question...we can say more, or make stronger claims about some things than others' (Payne and Williams, 2005: 306). The nature of the phenomena in the current study is processual and relational. Any

generalisations made will be theoretical as per the nature of the phenomena and the qualitative character of the research. Furthermore Watson (2001) points out that ethnographic work in particular enables us to make theoretical generalisations, rather than empirical. As he points out 'organizational ethnography needs to be concerned with creating systematic generalizations about 'how the world works' (Watson, 2011: 209). Theoretical generalisation involves 'suggesting new interpretations and concepts or re-examining earlier concepts or interpretations in new and innovative ways' (Orum et al., 1991: 13). Here I offer a new interpretation and concepts for explaining business incubation by applying the 'rite of passage' framework (Chapter 2, section 3). It is also a re-examination of those earlier concepts in the new context of social venture incubation.

4. Ethnographic approach to investigating social incubation

Researchers in that 'scientific' tradition 'have rarely got close to the action through intensive fieldwork' (Watson, 2013c: 67). This is also true for the places of entrepreneurial action called business incubators. That is an opportunity for my study to provide a methodological contribution, enhancing the sociological understanding of incubation and opening the 'black box' of business incubation offering an insider perspective (Bearse, 1998). An ethnographic approach enabled me to find out 'what actually happens' and 'how things work' (Watson, 2011: 204) at SVI. 'Only intensive type of close-observational or participative research' (ibid.) could help unpack the 'black box' of business incubation.

Herein I adopt Watson's (2011: 205) view of what ethnography is:

'Ethnography is the product and not the method of production.... a style of social science writing which draws upon the writer's close observation of and involvement with people in a particular social setting and relates the words spoken and the practices observed or experienced to the overall cultural framework within which they occurred.' (Watson, 2011: 205; emphasis original).

This thesis will not present a full 'written representation of culture' (Van Maanen, 1988: 1) but as mentioned in the same text offer insights on selected aspects of that culture. Mostly the aim is to provide 'rich insights into aspects of entrepreneurs' lives and practices and thus produce 'practice-oriented social knowledge' (Watson, 2013c: 69) as I am interested in the 'processes of enterprise' (p. 119) similarly to Down (2006). However my interest is in the supportive process of incubating social ventures. Following the ethnographic approach I draw upon a wide range of methods however fieldwork was the most defining one (Van Maanen, 1988). I joined the organisation, engaged with the people there, took part in conversations, asked questions and read relevant documents. I had continuous interaction with the participants over a 18 months in order to appreciate the values, norms,

practices (official and unofficial) characterising the setting (Van Maanen, 1988; Gellner et al., 2001; Watson, 2011).

5. Research design

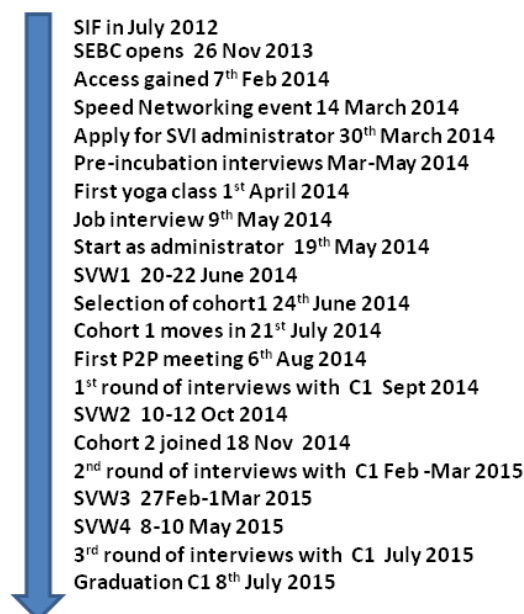
5.1 Context

This section will lay out the details about the programme and the participants involved.

The Social Venture Incubator (SVI) is an incubator programme led by Amea, a charitable organisation supporting social ventures providing finance solutions, work space and business support. One of Amea's initiatives is Social and Environmental Business (SEB) which is a social enterprise itself aiming to create, nurture and catalyse new and existing businesses including social enterprises, voluntary organisations, start-ups, and charities. They provide business advice, impact measurement, coaching and affordable workspace. Through issuing of bonds and European funding, Amea have built a Social and Environmental Business Centre – the SEBC. The SVI is a programme delivered in partnership with a local university, a social enterprise finance institution lending money to small businesses, including social enterprises, and a development trust.

The programme was delivered by a team of five dedicated staff – a project manager, three business advisors and an administrator. I started part-time (2.5 days a week) work as an administrator on 19th May 2014 (fig.1). The programme aimed to recruit social ventures in four cohorts over the first year and incubate them for 12 months. Eleven ventures were selected for Cohort 1 and they joined the incubator in July 2014. Subsequently another three cohorts joined the incubator in November 2014, April 2015 and July 2015.

Figure 1: Fieldwork Timeline



I started the fieldwork in March 2014 and exited the field in July 2015. The fieldwork comprised a pre-incubation phase - March 2014 to May 2014. At that stage I interviewed Amea's management and had access to the business centre building. This phase served the purpose to familiarise myself with the organisation, the building and their intentions for it. However the social venture incubation project started on 19th May 2014. That was the first work day for me and Beth, the programme director. My research thus followed the timescale of cohort 1 selected on 23rd June 2014 until their graduation in July 2015.

In many respects the setting shares a lot of similarities with other incubators (Chapter 2, section 2). However there are a few distinguishing characteristics presented in Chapter 4. The most fundamental difference is the cohort approach to delivery of the incubation process. What follows is the detailed research design of the study starting with how I gained access.

5.2 The access journey

Gaining access, often considered problematic and time-consuming (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) unfolded slowly and was accompanied by change of roles in the field.

I started the PhD applying for a specific project broadly defined as 'Social innovation, sustainability and enterprise'. My second supervisor was involved in a bigger project before the SEBC was opened and thus collaborated with Amea. He was a director of another organisation with premises about 50 meters behind SEBC. At that time I remember having some supervisory meetings in that unit overlooking the construction site across which was to become my research field in less than a year. I must admit that at times it felt unbelievable as the place wasn't operational. Near the end of the first year of my PhD he invited me to the Open Afternoon they held at the business centre in order to introduce me to Amea management. The event was moderately attended and friendly. We had a tour of the building followed by reception where my supervisor managed to introduce me to the centre director, Amea CEO as well as the deputy CEO.

That was the beginning of my access journey which led to some explicit discussions with the centre director. However the discussion we had with her happened two months after that event which led to an official access without any problems. It seemed easy but later on I experienced what Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 44) referred to as 'being at a place' but not having 'access to the social relations that take place'. That led to nothing more than an access card and a permission letter (Appendix 2) to the premises and an official email from the centre director to all centre staff that I am a researcher who would

get in touch with them to arrange an interview. I spent most of my time in the hot-desking area where I met a few people, freelancers, who were always busy. I was naive at that time to expect that it will be as easy as during the initial access negotiations. However this required 'much more wide-ranging and subtle process of manoeuvring oneself into position from which the necessary data can be collected' (ibid: 62). My journey thus started as an observer-as-participant, where the researcher is predominantly an interviewer, there was observation but very little of it involved participation (Gold, 1958).

Another reason for my relative 'outsider' status at that time was the fact that the place was new and tenant occupancy was a little below 50%. I attended the social events at the centre but they weren't that many at the time. The centre director and the communications officer were very welcoming and invited me to tenants' meetings too. I remember that my identity was widely advertised in the tenants' newsletter too as a researcher on tenants' experience. I contacted all tenants too via email after that announcement and I had about 50% response rate - agreeing to be interviewed. The phase that followed was marked by interviewing and thus getting to know people in the centre. However what I consider a turning point was the social event I attended in March 2014. Following Buchanan et al.'s (1988) advice to adopt an opportunistic approach towards fieldwork, I used that occasion to change my total researcher/observer-as-participant role to some sort of confidant as I offered my voluntary service to the centre. I started teaching a weekly yoga class in the conference room. That also provided opportunities to meet more of the tenants in an informal way, thus embedding myself into the organisation as a participant. That sort of service cannot be classified as a one-to-one therapy (Bryman and Bell, 2007) where I would learn more about the subjects or get closer to them but still it offered an identity change which helped me approach the people more easily as I offered something in return. I believe it facilitated the next identity change as I also became familiar and people got to know me better.

From that point onwards until I joined the incubator as an administrator (two months later) I interviewed most of Amea management staff and some of the tenants. That's how I found out that the business centre did not have an incubation programme. Despite being advertised as an incubator, it did not offer an incubation process. I needed to either change the focus of my study or somehow miraculously find another incubator to research. I thought about visiting other incubators and getting in touch with people. Luckily not long after my realisation Amea advertised staff vacancies for their newly funded social incubation programme. That new initiative, which had been alluded to me in some of the interviews, was about to start – a fully funded incubation programme for social ventures. They were recruiting for a part-time administrator, programme director and business advisors. That was my golden opportunity for a full-blown ethnography. After 'months of

meetings, interviews, correspondence, after all the 'strategic planning' and 'hard work', that final opportunity I felt was 'dumb luck' (Van Maanen and Kolb, 1985: 11).

I consider this a 'serendipitous development of a research design' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 47) and applied for the job to the surprise of management. I then attended two interviews – one informal chat with the deputy CEO and an official interview with him and the programme director. I didn't have any administrative work experience but I was interested in the incubation programme as a researcher and presented the opportunity as a good fit for both sides. I offered commitment in return to access to the ventures. Laying out my research intentions and being open paid off and at the end of the formal interview I was offered the job. Finally in May 2014, six months after that open afternoon at the business centre, I gained access to the incubation programme itself. I did not experience difficulties with gaining access as I felt welcome to lots of events, however it took me a long time to become a *participant* observer at SVI.

The fieldwork I have conducted required a total participant role (Gans, 1968) because I had to understand how and why subjects constructed their social world the way they did and explain that to others (Rosen, 1991). What I needed to do for work and research coincided - I was a researcher-participant. I have adopted different roles in relation to the people or situations I was involved in.

Having told the story of how I managed to gain access to the incubator, I now continue with an overview of the fieldwork itself.

5.3 Fieldwork and work in the field

After I started the administrative job in May 2014 the intensive participant-observer fieldwork began too. The six-month phase beforehand together with the 12 interviews I had conducted with Amea management are both part of my access journey and familiarisation, 'learning the ropes' (Watson, 2001) at the business centre. These play an important role in the emergent research design.

The following phase, which began in May 2014, was the source of the main participant observation data in this study. Being embedded as a participant was crucial as it enabled observation of daily activities as well as group dynamics and relationship development in the incubator. I engaged in occasional informal chats and I could find how people felt. I was lucky to facilitate the fortnightly peer-to-peer meetings. Those offered insights into entrepreneurs' venture progress and struggles as well as their feelings. I decided to conduct formal interviews as they can aid in providing reflection on the data collected through participant observations (Lofland et al., 2006). Some of the information I was

interested in was not available through observations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) as it simply could not be observed (Burgess, 1985). For instance entrepreneurs met their business advisors privately. They met other people out of the incubator and also talked to their peers in other areas in the building or the meeting room. I could observe what happened within the boundaries of the incubator and who people interacted with as my desk was in the open plan office (Photograph 7). I decided to conduct three rounds of interviews with cohort one at three different points in time throughout the programme - in the beginning, the middle and at graduation. I followed a similar approach to Koning and Verver as I also aimed at finding out 'how entrepreneurs experience and give meaning to their entrepreneurial life' (2013: 333). The interview process was thus flexible, 'reflecting after each interview whether the appropriate topics had been addressed and whether new topics had come to the fore that made it necessary to add new questions to the topic list' (ibid.).

Finally I also managed to gather different sources of documentation mostly relevant to the context and programme strategic direction than related to the ventures themselves. Some official documentation included minutes of meetings with partners, press releases, newspaper articles and advertisements, marketing materials and reports. Informal documentation consisted of emails predominantly – emails with entrepreneurs as well as management staff and steering group. Those materials were data related to the design of the incubation programme as well as the venture monitoring progress. Another source of data was the online platform for team communication. It evolved into a communication tool for all sorts of requests amongst the entrepreneurs as well as staff and the ventures. The online platform as well as twitter have enabled the interaction and have become part of the process. The interest of ethnographers in the use of blogs, forums and social media and the interaction within and through them has already increased (McKie and Ryan, 2012). It offers insights into peer interaction and the way those tools were used by the incubatees.

I now focus on the three phases of the 12 month programme which were synonymous with the RoP schema and inspired adopting it as a theoretical framework.

Pre-incubation phase

In May 2014 the programme director and I joined Amea's management office. Our incubation space was being prepared in the meantime. It was ready at the time when the first cohort moved in at the end of July 2014. Beth said this was a good opportunity to sit in Amea's office and 'to listen to what they talk about'. This was the phase when the venture selection process was designed and preparation for the first Social Venture

Weekend began. My work at the time comprised of responding to emails, assisting with the preparation of SVI processes and procedures, and participating in the meetings with the other programme partners. The delivery of the programme was being negotiated and established in May and June 2014. The programme itself was a start-up as the programme manager used to say so we were also learning how to incubate social ventures in the process of doing it. At that time she would also visit a lot of other incubators in order to check how they were doing it too. Obviously there were programme elements that could be changed and others that we had to adhere to as they were determined by the funders. The group dynamics and relationships between the four partner organisations became apparent to me due to my involvement in this pre-incubation phase. I consider that an important insight into the backstage of the incubation process and helpful in interpretation vis-à-vis the incubation design process itself. It offers an insight into the intentions of the organisers analysed in detail in Chapter 4.

Incubation phase

This phase started on 21 July 2014 with a kick-off event at the business centre more formally and the incubatees moving in. It finished 12 months later in July 2015. I have divided this phase into three sub-phases simply marked temporally and covering four months each. This was convenient because the formal interviews with the entrepreneurs took place at three different times during the programme.

Joining the incubator

The time when the cohort joined the incubator in July 2014 was marked by a kick-off afternoon. I participated in the event and then worked 2.5 days a week as per my part-time contract. Most of the time I spent working on administrative tasks, helping with reports, maintaining the database, sorting out housekeeping issues as the office was new and furniture was being delivered (Photograph 8). At that time the programme director decided to start the fortnightly peer-to-peer group meetings which she thought I could facilitate as her role was not suitable. She assumed I would be willing to do that. That was a great opportunity for me to listen to the entrepreneurial stories. Those meetings started in August 2014.

I also conducted initial interviews with them in September and October (see detailed interview schedule in Appendix 2). I aimed to involve all entrepreneurs, however due to people's commitments and time schedules this proved difficult. For example two out of 11 entrepreneurs did not reply to my request for an interview. In fact they were not involved in any of the incubator activities apart from interacting occasionally with their business

advisors. One of the ventures was further afield – in a town quite far away from the incubator premises and their business was facility based. Hence they were not involved in anything and did not communicate with anyone else in the cohort. The other entrepreneur seemed to always have some sort of personal issues. She was also based out of town even though not as far as the first one. Hence out of the eleven ventures on the cohort I received a reply from nine of them. I managed to interview six and the rest of the people were always busy when I approached them. They also could not commit to a time and date in advance therefore I had to adopt a flexible interview schedule with them. This research practice is in accordance with an ethnographic approach of enquiry where 'one's research decisions interact with those of participants to create the ethnographic reality of organizational life' (Fine et al, 2009: 612).

The aim of the first round of interviews was to find out more about what entrepreneurs did, why they decided to start a social venture and how their journey unfolded through semi-structured narrative interviews. Narrative interviews are in accordance with Czarniawska's (2004) invitation to focus on 'organizing' who follows Weick's (1979) view that organizations are ongoing, dynamic accomplishments. And thus the former supports they produce chronological depictions of events from the perspective of the informants. In the context of venture creation this is in agreement with Watson (2013a, b, c) who focuses on entrepreneurial action. He emphasises the process rather than the entrepreneur and her unique abilities. I asked entrepreneurs to tell their story starting from the beginning when they had their idea for the social venture and focus on the people and events that were important to them along the way, thus exploring their ventures' inception and their motivations. As mentioned earlier the interviews also served as a source of information on the interactions and events that I could not observe. They changed the relationships I had with the entrepreneurs, also experienced by Down (2006):

'It was as though the interview had been a confession, and now we have a bond ... doing the interview seemed to draw myself closer to all' (p.123)

Some of the interviews were conducted in the built-in meeting room (Photograph 3). Whenever it was busy I would use a room downstairs (an empty office room which still wasn't rented out). I knew what was available as we used some rooms for yoga or alternatively we sat in the less private pods in the café (Photograph 9). The length of the interviews varied from 30 minutes to one hour depending on the person and how much they were willing to share.

Halfway through

I interviewed the entrepreneurs in February and March 2015. In November 2014 the second cohort of ventures was admitted to the incubator and thus the number of people in

the open plan office increased. In addition the midpoint of the 12 month programme coincided with the 6 month reviews which Beth implemented end of January 2015 'to ensure we are providing you with the right kind of support and that you are still benefitting from the programme' (Belth, 2014e). Ventures' progress and commitment to the programme were central to that review and to the research in order to understand the impact of the programme on the ventures and the entrepreneurs' engagement with it. The aim of the interviews was to reveal group dynamics within the cohort, to understand the entrepreneurial experience and discuss their engagement with the programme (Chapter 5).

Graduation

The final interviews took place near cohort 1 graduation - 8th July 2015. The aim of those was to reflect upon the year and their journey, considering the advantages and disadvantages of taking part, the outcomes and impact the programme had on them and their ventures. In addition I wanted to find out how they felt about leaving the support programme. I wanted to explore how they perceived their future and whether they were prepared for incorporation into the business world.

The continuous fieldwork throughout the 12 months of incubation together with the three rounds of interviews helped to create a fuller account of social venture incubation and 'to examine how organizations (business incubators) operate as ongoing concerns' (Fine et al., 2011: 611). The aim here is to study the process of business incubation in a processual way – this is a methodological claim of ethnographic research (Fine et al., 2011). Thus I adopt a processual strategy of enquiry and supplement it with interviews with the people experiencing incubation, the experiencing subjects. My study followed how social venture incubation unfolded over time (Fine et al., 2011) leading to the impacts and outcomes analysed in Chapter 6.

Leaving the incubator

Contrary to most ethnographic research, in my study, knowing when to stop was straightforward. However like most ethnographies, stopping was not easy (Rock, 2011). From the time when I gained access to the incubator itself I limited my study to cohort 1 and hence the exit from the field in my case was determined by their 'graduation'. What made it hard was my commitment related to my administrative role and my employers. In the beginning I was hired for two months only on a temporary contract which ended at the end of July 2014 (covering the pre-incubation phase). During that time they wanted to see how everything would work out and subsequently adjust the terms of the contract. It was a

time when I was tested too as I might not have been suitable for the role. I clearly passed the test and thus was hired for two years. What I experienced as difficult was the 'physical and emotional disengagement' (Gray, 2014: 445) from the organisers, my employers. We also selected three other cohorts and inevitably relationships and friendships (Kondo, 1990; Holliday, 1995) developed with some of the entrepreneurs. However the open, overt nature of my other identity, as researcher, was apparent to all. Thus both the organisers and entrepreneurs could understand that I was already at another stage of my journey to becoming an academic (Chapter 8). The temporary nature of the incubation process for the entrepreneurs (12 months) somehow relieved the difficulty to disengage at the end.

6. Identity work and ethics

'..inclusive reflexivity not only allows room for the imperfectness of the researcher, but also enables a fuller and deeper representation of the groups and communities we aim to understand, and thus will enhance the trustworthiness and quality of our ethnographic work.' (Koning and Ooi, 2013: 29)

Here I discuss the impact of my multiple roles on knowledge production and the different responsibilities I had to the people in the field. I explore the awkward moments which arose as a result shedding light on the credibility and trustworthiness of my research practice (Koning and Ooi, 2013). Throughout the 12 month incubation phase I maintained a multitude of identities: the researcher, the administrator and the yoga teacher. Later I realised I also was a writer and a liminar myself (Chapter 8). Other identity related issues in ethnographic research which I discuss here include impression management, pure sociability, management of self-disclosure, researchers ascribed characteristics, maintaining marginal position (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Securing access was an ongoing activity in fieldwork thus management of 'personal front' (Goffmann, 1955) involved avoiding impressions that could be an obstacle to access. In the initial phase of gaining access, until I joined the incubator as an administrator, I was dressing in a smart office manner. That continued throughout the pre-incubation phase mimicking the dress code of Amea management staff. Once we moved to the incubator office I started dressing casually as Beth and Marcus, the lead business advisor, were both wearing jeans and casual footwear quite often. I remember overdressing (wearing a suit) for my interview with the deputy CEO and her. I felt quite uncomfortable as I was too formally dressed. Those moments taught me to dress down and wear smart-casual clothes on a daily basis. However dress has never been an issue that people in the office felt strongly about as I could observe a whole range dress from formal business suits to casual clothing.

Another characteristic of fieldwork and particularly encouraged in the incubator was 'pure sociability' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Small talk was part of the everyday life as in any other organisation. What was particularly interesting was entrepreneurs' freedom to engage in small talk compared to employees in an organisation. It brought the theme of engagement and weak authority structure in the incubator to the forefront. As they were not employed by the programme they would sometimes spend quite a lot of time chatting to others and to me. That started some friendships as chatting sometimes related to personal issues such as family, dogs, holidays, hobbies etc. As a participant in the incubation process and member of staff I felt comfortable in discussing mundane things with entrepreneurs and staff equally. However I had to make a decision related to how much of myself I would disclose to them. It felt fake to keep everyone in total ignorance about some personal stuff – marital status, holiday plans, not to mention hobbies as I was obviously applying my hobby at work – yoga. I felt awkward in the beginning as I was learning how to manage my identities but later I understood that 'the fact that we are asked about things "too" is more than appropriate; it is a way of returning the favour, so to speak, and stimulates the flow of the conversation' (Koning and Ooi, 2013: 27). People were genuinely interested in these personal details as well as in my research. I remember feeling particularly awkward in the beginning when I was asked by Beth, the programme director, to introduce myself at the three-day training (17th July, 2014) to cohort 1 and all the partners. She insisted to mention what else I was doing – to talk about my research. I had to stand up and explain that I was interested in the process of incubating social entrepreneurs and their perspective on it thus seeking their consent to participate. To that Shane, one of the entrepreneurs, jokingly commented 'so we are the guinea pigs' (fieldnotes). I felt uncomfortable and intrusive but Beth jumped up and said that they are the guinea pigs for the new centre at the business school (one of the partners in the project) who already took interviews from them at the social venture weekend. I felt relieved to know that research was an integral part of the programme and her reaction reassured me that my other identity was accepted.

On another occasion at the pub she shared that she appreciated me even more as she thought I was overqualified for the administrative role. In fact most of the cohort 1 entrepreneurs were also interested in my research and occasionally asked how it was going. I felt that they wanted to pass messages through me to the organisers during interviews, by emphasising how they felt about the process of incubation. Shane and Nate were very open and explicit about their uncomfortable experiences of the six-month reviews for instance. In fact giving voice to the entrepreneurs was something which is a methodological contribution in the wider incubation literature as researchers have focused

on incubation management and staff as sources of data and knowledge only (such as Hackett and Dilts, 2008).

The researcher's ascribed characteristics such as gender, age and ethnic/national group are used by the people in the field to cast her into certain identities. Thus I tried to monitor the effects of this 'identity work' (Goffmann, 1990) on the kinds of data collected. My gender never seemed to be an issue in gathering data. The gender representation in the office (including both the cohort ventures and the staff) was well balanced. Six out of the eleven ventures were founded by women and five by men. The programme director and I were both female and the business advisors all male. I never experienced any gender problems related to any aspect of the fieldwork. My nationality, Bulgarian, on the other hand was different than that of the majority of the incubatees or staff. In fact only one other venture in cohort 1 was founded by a non-British national and I was the only non-Brit on the staff team. However one of the partners was not British either. Possibly there could be some information (data) which I did not understand correctly as English is not my mother tongue. However that would be minimal as my language training and skills have passed both university level criteria and the interview for the job. Age difference could also impede fieldwork and data collection. The age range of incubation participants spanned from 22 to 65 years. In that respect I realised that most of the people I interacted with might be from a different generation than me (33 years old at the time). However I never experienced any negative impact of my age on the relationships or data collection at the incubator.

Initially I tried to maintain a relatively marginal position regardless of the numerous roles adopted and all the identity work involved. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) point out marginality provides access to participant perspectives but at the same time decreases the danger of over-rapport. They refer to the dangers of 'going observationalist' and 'going native' in ethnography. The access journey I described earlier was a journey from an observationalist mode (an outsider) to becoming an insider. However the part-time nature of my job combined with the overt nature of my research, being brought to the front on a lot of occasions, helped me keep the balance between the two extremes. This was how I coped with 'this marginal position of being simultaneous insider-outsider' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 89). My research interest in the entrepreneurial perspective on incubation helped to become accepted by the venture founders as I myself was part of the organisers in this process. In addition my overt researcher identity and lower status (administrator) in the organisation assisted in getting closer to the incubatees. People would share experiences with me that they would not discuss with their business advisor or the programme director. For instance reasons why they decided to take a decision on giving up or the relationships they had with other people in the group. This of course

happened gradually as in the beginning I felt I was perceived as one of the organisers. Then the first round of interviews asserted my researcher role and the relationship with most entrepreneurs was strengthened as we got to know each other better through them.

The awkwardness that arose from the conflict of interests between my responsibilities as an employee and me as a researcher sensitised me to the limitations of my research. However that is not surprising as 'we move in and out of these positions' (Koning and Ooi, 2013: 26). I experienced that quite strongly at some of the steering group meetings, I was taking the minutes at, on 21st Oct 2014 and even more so on 16 June 2015. At the former they were discussing internal issues about the business school and what the best strategy was for SVI in the future. Nick, the centre director at the business school, told me to stop writing as it was not for the minutes. At the latter meeting I witnessed a very awkward situation. Nick wasn't happy with Amea's decisions about the future of the programme. Then they decided that they need to continue the conversation in private. I felt extremely awkward as those conversations were sensitive and thus could not be included in my thesis, as it was pointed out in the earlier meeting. Some things were not to be included in the minutes or my dissertation as I was also an employee and had responsibilities towards the partners.

Finally I would like to point out my liminal identity. After having completed the analysis and most of the writing in this thesis, I became aware of another identity as a liminar - going through the rites of passage to becoming an academic, which I reflexively explore in what became chapter 8 in my dissertation. I internalised the concepts and theoretical framework used herein to analyse the process of social venture incubation and thus I could see the relevance of what I was studying for analysing other contexts and experiences too. The coherence between what I was going through and what the entrepreneurs were going through were prominent (see Chapter 8). My personal rite of passage experience helped me relate to them easily and to understand what they were talking about. That was a similar experience to what Hirst (2011) referred to when looking at the icy pavement and the salted road adjacent. Doing the project changed the way she saw and experienced reality, thus making her realise she had become a sociologist herself - applying the theoretical concepts to something mundane in her everyday life. Doing my project made me see the relevance of a rite of passage framework and apply it to the PhD process I was undergoing.

7. Data recording, analysis and writing

As discussed earlier the main types of empirical data in this study are field notes, interview transcripts and documents (formal and informal). Due to my role as an administrator I was able to record field notes at my desk or on a note pad in meetings. Most of the times when I was busy I would only manage to take what Lofland et al. (2006) classified as jotted notes such as little phrases, key words and quotes. I kept my note pad on my desk and also used it to write down work reminder notes - the words and situations observed and noted would serve two purposes. However this meant that sometimes people would be able to glance at it and there was a risk of reading what I was recording. I only used people's initials and phrases or short sentences. Later on I had the idea of writing ideas and notes in my native language – Bulgarian which nobody could actually comprehend. My handwriting also assisted in disguising my notes as I must admit it is illegible.

Those jotted notes later transformed into full field notes as scholars advised (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Bryman and Bell, 2007). I used to write them up after work. At first as most fieldworkers I would write down everything I observed and heard. And that was not much until the incubation phase started. Then my field notes increased especially when the second cohort joined, also at special events such as SVWs, talks and trainings - every time a large number of people gathered. Gradually the office population increased and there were a few conversations or things happening at the same time. For instance once there was a pitching event with some of the ventures at one corner of the office space and another venture team was sitting at the back working but also dipping in and out listening to what was happening. Trying to observe everything was impossible.

I recorded and transcribed all the interviews (the formal ones) and also typed all the full field notes in a word file on my laptop. All data used name initials only as per the confidentiality agreement in the consent forms. As mentioned earlier my identity as a researcher was communicated to all on numerous occasions. In addition I also collected signed consent forms and also obtained a letter of permission from the business centre (see Appendix 2) in accordance with the ethical clearance required by the university.

I used mental/head notes or memory to fill in any gaps in my field notes. Those were also the beginnings of data analysis. A distinguishing characteristic of ethnographic fieldwork is the vast amount of tacit knowledge that researchers acquire which can never be captured in written records (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Polanyi, 2009). I used it during the writing process as notes, documents and transcripts contained the prompts but tacit knowledge connected them into a comprehensible story for the reader.

As fieldwork progressed emergent issues were identified and the character of the field notes changed. In the beginning I was guided by the preliminary concepts pertinent to the business incubation process literature (selection, incubation, graduation/ office space, networking, business support and the peer element which was identified as an underexplored element of the process in one article). Furthermore the 'rite of passage' theory (Van Gennep, 1960) provided insights into the process once fieldwork began. The relevance of this theory sprang from my attendance at the 9th Annual Liverpool Symposium on Current Developments in Ethnographic Research in August 2014 on 'Ethnography and liminality: boundaries, opportunities and living 'at the edge''. In preparation for it and going deeper into Van Gennep's and Turner's work the idea of its explanatory power occurred to me. That sensitised me to pay attention to the concepts in that theory too. Later categories related to the elements of the incubation process were taken from the field. Those included the ones identified in literature (office space, networking, business support) but also engagement, social exchanges and impact on entrepreneur. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) point out the identification of categories is central to the analysis process (however it is not the analysis per se). I have noticed the preliminary concepts and categories undergo 'considerable change over the course of the research' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 153).

Qualitative data analysis consists of three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing, and verification (Miles and Huberman, 1994). However in ethnographic studies it is not enough to manipulate and manage data, 'data are materials to think with' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 158). Data analysis is an 'iterative process in which ideas are used to make sense of data, and data are used to change ideas' (ibid: 159). As the authors advise progressive focusing should occur over the course of research, or in other words from a concern with describing the incubation process towards developing and testing explanations and theories. I have used NVivo software to organise and analyse my data. I followed Braun and Clarke (2006: 87 - table 1) step-by-step guide in order to facilitate that process. I used thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (p.79). In doing that I agree with the authors criticising the passive account of the process of analysis by most qualitative researchers when claiming that the themes emerged or were discovered. Using such language means that:

'themes 'reside' in the data, and if we just look hard enough they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them.' (Ely, 1997: 205-6)

Here I claim an active role in the process of analysis, where I am as much a participant as I was at the time of data collection and fieldwork. Thinking with the data and developing

the themes happened over the course of the fieldwork, for instance the theme of engagement and social exchanges (Chapter 5) and the theme of incubation impact (Chapter 6). Those issues were something that the organisers worried about. However they were also identified in the literature afterwards (Chapter 2, section 2.4 and section 4). Therefore the interplay between the emerging issues in the field combined with the theoretical and empirical literature assisted the analysis and the development of the themes as 'data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84).

I started by uploading all my data sources in NVivo creating separate folders for each. I coded it at three different stages - March/April 2015, September/October 2015 and January/February 2016. Due to the large amounts of data, I coded the organisers data first and then I coded the rest of it. I did that because I decided to structure the thesis starting with the organisers design and intentions about the incubation process (Chapter 4) followed by the entrepreneurs response (Chapter 5) and impact (Chapter 6). That made sense as I already mentioned that social incubation was a new phenomenon which the organisers were also learning how to do. Some of the generated codes were informed by the incubation literature, some by the theoretical framework and some were developed inductively from the data (an abductive approach altogether discussed in section 2). The latter as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) described them 'arise "spontaneously" as they are being used by the participants or they can be "observer-identified"' (Lofland et al., 2006) developed by the ethnographer. At those three stages I coded the data developing 407 codes which is typical for the initial stages of ethnographic analysis as one is trying to make sense of it generating concepts. Some of the codes that spontaneously arose from the participants are the ones that were used regularly by organisers and entrepreneurs alike and relate to the venture: business plan, progress, and financial metrics. Also I coded a lot of the emotional experiences entrepreneurs shared by using the same adjectives they used as codes. At the next level of analysis I developed a theme which grouped all of them together - feelings. That was an example of developing a theme inductively.

In addition I used an approach which is advocated by Denzin (1989) called theoretical triangulation: 'approaching data with multiple perspectives and hypothesis in mind' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 165). As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) assert, ethnographers need not limit themselves to a single theory within which to analyse the data. Indeed I used the social exchange theory in order to explain how *communitas* develop within the social incubator as well as to explain the exchange dynamics and relationship development between business advisors and entrepreneurs (Chapter 7, section 3):

'When one set of theories does not exhaust the potentialities of the data, other sets can be employed to point to and explain the facts which remain unexplained.' (Bensman and Vidich, 1960: 165-6).

The writing of the account is also part of the synthesis. I agree with Hammersley and Atkinson who point out that 'ethnographic writing can often be a frustrating business' (2007: 193). That is because it should do 'justice to the complexities of everyday life, ordering themes and events, providing adequate details and evidence' (p.193). I had to resolve those when constructing the ethnography. At the same time a successful ethnography demonstrates a dynamic balance, 'a constant interplay between the concrete and the analytic, the empirical and the theoretical' (p. 197). I have used a combination of both the thematic and chronological approaches to organising the text. Chapter 4 as mentioned earlier is constructed from the initial stages of the fieldwork data, incorporating the organisers' intentions, expectations and design of the process. Chronologically it comes first before the following selection, engagement with the elements of the incubation process (Chapter 5). It also thematically covers the organisers' perspective of the process. The last findings chapter focuses on impact thematically but it also presents the reflexive account of the participants at their graduation.

I have now explained how I conducted my research and analysed the data. What follows is the result of those processes – the ethnographic account of social venture incubation.

Chapter 4: Designing social incubation

1. Introduction to the chapter

This first empirical chapter presents the organisers' perspective of Social Venture Incubator (SVI). It focuses on the aims of the programme and the expected outcomes as set by the funders as well as how those were expected to be achieved. The venture-centric orientation of the organisers is analysed. The analysis also shows the evolving, changing nature of the expectations and design. I have used interviews with the programme director, lead business advisor, the steering group partners, my fieldnotes and programme documents I had access to.

The chapter starts with an overview of the organisers of the incubation process, their role and organisational intentions. Two of them had aspirations for taking the lead on SVI in the future as it fulfilled their organisational aims and ambitions. They were, together with the dedicated programme staff, the organisers who designed the incubation process. They were the experts and instructors, or in Turner's (1969) words the masters of ceremony.

Next I focus on the programme and its intentions. I explain who the incubation programme was designed for and what it intended to achieve. The programme was set out as a transition to becoming investment-ready and scaling the ventures. This part also presents the means, designed by staff, to achieve the desired outcomes.

The following section focuses on the incubation structures and activities designed to achieve the aims of the programme. It analyses the social venture journey. The three phases of the process are: sifting - ventures selection and the criteria, incubation - growing social ventures, and graduation - exit from the programme.

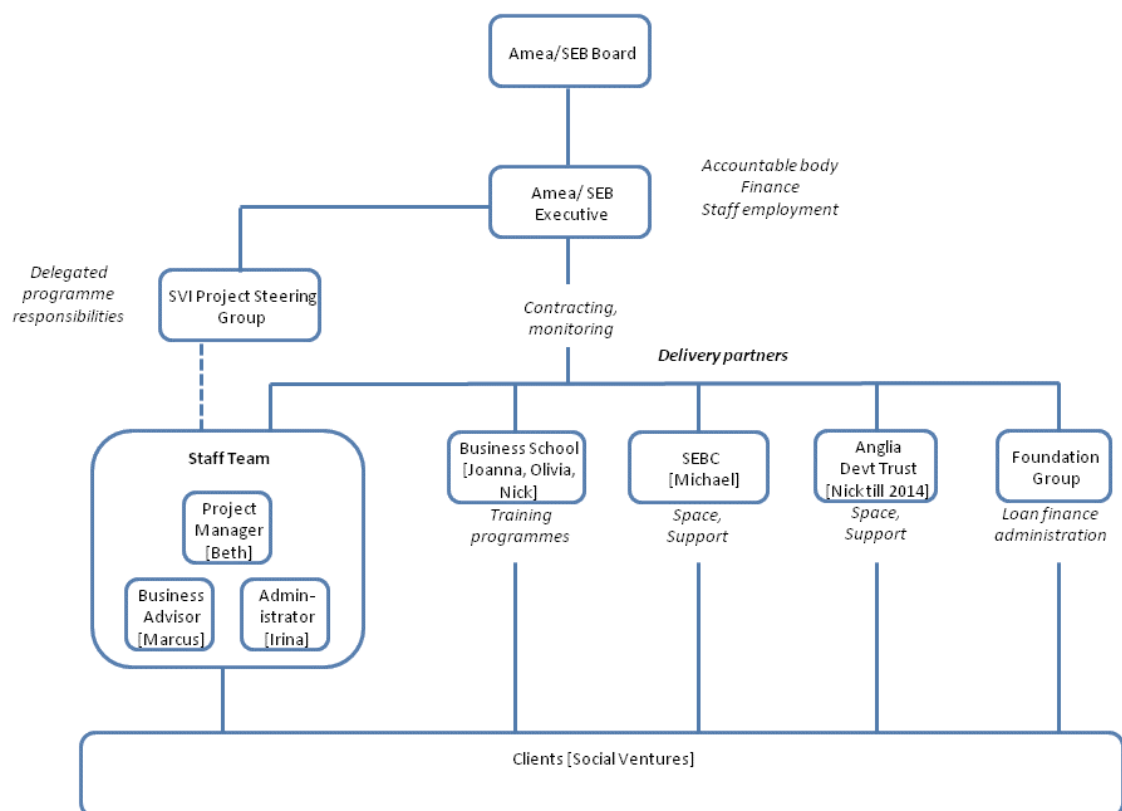
Taking an in depth study of those phases made it possible to study the nature of the incubation process, more specifically the design of those phases and the elements employed to bring about the transition of an idea into a social venture. Social incubation as a context presented an opportunity to enrich and extend the rite of passage theory thus offering a theoretical contribution too.

2. Social venture incubator - aims, intentions and design

2.1 The steering group - roles and intentions

In this section I first explain the role of each partner organisation, their intentions and relationships with one other. I then set out the aims of the programme. The role of 'masters of ceremonies' as designers of the incubation rite of passage are presented next (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: SVI organisational chart



(I have added the names of the people next to their roles in the chart taken from the programme business plan document)

2.1.1 Amea

Amea, started in 1999, is a charitable organisation with the purpose 'to make a positive impact on society by supporting individuals and ventures who create social benefit. We do that in three ways: through social innovation, through social finance and through workspace and enterprise support' (Amea website). Their activities fall into four main areas: retail charity bonds, charity bonds (that is the finance support), SEB (workspace

and enterprise support), SVI (workspace and enterprise support, incubation). Those position the organisation as a key expert in the social enterprise support, necessary for positioning them as a key master of ceremony too.

At the time I started my fieldwork the senior management were discussing their broader mission, vision, values and how they could unify all the charity activities. The two new big projects, SVI and SEBC, had created the need to employ more people. Amea was in flux, developing and (re)establishing the relationships between their internal projects and activities. The Social Incubator Fund was the vehicle to incorporate an incubation support to the Amea offering as 'building the incubation component is critical...' (Carol, SEBC director, interview). The SEBC was young and needed 'to build a reputation and ... to build a competency to be able to say this is what we are' (ibid). As a leading partner on the Social Incubation Programme they were also the key 'masters of ceremonies' or in Czarniawska and Mazza (2003) terms - the organisers of the rites of passage. Amea commissioned three other organisations to support it in the delivery of this programme. The project was managed by Michael, the deputy CEO of Amea, who had the overall management responsibility for SVI. The dedicated staff team were employed by Amea and dealt with the day-to-day delivery of the programme - programme director (Beth), business advisors (Marcus, Peter and Colin) and administrator (me). The main office space for both the dedicated staff and SVI ventures was provided by Amea within the SEBC as physical office space, a key element of most business incubators (Photograph 1). Amea's leading role in the incubation programme meant they were the key organisers, designers and 'masters of ceremony' and elements of the delivery of the programme were handed over to the other partners. Their role changed in 2016 when the business school took over the leadership of the programme.

2.1.2 The Business School (BS)

The Business School delivered the main training on the programme or in Hawkins and Edwards (2015) terms they were in charge of making the learning possible in a rite of passage. It organised the Social Venture Weekend (SVW analysed below) and also provided external experienced entrepreneurs, mentors and facilitators. They were responsible for the delivery of the further five days of training for the cohort selected for the twelve month programme. The management team, also part of the steering group that oversaw the SVI project, included two people, Joanna and Olivia, who were responsible for the organisation and delivery of the SVWs and the additional five days of training.

The business school was also in flux with the social incubator becoming an integral part of it too. The entrepreneurial centre within the business school that was in charge of the

training sessions was being restructured and the new Social Innovation Centre (SIC) that emerged within had primary interest in SVI as major part of their research involved the social entrepreneurs there. In fact soon after the staff and SVI programme started the news about this centre was spread through a brochure and was mentioned at the first steering group meeting I attended. This new centre would focus on 'improving the understanding of how best to create high impact social ventures' and also conduct 'a longitudinal study of the entrepreneurs and organisations within [SVI]' (Amea, 2014b). Towards the end of the calendar year, the centre was established and Nick, CEO of Anglia Development Trust, became the new centre's executive director and full time employee of the BS. His new role and the centre's interest in being involved in the future management of SVI surfaced later on when discussions about the future of the programme started. From the first official discussion in November 2015, he 'expressed his desire for the new centre to take the lead on the university side as it is relevant' (fieldnotes, 25.11.2015).

Thus the role of SIC and Amea were discussed at every steering group meeting thereafter as it was something that both wanted to continue being involved in as masters of ceremony. In May 2015, at one of our team meetings, the programme director shared with the business advisors and me that the future of SVI was not certain and that 'there are two possibilities – the university funding and the SEBC ERDF (European Regional Development Framework) application – there are hence different scenarios about how this will work out depending on whether both or either only one of them are realised' (fieldnotes, 12.05.2015).

Just before I left my administrative job in July 2015, in a conversation with the programme director about handing over, I inquired about the future of SVI and the partners' relationship. Beth shared that SVI 'will be moving to the Business School ...and that might change the relationship between the partners and they [SVI] will probably have to start paying rent here. Physically they will be in the same office but administratively/legally, part of the business school's Social Innovation Centre.' (fieldnotes, 16.07.2015)

Had my research method solely involved interviews with the partners I would not have been aware of the relationship dynamics and structure of the designers of this process. However my close involvement as a participant-observer showed that the organisation was complex and involved a constant renegotiation of partners' roles.

2.1.3 Foundation Group (FG) - Community Development Finance Institution

FG is a social enterprise with two main roles: lending money to small businesses and social enterprises that are unable to access the money from mainstream financial institutions and also assisting in acquiring property for the benefit of the region. Therefore the ethos of FG was seen to complement and match the needs and ethos of the social venture programme.

It is important to state that this partner was less present in the overall process of incubation but at the same time the programme depended on it as it fulfilled one of the criteria for receiving SIF funding: it provided the match funding. FG were involved in the selection of ventures for the 12 month programme (as all other partners) and they participated in the steering group meetings.

Initially the 'client journey' through the programme was designed as a sequence of loan finance applications managed by FG. Originally the journey was determined and dominated by financial progression ultimately becoming investment-ready. However even at the pre-start stage of the programme there was room for change depending on the stage of the ventures. It was written in the business plan that entrepreneurs could drop out and rejoin the programme at any point as well as people with developed ideas could skip the initial startup weekend ideation stage. The venture journey was aligned with the outcome expectations set by the funders, Cabinet Office. Those included the delivery of minimum 50 investment-ready social ventures over the two years of the programme. This set a clear venture-centric focus from the outset, which the organisers aligned to, similarly to other incubation studies (Hackets and Dilts 2004b; 2008). Hence the expected incubation transition was designed with the venture in mind.

FG's role in the programme was initially key. They had the authority to decide whether or not to award loans. Each venture applying for a loan had to follow a multiple step procedure including the writing and appraisal of a business plan. However soon after the programme staff team were recruited, and throughout the year and a half I was there, the conditions changed and the provision of those loans changed. From the very beginning, before a cohort was recruited, the programme director said 'that access to finance as a gatekeeper to the next stage [in the programme] is not going to work, working toward a loan is not suitable for most businesses, equity investment could be better' (fieldnotes, 02.06.2014). With regards to lending in general, the amount available was estimated to be larger than the demand from the ventures, then at the next steering group meeting, 30th June 2014, it was confirmed by Cabinet Office that larger loans could be awarded and there was flexibility with regards to the involvement of the ventures in the programme and

access to finance. Throughout the first year the partners realised that expectations of loan take up had to be reduced as a result of lack of demand. That's why the role of FG decreased in the overall unfolding incubation process as only a few ventures managed to apply and receive loans (Chapter 6, section 2.1.1).

2.1.4 Anglia Development Trust

The Trust was contracted to deliver support and space in another location. One of the SVI aims included geographical reach and support of social ventures in the South-East of England. Later on it was realised that the space provision was not necessary and the involvement of the Trust in the process decreased as Nick, the CEO, moved to the Business School at the end of 2014.

2.1.5 The role of the partners

The relationships of the partners were characterised by enmeshment. Their role in the SVI process was as organisers, masters of ceremonies, due to their expertise in the social enterprise field and entrepreneur support. And even though they were not obeyed totally (Chapter 7, section 2.4), as the instructors of a rite of passage would be, they were in a position to decide who joined the programme, how long they stayed and what they needed in terms of support. Their role entailed designing the programme and also participating in the support at selection, training and offering useful contacts to entrepreneurs. They were the designers of the rite of passage and also the instructors. In the entrepreneurial field, the organisers and designers of social incubation were considered as social extrapreneurs (Tracey and Stott, 2017). Social extrapreneurship has been described as 'the bringing together of ideas, people and resources by working across or beyond organisational boundaries to create social impact. A good example is the growth of social incubators' (Stott, 2015). Indeed that is an indication of a new sub-field emerging which this thesis explores in-depth empirically.

The partners were responsible for realising the aims and intentions of the programme which are discussed in the next section. On a daily basis the programme director and business advisors acted as instructors. In this section what has hopefully become apparent is the complex structure of the 'masters of ceremony' in this incubation rite of passage: four partner organisations and dedicated staff, as well as the fluid nature of organising practices and procedures, constantly being modified and adjusted throughout the course of the programme.

2.2 What we were trying to achieve

Having presented the four partners on the programme, their roles and intentions for the incubation programme, I now focus on the programme itself and its intended outcomes. It was designed by the partners to achieve a specific set of outcomes and impact the growth of social ventures. The specific structure and activities of that passage are presented in the following section.

Prior to the recruitment for the first social venture event, most of the processes for the delivery of the programme as well as the measures for impact were designed. That was not an easy time for Beth and I as it had to be established fairly quickly. However there were guiding aims and goals embedded in the business plan, a document designed at the funding application stage.

The overall purpose of the programme was 'to find, nurture and enable social ventures' (Amea, 2014b) to develop 'faster and more effectively than if the programme had not been available' (Amea, 2014a). Moreover ventures were expected to scale and become investment-ready. Those aims coincide with the aims of mainstream (for-profit) business incubators (CSES, 2002). However the idea of growth was perceived differently. Near the end of the programme Beth clarified that social venture growth was related to scaling their social impact rather than the venture itself as one 'can scale a venture and not scale the impact at all' (interview). In essence the goal in this process was the same and thus the means to achieve those goals, as in any rite of passage, were designed to be the same too.

The Cabinet Office expectations and outcomes from the SIF funded projects were translated into the SVI 'Theory of Change'. Beth created a document by that name which aligned the activities of the programme, its monitoring structures and systems with the outcomes set by the funders. Those were also called the markers of success for both the programme and the ventures (column three in figure 3). The social venture selection process was also informed by those objectives: 'the cohort should be those SVs most able to deliver against' (SVI, 2014a) the first six points. These objectives were expected to be achieved by the end of the twelve-month programme. The success of the ventures was directly translated into success for the programme along the same markers. Those expected outcomes clearly pushed towards growth in both financial and social impact terms, which Beth pointed out as not necessarily aligned in the context of social ventures.

Figure 3: SVI Expected outcomes, means and selection criteria

Selection	Incubation	Graduation
Selection criteria	The Underpinnings of a successful business (the means)	SVI Expected Outcomes (the ends)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Person and team 2. Proposition 3. Social impact 4. Vision and ambition 5. Timing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Business plan 2. Team 3. Skills to develop the venture 4. Social key metrics 5. Financial metrics and management accounts 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accessing loan finance 2. Geographic reach of SVI 3. Increase in revenue and sustainability 4. Jobs created 5. Investment ready 6. Increasing social impact including ability to measure (for SVs only) 7. Permanent strengthening of the supporting environment for SVs (for Aimea and partners only)

Beth had realised the tension between the programme's goal and the diverse composition of the objects of incubation, the ventures:

'the funding source pushes us towards trying to work with some ventures that might be investable. So they're quite a long way along the journey, whereas the people we get coming to the social venture weekends are actually very early in the journey.' (Beth, interview).

The demand for incubation came from early stage social ventures which was in line with the overall aim of the programme but at the same time the pressure for scaling and becoming investment ready by graduation was difficult to achieve unless 'we take them a little bit further in the journey when some of them would be beyond the need for incubation' (ibid).

The programme target was to engage with 300 social entrepreneurs at the social venture weekends and to further incubate 50 ventures that would become investment ready. To achieve that Marcus and Beth came up with five elements, 'the underpinnings of a successful business' (ibid.), which would lead to the Cabinet Office outcomes listed in figure 3. Those were: a business plan, a team, skills to develop the venture, social key metrics, financial metrics and management accounts. Hence in order to become investment ready, create jobs, increase social impact etc. the ventures would need to implement those elements, which Beth considered the 'fundamental prerequisite of running an organisation properly, and scaling it and all the rest of it' (ibid.). These were also aligned to current research on investment readiness in the social investment market (Hazenbergh, 2015).

Beth and Marcus had managed and advised a lot of social and mainstream ventures themselves which enabled them to act as instructors knowing what was necessary for their transition, transforming them into successful businesses. Organisers perceived the implementation of those elements to be the added value of the incubation programme as

they 'wouldn't have done that if it wasn't for us saying, 'You need to get this in place" (Beth, interview). The rite of passage to becoming a successful social venture thus required the implementation of the underpinnings of successful business, not much different than the elements and indicators implemented in other incubators (social impact and metrics being the exception). Those are in line with some of Voisey's (2006) soft outcomes (Chapter 2, section 2.4) and the outcomes in column three above are the hard outputs the author referred to. They can easily be measured and are monitored by most incubators (similarly here they were set by the funders). The soft outcomes are indicators of enterprise development (Bearse, 1998) and the hard outputs are indicators for growth. Hence there were two venture transformation processes intended in the incubator - venture development (related to building and changing structures and processes) and venture growth (related to size). In the course of the SVI programme the former process was considered a prerequisite for the latter.

Beth believed that it was the incubation programme that had imparted venture development wisdom on the entrepreneurs, similarly rituals and rites of passage have the power to enact the change, the transformation (Boland, 2013). Marcus also shared that view, attributing such impact to the programme with regards to implementation of the aforementioned elements:

'if ventures have made good progress on those items (the underpinnings of successful business) by the time they leave, then we've had a positive social impact, positive impact on the ventures. If they are no further with those things by the time we leave, then we haven't been successful.' (Marcus, interview)

Similarly to Voisey (2006), Marcus considered success as making positive impact along the soft outcomes leading to the hard outputs. The entrepreneur's perspective on the programme impact is presented in Chapter 6. In fact impact was something Beth was constantly preoccupied with as it justified the existence of such programmes, something Bearse (1998) criticised incubators for not evaluating properly. She shared that:

'this constant issue with incubation about whether or not we're actually having any impact at all, or are we just picking winners?....It's my view that social entrepreneurs take, have their own structural reasons why they're longer to get to revenue, why they're longer to get to sustainability.' (Beth, interview)

In addition to the targeted outcomes presented in this section, there was a further expectation of the ventures, which Beth insisted on, to engage with the programme in order to attribute impact (see the Contract section of this chapter). How ventures engaged with the elements of the programme is at the core of Chapter 5 where I look into how incubation worked in practice.

Having explained the overall intentions and aims of the programme I now continue with the structures and activities and their function in the venture incubation rite of passage.

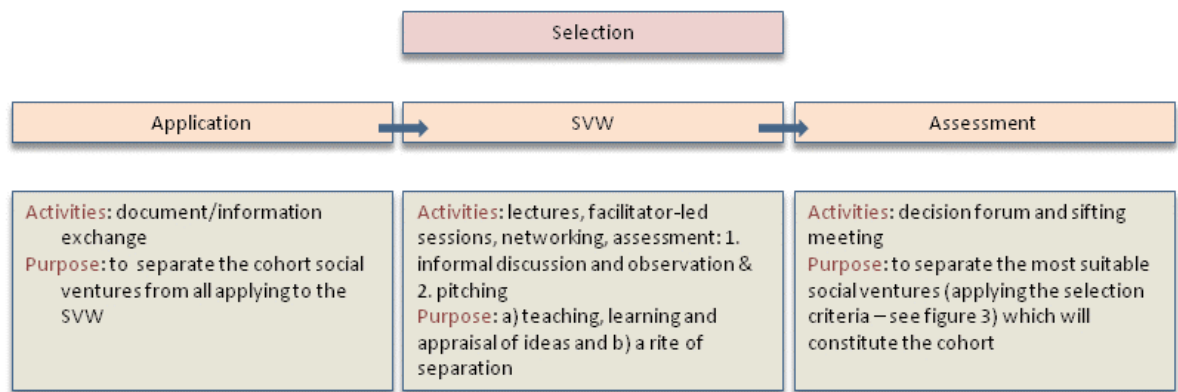
3. The 'SVI client journey' - structures and activities

The client journey was a term used in the business plan which included the whole process from expression of interest to attend the Social Venture Weekend (SVW) by an entrepreneur to graduating from the programme. The following three subsections - sifting, incubation and graduation - divide the activities and structures available to social ventures throughout that journey. Sifting and graduation appear to be just two short moments which mark the start and the finish of the incubation programme. Temporally that was the case compared to the lengthy period of incubation, however the activities and structures employed in them as well as the meaning those phases held for the entrepreneurs, turned them into something more than just a start and an end date. Those meanings are discussed in Chapter 6 whereas here I present the journey from an organisers' perspective.

3.1 Sifting - 'How do you want to choose the ventures?'

The selection process was described as a funnel by Nick as 'we accept a lot [of ventures] for the SVW, then we sift through and finally we get a few that are good to go on to the programme' (fiednotes, 23.06.2014). My administrative job entailed organising four selection processes and attending four SVWs, recruiting four cohorts. My task was 'communicating directly with ventures with regard to their applications and support needs; and attending and acting as a focal point at Social Venture Weekends and for ventures who are recruited to the incubator' (SVI, 2015a). 217 people attended those four weekends from 166 social ventures. The overall selection of ventures included three phases - application, Social Venture Weekend and assessment, during which participants were required to participate in different ceremonies related to establishing their eligibility to join the programme (figure 4). The selection process was characterised by information exchange between the organisers and the entrepreneurs (section 3.1.2).

Figure 4: Selection phase - activities and functions



3.1.1 Application

My involvement in the application process was key as I now reflect back on the four pre-social venture weekend periods. About a month before each weekend enquiries would start flooding our inbox with ventures interested in attending the SVW. I would read those enquiries to establish whether they were suitable for the event and request further information where necessary. Most incubators have set selection processes and criteria (Hacket and Dilts, 2004a) and according to Bergek and Norrman (2008) these are some of the elements that are important for differentiation between incubator models. Even though Beth reassured the other partners that it was not 'particularly difficult to spot a social entrepreneur' (Beth, 2015a), it was something that needed clarification. A social incubator first and foremost needed to be able to attract social ventures. With time I learned to distinguish them myself and filtered those who did not have a social mission or impact.

There were a lot of times when we had to refuse invitation to the weekend to people who were not able to articulate that they 'balance the generation of profit and commercial activity with the delivery of social impact' (SVI, 2015b). In the beginning we would use a broader definition which would not emphasise the central position of the social impact and that would lead to difficulties in articulating why some people would be turned down. It was essential to be able to spot that the business 'aims to solve a problem or make life better for others in some way, and is not solely focused on profit' (Beth, 2014b) as this rite of passage was designed for social ventures only. Similarly each rite of passage is aimed at a specific group of individuals undergoing a transition, boys transitioning to manhood for instance (Turner, 1969). Whereas in the latter circumstances the physical characteristics of the liminars are obvious and it is thus easy to determine who is suitable

for the passage, in the context of social ventures clear criteria and characteristics needed to be established.

The application process was carried out through email exchange and online questionnaires inquiring into the nature of the entrepreneurs' ideas. The amount of information needed to apply for the SVW was a lot. However as one venture founder shared with me at SVW3, it was a great opportunity at the cost of £50 compared to what BS usually charged for similar events. This economic imbalance in the exchange between the organisers and the entrepreneurs was also an issue that I explore here. We had a lot of difficulties collecting the data as well as collecting it on time. Despite the low cost a lot of entrepreneurs did not provide the information needed (on time). Separation from the pool of ventures included fulfilling the criteria for social mission and impact as well as paying a small fee, submitting a questionnaire and an executive summary.

In addition the term social venture created some issues as it was too broad. It included ventures spanning any legal structure, sector, stage, for- or not-for-profit status (Chapter 5, section 2). However the initial intention was that they would all 'certainly be looking for revenue streams and help to scale up and become investment or contract ready' (Beth, 2014a). That turned out not to be the case for all (see chapter 6). The social venture diversity led to difficulties in the delivery of the programme, for instance provision of workshops and training that would be suitable and useful for all (Chapter 5, section 3).

3.1.2 Social Venture Weekend

The Social Venture Weekend was the 'key tool in recruitment of SVI cohort' (SVI, 2014b) or in other words the 'portal to the Social Venture Incubator' (Marcus, 2014). It was a standalone event but for most of the entrepreneurs it was the separation rite leading to the incubation programme - two and a half days exchanging information in order to select the ventures for cohort 1.

It was an intensive, long weekend for all of us, ventures and organisers alike, which began on a Friday afternoon. Upon arrival they were initiated as participants via a name badge and a welcome information pack. The rest of the evening was all about introductions, presenting the programme, showcasing social ventures and networking. The SVW was organised and delivered entirely by and at the Business School, however its important function in the overall incubation process was emphasised by the programme director who insisted on 'opening the evening in order to make sure that it is about SVI' (fieldnotes, 10.10.2014). After introducing the programme and the partners, Nick talked about the difference between social ventures and other businesses emphasising 'transparency –

social ventures need to know what they are doing and prove that you are doing it, showing the [social] impact.' (fieldnotes, 20.06.2015).

The Friday evening also aimed to inspire the entrepreneurs. That's why the following session was a Q&A with a panel of four social venture founders who shared their experiences and once again emphasised social impact. After the recruitment of the first cohort, two of those panellists would be social entrepreneurs on the programme, usually Sandra and Flora, two of the cohort 1 entrepreneurs (photograph 10). They acted as advocates for the programme and answered questions both during the session and networking later on. The panel showed the diversity of social ventures, business models and approaches to the audience. This diversity of social ventures Nick referred to as 'pragmatic (that is the entrepreneurial philosophy) using what works best for them. There is no right or wrong strategy' (fieldnotes, 10.10.2014). This intended to show the new entrepreneurs the possibilities and the creativity in the approaches towards solving social problems, creativity typical for the liminal phase (Turner, 1969; Lindsay, 2010).

The excitement of the venture participants could easily be noticed when they talked to each other, the organisers, facilitators and assessment team, until way beyond 9pm (photograph 11). Simultaneously that was one of the opportunities when the assessors could speak to the venture founders and evaluate whether their ideas were suitable for the programme. It was part of the 'informal discussion and observation' of the assessment process. Most participants did not actually realise that they were being evaluated initially, sometimes not until Sunday, when they were prompted to talk to the team as part of the selection process (photograph 12).

The Saturday that followed was a very long day, 9am-9pm. It was packed with lecture type sessions interrupted by facilitator-led activities. The lectures would cover topics like defining customer needs, market research, business model canvas, pitching, legal structures for social ventures and funding. The programme, adapted from a model used at the business school, was delivered by the teaching faculty of entrepreneurship as well as mentors, experienced entrepreneurs and other people directly involved in developing social ventures. The goal of the programme was to provide the 'toolkit to undertake an initial appraisal of your social venture in the key areas of: defining the market and customers, exploring options for the business model and considering key financial issues' (Amea, 2014b). Turner (1969) suggests that a liminal space, similarly to the Social Venture Weekend, offers its occupants the opportunity to engage in transformative practices: questioning, trying out and adopting or rejecting new identities, frames of reference and ways of acting (Boland, 2013). Those sort of practices were both inspired by the sessions and encouraged by the facilitator-led activities where the social

entrepreneurs would sit around a coffee table in pairs or larger groups and discuss their business models, value propositions or customers (photograph 13). The aim was to question and appraise their social venture ideas, value proposition and business models.

All those lectures and exercises intended to teach the social entrepreneurs about starting a business and aimed at deconstructing their ideas through questioning. They inculcated them into practices related to starting a business as most entrepreneurs did not have business background (Chapter 5, section 2). That is quite contrary to what Dacin et al. (2011) have accused similar programmes of (Chapter 7, section 2.3 - inculcating social entrepreneurs into social enterprise specific practices). Questioning is typical for any rite of passage. It is however interesting to notice those at the pre-liminal, separation phase too as they are typical for liminality. In van Gennep's view rites of separation would only serve a function of detachment from the previous status or state in society. Therefore the SVW incorporated the elements of the whole schema of a rite of passage, but for some it was the gateway to a much longer transition programme. Those were the selected entrepreneurs for the 12 month programme.

The facilitators would usually be volunteers that the Business School recruited and in the later weekends some of the cohort venture founders. The organisers considered that 'the new cohort will benefit greatly from their insight and experience on starting a social venture' (Beth, 2015b). Therefore at SVW3 and 4 some entrepreneurs from cohort 1 and 2 became facilitators and joined the process as instructors. In a similar fashion a leadership educator has already 'faced similar monsters themselves during their transition towards new understandings of leadership and is able to identify and point out some of the hazards and uncertainties that the student might encounter' (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015: 36). The current SVI entrepreneurs became instructors for the applying entrepreneurs at SVWs as they had faced the same activities and difficulties not too long ago (photograph 14).

The Sunday was full of excitement too and sometimes panic as some entrepreneurs were very worried about pitching. The morning would include lectures and facilitator-led activities and the afternoon would finish with pitching in front of a panel of two judges - one of the assessors and one external influential person from the region. Pitching caused lots of worry and excitement and the programme director decided that this anxiety might be reduced if we provided the participants with a pitching cover letter. This was suggested by Peter, one of the business advisors, who also sat on the pitching panel at SVW3 and noticed one of the venture founders 'nearly in tears and they reassured him that this was a friendly chat and asked him questions' (fieldnotes, 10.03.2015). Marcus also confirmed that another entrepreneur who attended SVW2 was nearly in tears. At that point 'it was

evident that people take pitching very seriously whereas that is not the impression we want to portray' (ibid.). Pitching was the element of the assessment that triggered peoples fear and emotions. Those stories offered an insight into the nature of the social entrepreneurs and their experiences of doubt, fear, anxiety and excitement.

The weekend hence served two purposes. One was the teaching, learning and appraisal of ventures' ideas, and the other was a separation rite through assessment via information exchange with the assessors. It was a rite of separation imbued with entrepreneurial excitement and emotion too. It also (analysed at length in Chapter 6, section 3) offered a different image of the social entrepreneur compared to most of the heroic accounts in social entrepreneurship literature criticised by scholars (Dacin et al., 2011; Parkinson and Howorth, 2008; Ruebottom, 2013).

3.1.3 Assessment

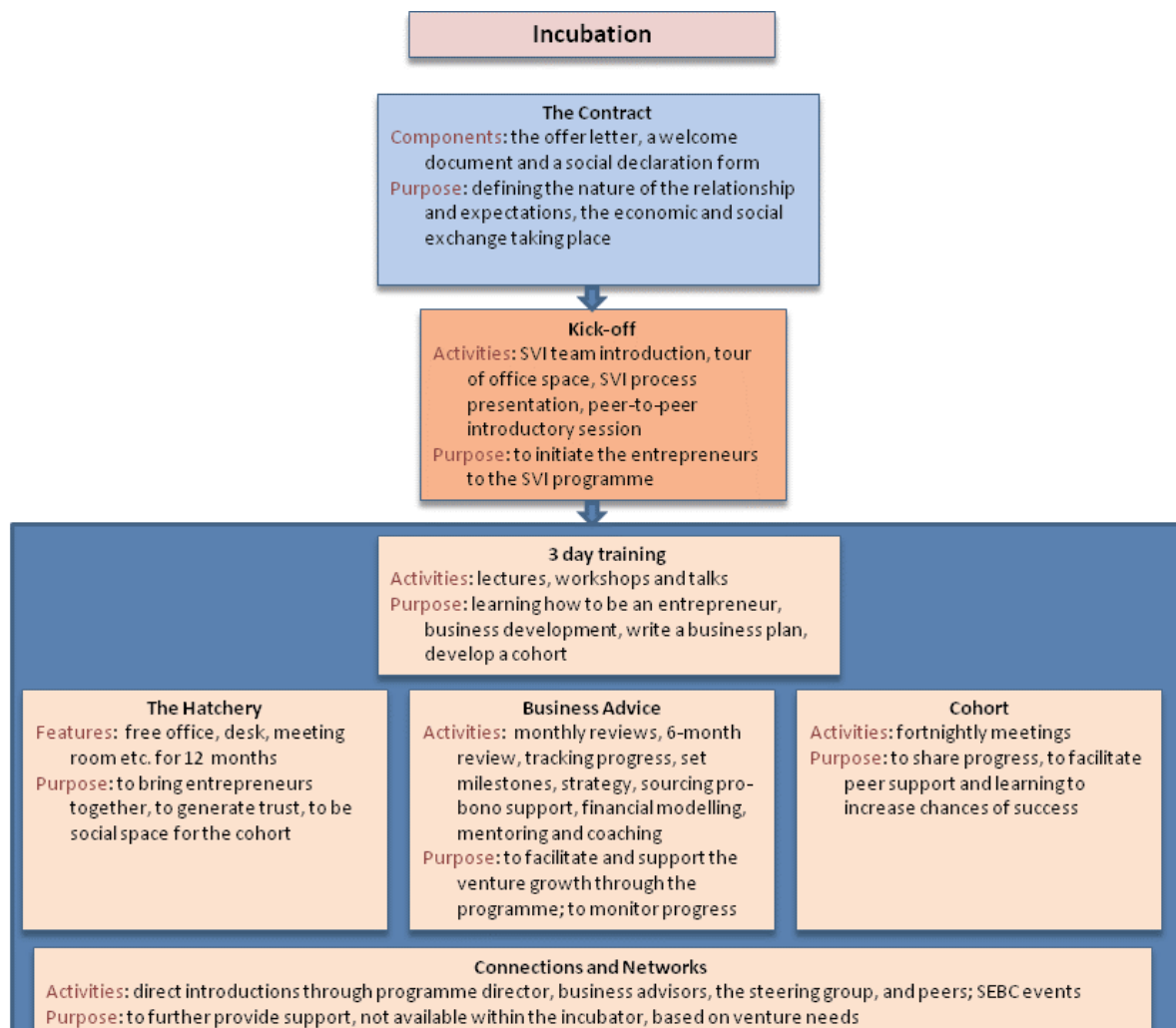
At the end of the assessment process the separation phase culminated in a decision forum. Each assessor submitted three lists of recommendations to me, prior to a sifting meeting where the steering group decided which ventures would be accepted. The ventures were categorised in three groups: 'suitable', 'not suitable' or to be offered 'further support'. The rites in this separation phase were designed to select the appropriate social ventures for which elaborate selection and assessment activities, analysed above, were needed. In essence the criteria and assessment process with its complex structure served the purpose to find and admit only the social ventures able to grow and become investment-ready in the incubator. However whether they selected the right ventures is analysed in Chapter 5 (section 2) and Chapter 7.

3.2 Incubation - growing social ventures

After the ventures accepted the offer to join the social incubator there were a few administrative exchanges which included some paperwork exchange as well as preparing the access cards to the office. The ventures' name plates were also pasted on the walls behind reception and the 3rd floor landing (photograph 15). Placing the name of the venture there was an important symbolic moment for some entrepreneurs which is discussed in Chapter 6.

Here I analyse the elements of the incubation phase (figure 5). All these elements (structures and activities) were available to the incubatees after the kick off day for one calendar year.

Figure 5: Incubation Elements - activities and purposes



3.2.1 The Contract

Entrepreneurs signed a contract (SVI, 2015c) which established the nature of the relationship between the venture and the organisers. In addition they received a welcome document and later cohorts had to also sign a social declaration form¹⁰. Those papers were intended to formalise the relationship and reinforce engagement with the programme. The welcome document contained more information about what was offered such as: the relationship with the business advisor, the loan finance available to them, the peer-to-peer support and sessions, the training, the space and what is provided, events and a bit more about staff. Each of those elements is covered in the following sections.

The contract determined the exact terms of the exchange as 'the sterling value of the de minimis aid you have been awarded is £5,500' (SVI, 2015c) in return for entrepreneurs' engagement with the programme. It stipulated the details of the return for an equivalent thing given (Blau, 1964). In return entrepreneurs agreed to:

1. 'Engage fully with the programme, particularly their Business Advisor, proactively arranging meetings.
 2. To be working on growing a social venture and to be ambitious about that.
 3. As far as practicable base themselves and their teams at the Incubator.
 4. Attend fortnightly peer-to-peer sessions at the SEBC.
 5. Be honest with us, ask for help, and be trustworthy to us and your fellow ventures.'
- (SVI, 2015c)

The above expectations relate to social exchanges that take place in any given work setting. These sorts of exchanges do not expect immediate or even matching return and establish relationships of trust, feelings of obligation and trust development. Blau further points out that unlike in economic exchange, in social exchange 'a spiral or rising trust' (1964: 71) is generated. Hence those intangible returns listed in the offer letter in exchange for services economically valued at £5,500 were part of a different type of relationship, based on social exchange rather than purely contractual economic one.

However Beth soon realised that being accepted on the programme without any financial gains in the form of a grant or award given to the entrepreneurs created problems with engagement:

'if we wanted a programme where people were full-time on their ventures, we would need to either give them money to stop work, or take them a little bit further in the journey when some of them would be beyond the need for incubation' (Beth, interview).

¹⁰ The social declaration form was added to that package of signing up documents by the programme director later and the first two cohorts did not have to sign one. Signing that form also asked for specific social goals during the programme, the social issue that the venture was trying to address and specific social key performance indicators which are able to demonstrate the success and progress in achieving the social goals. By signing the declaration they declared social venture status.

The engagement issue with the programme persisted throughout (see Chapter 5) and it was related to the basic principles of exchange taking place in the incubator setting. The economic institution of the contract was not reinforced and entrepreneurs were not bound to the incubator the same way liminars were to the seclusion lodge and the masters of ceremony in a rite of passage. I thus explore why that was the case in the following chapter where I analyse entrepreneurs' engagement with the incubation process.

The 'traditional' work arrangements 'fit the concept of economic exchange' (Watson, 2001: 171), however in the context of a social incubator, where the arrangements between entrepreneurs and organisers are not employer - employee ones, the contract does not hold the same meaning and what becomes more important are processes of social exchange which navigate the dynamics (chapter 5 and 7). Beth's view on solving the engagement problem, was to either 'charge the ventures', which she was not keen on, or take equity stakes in the ventures. This solution was very similar to the approach taken by many of the business incubators (Barrow, 2001, Gross, 1998). It is based on the concept of economic exchange. The incentive here for the incubator was not so much about the financial reward but about changing 'the nature of the relationship being somewhat more two-way' (Beth, interview). She had realised that the balance between giving and receiving was crucial as 'if all you do is give to entrepreneurs, well, to anybody. Basically, they don't value it after a certain amount of time' (ibid.).

Organisers expected entrepreneurs to engage with the programme elements as listed in the contract. How engagement and social exchanges unfolded throughout the programme is analysed in the following chapter. Similarly to social exchanges among managers in organisations, social exchanges in the incubator were strategically shaped, not only 'related to the interests, purposes and projects of those who engage in them' (Watson, 2001: 26) though. In brief the processes of exchange, economic or social, and the broader exchange perspective, are useful concepts I employ to explain the engagement dynamic in the incubation process (Chapter 7, section 3).

3.2.2 The kick off

The kick-off day became an important event marking the start of the programme. The steering group decided that it was a good start – an initiation if you like - for the entrepreneurs. As the new ventures arrived to the SEBC I welcomed them and handed the contracts out to sign, they in turn were expected to hand all the registration paperwork to reception. Then they received their access cards. Those material objects, together with the logos, venture name-plates and website profiles, played a role in the establishment of the entrepreneurs' ideas as real, credible ventures. It was a rite on its own, becoming

'real'. In this context incubation was not only a period of transformation, change, fluid and dynamic time (Gibbons, 2014), but it also served as an initiation into the world of enterprise - an important venture creation moment.

Once all the entrepreneurs gathered in the conference room, the programme director congratulated them and pointed out that the team 'have chosen the 11 ventures that we believe had what it takes in terms of an idea and appropriate team' (fieldnotes, 18.07.2015; photograph 16). Then we introduced ourselves, I gave them a tour of the shared office space, Marcus presented the SVI process and we had the first peer-to-peer session.

Each of us was responsible for one of these activities. The programme director did the welcome speech and the team introductions. The lead business advisor introduced the year ahead. His presentation also presented the programme as a process rather than a physical space: 'it is a community... it is an organisation and a process/programme.... the space is just part - an important one though '(ibid.).

Then the introductions and bonding of the selected entrepreneurs was encouraged (photograph 17). Each entrepreneur explained their venture to the group with the aim to 'start the process of saying 'this is what I need help with right now' (Beth, 2014c). That session and the other peer-to-peer meetings, held fortnightly, followed the same structure. The purpose was to facilitate the peer support, typical for *communitas* (Turner, 1969), and also the learning that the programme wanted to facilitate. They would share what they needed and in turn mention what skills or contacts they could offer in return. This was another example symbolizing that the incubation process was based on exchange, not only a one-way flow of wisdom imparted on the ventures by the organisers. They were expected to pro-actively 'ask for help' (SVI, 2015c) and also help others in return utilising their skills and contacts, and thus contributing to the process of venture creation and development.

This kick-off rite marked the programme initiation. The incubatees were ceremonially admitted to the incubator and joined the twelve-month programme.

3.2.3 The Hatchery

As part of the incubation programme all selected ventures were offered free workspace at the SEBC (see photographs 1 and 6) and were encouraged 'as far as practicable to base themselves and their teams at the Incubator' (SVI, 2015c)¹¹. However this space had

¹¹ In fact most incubators offer office space, despite not for free, and tenant companies benefit from economies of scale (Bruneel et al., 2012).

permeable and flexible boundaries. The physical space was provided however its use was not compulsory. In fact the organisers wanted the incubator to be a 'safe space where we are able to be open and trust one another' (welcome document), another reference to its social dimensions. It extended beyond the physical office to the symbolic space and time shared with others, which is a characteristic of the liminal condition and *communitas* (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). Beth and the rest of the organisers aimed to instil this common understanding amongst the entrepreneurs pleading to 'respect others and the trust they place in you' (welcome document).

Geographical reach was often discussed at steering group meetings, as one of the Cabinet Office expected outcomes. However at the December 2014 steering group meeting it was concluded that 'it is not feasible to support ventures based a long distance away from the incubator' (fieldnotes, 16.12.2014). The proximity to the physical office space was vital to support the ventures. The physical aspect of the seclusion lodge (Turner, 1969), where the liminars are physically bound and spend time together going through a rite of passage, seemed to be important in an incubator context too. The entrepreneurs were not forced into seclusion as such however their proximity and ability to connect to the space were important to the organisers as a form of engagement.

Beth wanted to accommodate the ventures 'to best meet team requirements' (SVI, 2015d). Generally she was keen on responding to entrepreneurs' needs if they were reasonable through the provision of 'desks and chairs, bookshelves, sofas, wifi, meeting room, coffee and tea, printing and photocopying (up to a point), bike parking, lockers' and other things ventures needed to pay for such as 'phones, car parking, franking services, more meeting rooms' (SVI, 2014c). However not all of them needed the office space which I explore in chapter 5 and thus engagement was related to their needs rather than determined by the contract.

It is not my intention to emphasise discourse or language in this thesis, but the words incubator and hatchery are worth noting. The Hatchery sign was pasted on the door on 12th November 2014. The 'hatching space' phrase was first used by Michael and he related it to early stage ventures and even people who 'just have an idea' (Michael, interview). Incubating or hatching ideas therefore was reflected in the name of the space itself which was in contrast to the talk that developed around scaling and growth referred to earlier in this chapter. Both terms were used interchangeably and were a topic for discussion amongst entrepreneurs, trying to find what incubation meant for them, those are presented in Chapter 6 and their reactions and responses to the space in Chapter 5.

Three themes emerged from my analysis of the organisers perspective on incubation space. The first one is its social aspects which I follow up on in the next chapter. The

second one is the importance of physical proximity to the Hatchery and its impact on the incubation process. And finally the controversy between the nascent nature of entrepreneurs that need hatching and the organisers agenda to scale ventures which I return to in Chapter 6.

3.2.4 Training

At the start of the incubation process BS organised a three-day training workshop where 'theory' was delivered in the mornings and the afternoons were occupied by mentoring. Each day focused on a specific topic such as - strategy, managing your finance and leadership/building a team. The mentoring in the afternoons would typically be a mix of group and one-to-one meetings where the theory from the morning was discussed one-to-one with each entrepreneur. The initial intention was to develop a business plan. Other envisaged outputs were a personal leadership development plan for the entrepreneur and a roadmap with key milestones for the next twelve months. Joanna, the organiser from BS, also suggested that a three-day block, when people spent time together, would help develop a cohort. How that happened in practice is analysed in the following chapter.

The focus during these three days 'is all about training how to be an entrepreneur as opposed to one-to-one sessions with the business advisors which will be the case after the three days when they join the incubator programme' (fieldnotes, 30.06.2014). At one of the earlier discussions, Nick said that the focus of the training should be the entrepreneurial journey and business development, emphasising the process of change, characteristics also of a rite of passage. The training served the purpose to impart knowledge, as in a rite of passage the masters of ceremony would instruct liminars into tribal law, traditions etc. so they would be prepared to reincorporate into society and take their new position there. However here Beth explained that the incubation model is business advisor-led as group training had limitations beyond a certain point and was not useful for all in the cohort. Thus formal training in this incubation process was not considered as the only way to 'accelerating the learning curve' (Bruneel et al., 2012: 112).

In addition to these three days there were other training days, some organised by incubator staff. Even though training as a means for learning was considered to have its limitations, learning was encouraged through peers, business advisors and the networks of the incubator. The power of the rite of passage to impart wisdom onto the entrepreneurs occurred through different channels (Chapter 6, section 3.2) rather than the training organisers only as Beth believed that constructing 'a curriculum for entrepreneurs is just ridiculous, there's not very many things entrepreneurs need to know' (Beth, interview).

The initial three-day training, similarly to SVW, was an emotional experience too. That was why at the start of the third cohort three-day training Beth warned the entrepreneurs that it would be a demanding period for them:

'and that some of them will probably find it tough as it is an intense three days of mentors telling you things about how to approach different aspects of your business. Some people went into tears but got on with it last time round. However she advised everyone to remember that it is their venture and they make the decisions in the end of the day. The aim is to create rapid social change, we aim for that she shared with the participants, so it can be intense but all we want to do is help and support you to achieve that.' (fieldnotes, 13.04.2015).

All the elements of the liminal condition - the questioning, fright and uncertainty were experienced (Boland, 2013; Turner, 1969). That was indeed the start of a very emotional journey for some (Chapter 6, section 3.1). The training finished with a pitching and pledging session on the third day in the afternoon before all of us headed to the pub for a drink. Each venture pledged what they wanted to achieve in the next twelve months.

3.2.5 Business advice

The business advisor was 'the key relationship' (SVI, 2014c) for the entrepreneurs on the programme. Together they were expected to 'lay down milestones, track progress and work on strategy' (ibid.). The scope of support, Beth specified, included 'financial modelling, bids, applications and investment readiness work, refining organisational objectives, building internal understanding of social objectives, sourcing pro bono support, mentoring and coaching' (ibid.). The BAs were the people who were responsible to take the entrepreneur and the venture through the programme, facilitating and supporting their growth. They were the immediate instructors and therefore the expectation was to 'engage fully with the programme, particularly the Business Advisor, proactively arranging meetings' (SVI, 2015c).

Their expertise was not total as: 'the advisors will not know everything about your specific business! However, together we have worked with and founded many, many social ventures and there are lots of commonalities.' (ibid.). The business advisor-led incubation model was selected by Beth 'because when you're paying somebody you can tell what they do, and make them write down notes about what they do and control it, and get rid of them if they aren't any good' (interview). In essence there was more control over the instructors of this rite of passage than if they were to rely on volunteer mentors only.

Marcus and Beth's opinions differed on the particular approach to business support. The imperative for rapid social change and growth required an advisor's approach to the relationship where advisors 'advise the entrepreneurs, and tell them. I don't particularly want the entrepreneurs to go through some kind of personal learning journey, I want them

to get a move on with scaling their ventures to make social change' (ibid.). Beth considered incubation as a rite of passage of the venture where the role of the business advisor was to impact the venture not the entrepreneur. On the other hand Marcus shared that not all ventures needed business advice, suggesting that the journey was more about the entrepreneur rather than the venture. The business support they provided should really be a mix of coaching, mentoring and advice as:

'some ventures will respond more to personal coaching, and other ventures really need business advice to be told how to do it. So maybe that's one of my takeaways from the first cohort, which is trying to figure out early on where ventures are on that spectrum, and fit in the mentoring or coaching, or advice to what they need to do.' (Marcus, interview)

He believed that more time should be spent focusing 'on the person, the entrepreneur behind the venture'. This finding questions the nature of who the incubatees are and it is discussed in Chapter 7 (section 2.2). Reflecting on the experience with the first cohort of social ventures Marcus also emphasised the connection between the person behind the venture and their engagement with the process:

'Because I wonder with cohort one whether personally I spent too much time thinking about the business, and not about the person behind it. Because I think the ventures that are on cohort one and cohort two, we've had issues with and when I say issues, I don't necessarily mean problems, but where it's been difficult to engage with them. Probably the common thread between them all is that you haven't really figured out the person, and the entrepreneur and what drives them, and why they're doing what they're doing; and maybe why they aren't fully engaged on the programme. So, for me, that's probably kind of lesson learnt and I need to sit down with Beth, and also with the other mentors, Colin and Peter, to find out what their thinking is.' (ibid)

The issue with engagement (discussed in 3.2.1) existed in this context because the boundaries of the Hatchery were permeable and entrepreneurs were left to decide how to engage with the incubation elements. Therefore Marcus felt he needed to work with the entrepreneur more in order to increase engagement and consequently help the venture. The overall aim of the programme was not personal change, however Marcus realised it was necessary in some instances in order to grow the venture. This important insight into the engagement dynamics was developed by Marcus, who also managed the largest number of ventures on the programme - seven out of nine on cohort 1. Marcus's insight was invaluable in designing and changing the social incubation process. It meant that social venture incubation was firstly a rite of passage for the entrepreneurs and secondly of their ventures (Chapter 7, section 2.2). Changing the focus of the programme to include the entrepreneurs would thus have implications for organising and designing the incubation process itself. Most incubation literature in fact focuses on the venture (Hackett and Dilts, 2004b, 2008; Peters et al., 2004) , i.e. the incubation models presented there are venture-centric rather than entrepreneur-centric, a point I return to in the discussion (Chapter 7).

Some of the technical tasks of a business advisor included monitoring progress via monthly review meetings, a six-month review and progress spreadsheets on a quarterly basis (figure 5). The very first kick-off meeting with the business advisor focused on the venture rather than the person and that was evident in the 42 questions where only two inquired into the background of the entrepreneur and what they were doing. The rest of the questions focused on:

- the venture status
- business plan
- lean start-up factors
- the team
- skills
- social KPIs
- financial metrics
- capital funding requirements
- learning and support needs
- setting milestones.

Marcus described the monthly reviews as:

'quite straightforward, it's a news-in-progress update. It's an analysis of that and what the key issues are, what they've committed to previously or what the key issues are that we know from previous meetings, and how they're going to progress those? And that's pretty much it, really.' (ibid.)

The purpose of the more formal six-month review was to make sure that the support was appropriate and to look at the progress of the venture. It also set some targets for the remaining six months and evaluated the support needed. Entrepreneurs were also reminded of the number of things that they were expected to have in place (see figure 3) by graduation. As a result ventures that did not fulfil the requirements anymore would be asked to leave the incubator at this stage. The six-month review also served to maintain the pressure and challenge the entrepreneurs, a typical characteristic of liminality:

'it's a really good opportunity to ask them for more. People who become too comfortable and not questioned enough, and you don't want to be critical all the time, but the six-month reviews are a really good opportunity to tell them all the stuff that's going badly, or not going well enough to try and drive them forward. But it's, yeah, none of them are ever doing enough, good enough or quick enough to make me happy, so yeah.' (Beth, interview)

Furthermore the business advisors were asked to complete progress spreadsheets each quarter evaluating the progress of each venture on the following (aligned with the five elements underpinning a successful business in figure 2):

- compelling viable value proposition
- up-to-date business plan
- social impact and measuring
- external advisers and governance
- financial control
- skills/team
- engagement with SVI.

These relate to the soft outcomes of incubation (Voisey, 2006) also considered to reflect venture development (Bearse, 1998). The ventures on the other hand were supposed to submit quarterly reports on key metrics - the hard outputs (Voisey, 2006) or measurements related to venture growth (Bearse, 1998). These monitoring activities aimed to measure the two transformation processes occurring in the incubator - venture development and venture growth (see section 2.2). These once again demonstrate a venture-centric incubation model. The quarterly reports and the progress spreadsheets were also key to monitoring and evaluating the programme itself. The quarterly report metrics included turnover, profit, number of people employed, external repayable finance raised, grant finance secured, public sector contracts secured, number of beneficiaries reached, key social impact metric delivered. They were aligned with the outcomes in figure 2. Overall monitoring responsibility lay in the hands of the business advisors (progress spreadsheets and reviews) who acted as key masters of ceremony for the ventures.

3.2.7 Cohort – peer-to-peer support

Another important requirement for the delivery of the programme, supported by all incubation organisers, and an essential element of the incubation process, was the cohort as it was believed it enabled peer support and learning. The cohort provided the 'environment where the people are having the same experience, then it makes it much easier...' (Tom, interview).

This incubator *communitas* was the vehicle to enable peer learning and support facilitated formally through cohort meeting sessions also known as peer-to-peer sessions on a fortnightly basis. It was believed that '...providing a clear programme trajectory, shared with others with whom they can form supportive relationships and increase chances of success, and with business support provided in a coherent manner with participants at similar stages' (Amea, 2014a). It was also emphasised in the plan that in order to enable that shared experience the physical co-location was key, similar to the *communitas*

concept developed by Turner (1969), where liminars are collocated in a seclusion lodge. Through spending time together at the initial three-day training and locating the businesses in the same office space, a peer group and a community was expected to develop.

Recruiting ventures in cohorts did not automatically create *communitas* and an active peer support group because they were not physically collocated together in a seclusion lodge. Chapter 5 explores the underlying processes of exchange facilitating *communitas* development, further discussed in Chapter 7 (section 3). At the outset it was not quite clear how the peer support would work as Beth and Martin shared on my first day at the incubator. Even though Jo emphasised that 'learning is a social process and we encourage that and she is there to start stimulating the process to start learning together' (fieldnotes, 18.07.2015), there were difficulties with engagement due to the different stages of the ventures in the cohorts (Chapter 5, section 2). The initial assumption that 'it is beneficial to be in a group with people who are a few weeks ahead not a few years ahead' (fieldnotes, 11.09.2014) was confronted by the breadth of venture sectors and stages at SVI: 'I think if everybody was at a more similar stage, would almost, at whatever that stage was, I think that might be more productive for them. That might enable the peer support to work better.' (Beth, interview).

The importance of the peer group is rejected by Gertner (2013) and not even discussed by most authors studying incubation (Bergek and Norman, 2008; Hacket and Dilts, 2004a with the exception of Bøllingtoft and Ulhøi, 2005 and Ulhøi, 2005), who observed and suggested that co-location in an environment of peers, social inputs, and the possibility to obtain legitimacy and psychological support are important. Other SIF funded social incubators also claimed that 'the peer group is the most highly rated aspect of support' (Amea, 2014c). This debate will be re-engaged in Chapter 7.

The organisers recognised the role of the entrepreneurs as more than just a support group of people sharing a similar experience though. They were considered as sources of skills and expertise. That was why the main purpose of the fortnightly meetings (photograph 18) was to facilitate the bonding and also to share progress, learning and contacts with peers on a regular basis: 'to encourage any support/links you might want to share with the cohort in order to benefit from the programme. Your peers might know/have just the thing you need!' (Irina, 2014).

3.2.8 Connections and networks

Access to networks and contacts is one of the key capacities of an incubator (Hansen et al., 2000). This element was exploited in SVI too through various routes. Beth shared with me that she considered her role in the program to be 'finding people based on what our ventures need' and also 'tapping into networks to find relevant support rather than running workshops just for the sake of it' (fieldnotes, 29.05.2014). In fact a year into the programme she reflected on her job as 'a lot of what I actually do day-to-day is introducing somebody to somebody else' (interview). She often had days when she was in back-to-back meetings with external people interested in coming to the incubator to deliver a workshop for instance, or meeting the entrepreneurs. Her role in the ventures' rite of passage was mainly introducing and linking people to help entrepreneurs' businesses grow. She also considered the introductions to 'customers, as much as kind of investors and funders' (ibid.) as a key incubation impact on the ventures.

However that function was not exclusive to the programme director. Introductions also happened through the business advisors, the SEBC building, the other partners and peers themselves (Chapter 5, section 3.5). Marcus had introduced ventures to his contacts and organised numerous pro bono workshops via his contacts - Phil came in and did a talk on intellectual property for start-ups, another friend of his presented the opportunities for applying for R&D tax credits (photograph 19). SEBC was populated with companies and they also organised numerous free workshops for all the ventures in the building. That included numerous visits from companies abroad and ministers, networking occasions when we 'showcase for them social and cleantech ventures' (Beth, 2014d), where a lot of the Hatchery entrepreneurs would be lined up to pitch their businesses. Numerous times we would just be sitting in the office and a group of unexpected visitors would pop in, led by Michael usually. He used to put entrepreneurs who were in on the spot to pitch and explain what they did. Those types of events linked people to the external world as networks and connections were an important incubation element.

I analyse how entrepreneurs engaged with incubator networks in Chapter 5 (section 3.5).

4.3 Graduation - moving out

Social venture incubation was a journey 'aiming for investment readiness' (Amea, 2014a). However, Beth, near the graduation of the first cohort, realised that successful graduation was 'different for different entrepreneurs' (interview). The graduation of the entrepreneurs was a moment for them to physically move out, to 'fly the nest' (ibid) or stay and start

paying for space and services. However the physical relocation did not match the social return of the entrepreneurs, incorporating them into the business world, or at least it did not happen for all (analysed in Chapter 6).

Graduation was marked by a party, an occasion 'with all pomp and ceremony' (Turner, 1969: 102), and a symbolic completion of the incubation rite of passage by receiving an award with the graduate incubation logo (photograph 20). Beth herself was surprised what the graduate logo meant for the entrepreneurs, when Sandra, one of the entrepreneurs, expressed her excitement by the fact that they would be allowed to use it on paper and documents. It was perceived as a symbol of achievement and completion.

As in most incorporation rites, it involved symbolic union through shared, in this case, drinks and food to facilitate the social return. The graduation itself was a very private ceremony (photograph 21) attended by six of the nine entrepreneurs from the first cohort together with Beth, Marcus and me. People were given the time to reflect on the five elements of a successful business and share their progress. It was a reflection on the journey travelled and there was a clear division at the round table - some entrepreneurs shared great progress of their ventures and others remained silent. What graduation meant for entrepreneurs is analysed in Chapter 6 (section 3.3), where I go below the sugar-coated surface of the showcased success stories into the nuances of venture graduates and the spectrum of incubation outcomes for entrepreneurs and ventures. Physical return was imminent but not all the graduates were ready for the social return - Chapter 6, section 3.3.

In the ceremonial spirit of an incorporation ritual we had a glass of Prosecco followed by a party (photograph 22) where different types of people were invited - 'ventures, investors, the Cabinet Office, and representatives from the partners' (fieldnotes, 21.04.2015). Two of the graduating entrepreneurs were asked to reflect on the journey and 'outline how being on the programme has helped ... and how you have put in the underpinnings of the future – business plan, advisory board etc and your plans ' (Beth, 2015c). This clearly aimed to showcase the impact the programme had made on those ventures - related to the process of venture development and growth.

Within a week after the party most of the ventures moved their stuff out, handed their locker keys and left the Hatchery. It was decided that the entrepreneurs would be allowed to stay in touch through Slack, the online communication tool, and also invited, though charged, for the events in the incubator. How and where they moved, the entrepreneurs' response to incubation and graduation, their engagement in the process and the programme's overall perceived impact are themes analysed in the next findings chapters.

5. Key findings

The first findings chapter conceptualised SVI as a rite of passage with all its elements and structures - masters of ceremony (the organisers of the incubation programme), a seclusion lodge (the Hatchery) and an entrepreneurial communitas (the cohort). The rite of passage was designed with the venture transition in mind - i.e. a venture-centric incubation model, where all the expected outcomes related to venture development and growth. The RoP framework is useful in theorising incubation as the latter is a complex processual organisation facilitating the venture creation process which includes a variety of participants with different roles. Whereas RoP has been developed for human transitions as subjects of the passage, here the organisers have clearly underplayed the entrepreneur and focused on venture development and growth.

The three phases (sifting, incubation, graduation) in an incubation process have the same function as the three phases in a RoP (separation, transition/liminality, incorporation). The importance of selecting a cohort (communitas) of ventures at similar stages was recognised by the organisers. The separation rite was characterised by information exchange aimed to establish whether they fulfilled the social venture criteria. The liminal phase was characterised by exchanges, where entrepreneurs were expected to contribute by helping others using the skills and contacts they had. Similarly to a RoP full engagement with the programme was expected by the organisers. However the seclusion lodge had permeable boundaries where entrepreneurs dipped in and out of. There was very little group training organised to impart knowledge, instead more one-to-one support was offered via the business advisors. Finally graduation was conducted ceremonially showcasing ventures that managed to develop and grow, i.e. successfully incorporated into the business world.

Let us now turn to the entrepreneurs and their incubation journey.

Chapter 5: Incubating

1. Introduction

In this chapter I turn to how the designed incubation rite of passage worked in practice in terms of entrepreneurial engagement with the programme structures. The contract analysed in the previous chapter set out the expected engagement between organisers and entrepreneurs. Being selected for the cohort offered access to free work space at the Hatchery, free training and talks, a group of peers, an allocated business advisor and access to contacts important for the growth of the ventures. In this chapter I analyse how they engaged with the programme.

The chapter starts with a summary of the selected entrepreneurs and their ventures. I focus on entrepreneurs' background, stage of venture development, team, expected challenges and aims. All these are taken from the baseline questionnaire and website profile created at the beginning of their journey at SVI. I also explain the reasons why some ventures dropped out or did not participate in this study.

Following this I turn to an analysis of the engagement of entrepreneurs with the programme. The importance of engagement has not received much attention in incubation literature. In addition, engagement has not received any attention in the rite of passage theory (as total engagement is implied in pre-modern societies) or in its current applications and developments as the theory was not applied in its entirety (Chapter 2, section 3). It became clear that the incubation process and its impact (Chapter 6) depend on how entrepreneurs engage within this rite of passage.

Thereafter I discuss how the entrepreneurs engaged with each element and the participants¹². Firstly I analyse how entrepreneurs used the Hatchery and why. Then I continue with the training provided to entrepreneurs as part of the incubation offer and why people engaged with it differently. Attending trainings and their emotional effect on some of the incubatees is presented through their shared stories. Emotional as well as practical support was offered through the cohort and peers. I followed how the entrepreneurial communitas changed over time and why. The fourth section focuses on entrepreneurs' relationships with their business advisors. I analyse how they engaged with them as key masters of ceremonies. I shed light on entrepreneurs' expectations of and

¹² Training, networks and space are referred to as elements of incubation and peers and business advisors as participants.

experiences with their business advisors. Finally the chapter finishes with exploring networks and connections as a resource, sharing some of the experiences entrepreneurs had being introduced to or encountering useful contacts throughout the programme. The section looks into the way how accessing networks and contacts was related to engagement of the entrepreneurs with the programme elements and participants.

2. Cohort 1 - social ventures and entrepreneurs

'...to be truly successful an incubator needs to lure in people who could probably succeed without their help. But with it they might just get there a bit faster or do things on a bigger scale.'
(Barrow, 2001: 125)

Cohort 1 (C1) was selected after the separation rites, analysed in Chapter 4, and consisted of eleven entrepreneurs out of 41 who took part (see Appendix 3). The table presents some of the challenges and aims the entrepreneurs reported before the weekend in a questionnaire sent out to them as part of the application process. Interestingly despite the overall common aim to scale, the ventures were at different stage of their venture development. As per the intentions of the organisers, they all ought to be scaled and grown through their incubation experience. This heterogeneous group was something that worried Beth as the support they needed was different (already discussed in previous chapter and pointed out in Miller and Stacey, 2014). Furthermore it impacted the way they engaged with the elements of the programme. Had we managed to lure the right people in then?

Alex for instance changed his idea for business at the SVW and pitched the transformed one to the panel I joined on 22nd June 2014. His story, as he revealed it in the first interview, illustrated the nascent nature of some of the ventures:

'I came to the social venture weekend with all those ideas in my head ...and I didn't know which one to choose, and it got to Saturday night and I thought, well, I now need to choose, but I don't know what to do. And at 3 am on the Sunday morning I woke up and that's when I had the idea for this business' (Alex, interview 1)

He had an idea to create a simple technological innovation that will help the hospitality sector automate waste monitoring - automating the capturing of food waste data. In his case we have a newborn idea with a sole technical inventor who had no proof of concept with the ambition to scale the venture and no income generating activity (no job). The stage of the companies that government-backed incubators usually target is at least 'two people with some business experience with a concept (and, ideally, prototype) with some understanding of the market potential of the concept' (Barrow, 2001). His venture's nascent stage later led to difficulties with accessing finance and eventually dropping out.

Sandra was also a lone founder and the only person in the company when she joined the incubator, working part-time. As a single mother she 'wanted to live this work-life balance' (interview 1) which her company was promoting. Her product or proposition was new and exciting and she demonstrated she was up-to-date with the new legislation. Her vision was to automate and create the new matching platform for jobsharers (at the time she only had a landing page) and needed to bring a technical person in. And even though she never thought about starting a social venture before she applied for SVW, she said that her venture cannot work without having social impact. Sandra had worked on her idea for about a year before the start of the programme and had made first steps into networking and talking to people in the local area.

Lucy, the founder of a performance coaching service for students, had left her job in the NHS less than a year before joining the programme and started her own practice as she 'was under a lot of pressure and increasing pressure, and I'd had to have time off through stress and depression' (interview 1). She was already generating some revenue but had no profit and her ambition was to change that and grow. She was working full-time on the venture and needed the incubation support to scale.

Nate, who was nearly 60 years old at the time and had been a CEO of a disability charity for seven years, was also an early revenue stage venture with less than a year in operation and zero profit reported. He had a nearly ready product to be launched and sold to clients. He spent four days a week on the venture and two days on a part-time job with a disability charity. There were six shareholders in his community interest company (CIC) and they also had a bookkeeper as they had a payroll service which transferred over from the charity he worked for previously. The venture's purpose was to enable 'disabled, elderly and vulnerable people to employ Personal Assistants (PAs) or care staff so they can continue to live at home' (application questionnaire) through the provision of distance-learning resources, payroll support and membership to a Guild of Employers of PAs.

Despite having some revenue at the time Karen, the founder of a young women's service building self-esteem and confidence, did not consider her venture an early revenue but a prestart one. The social impact was built into the mission of the venture and she felt quite strongly about it managing to juggle between two part-time jobs and studying for a counselling degree. Therefore time was tight for her to spend on her venture, especially when her co-founder left soon after they joined the programme 'which left me to pick up everything that she was doing. So she used to handle the accounts...' (interview 1). Despite having had some track record and organised events, the venture was quite small and Karen alone did not have the capacity and time to grow it. She was one of the entrepreneurs who was on another incubation programme, as half of the cohort.

Flora had been part of the Wayra Unlimited programme for 10 months prior to joining the SVI incubator and also got onto the Big Venture Challenge which offered entrepreneurs match funding. Andrew, Flora's co-founder, announced in May 2015 that they got a place on the Mass Challenge too, a four-month US based accelerator which also runs in the UK. Samuel also managed to get onto the Big Venture Challenge, though towards the end of the SVI programme. Matt managed to get on to the HealthBox programme based in London and Lucy was on the School for Social Entrepreneurs from the start and Nate joined it too not long after that. The fact that so many of the entrepreneurs look for support programmes and competitions awarding money was discussed at our team meeting on 10th March 2015 and Beth was amazed how 'people nowadays would jump from one support programme to another support programme and can do that for years. The times are different now she said, whereas she thinks they should just get on with it – leave and run their venture.' (fieldnotes)

Shane, a software engineer and another entrepreneur with a part-time job, joined the SVW without realising it was the entry point for the 12-month incubator programme and found out at the weekend that 'a few of the companies here today will get selected to join the social incubator, and I didn't know that was part of the deal, but it was because I got picked' (interview 1). At the time he joined the incubator he had managed to gather a team around him 'who are working for sweat equity who are software developers. So I've currently got three; I've had up to seven at one stage, but I've got three now'. They were still in the development phase of their app, 'on demand' UK travel service for car lift sharing for 'corporates' and organizations, and were hoping to pilot the concept shortly after joining the incubator.

Matt, an entrepreneur with a long career as a finance senior executive, had been exploring the idea for his venture since 2009, but it was not until he joined SVI that he 'decided doing this full-time, and you either do it or you don't. Try and do it in conjunction with other jobs just doesn't work.' (interview 1). His venture's purpose was to develop and sell 'a software solution that enables hearing-impaired people to receive a personalised audio signal based on their hearing loss direct to their mobile phone or device' (SVI, 2014d). His personal motivation and background in finance however positioned him differently than Alex, who also considered himself at a prestart stage. Matt was in a better position to start developing his venture in addition to being able to dedicate 100% of his time to it.

Flora, another highly qualified social entrepreneur and bioinformatics scientist, joined the programme with two full-time and two part-time interns and moved into the hot-desking area of the building two weeks before the Hatchery office was ready. Soon after that

Andrew, her ex-colleague at the bio-tech company she used to work for, joined her as the CTO. Their venture aimed to develop a genomic data sharing platform with the purpose to speed scientific discovery. For a year she had been trying to find the appropriate legal form for her company starting with a charity, then incorporating a company as a subsidiary to the charity in order to attract investors (without success) and finally they registered 'two entities alongside each other where there's no ownership relation, but there is a people relation because the people who are employed in the company are doing all the activities that are happening in the charity' (interview 2). This practice was typical for most social entrepreneurs who tried to find the best legal form or forms that would fulfil the needs of their social venture. Flora and Andrew worked without a salary until January 2016 and their interns were paid by the funding she secured from the previous accelerator programme. Even though she considered her venture at a prestart stage when they joined SVI, she had just been through another incubation programme. She had received the training that her peers in the Hatchery were just about to do. She had also started to prepare her company for an investment round and had the team to support her.

Samuel, an entrepreneur priding himself in his background in marketing, was the only founder of a social enterprise that had been around for five years and generated profit before joining the incubator. His venture aimed to help family carers across the UK to improve their lives. It was already registered as a social enterprise and his aim was to grow it nationwide and overseas. Over the course of the programme he repositioned the business by narrowing down the focus encompassing one target group (the family carers) and renamed the business itself thus joining the Big Venture Challenge competition.

For a matter of comprehensiveness it is necessary to mention that there were three other ventures involved in the programme but they did not participate in this research. Two of them were selected at SVW1 and one joined later on at the three-day training in September 2014. The first two were a training service for unemployed people and a conservation finance enterprise. The latter, soon after the start of the programme, dropped out as they realised they could not commit fully (engage) to the programme. The other venture was asked to leave at the six month review as they never really appeared in the Hatchery after September 2014. Joy, the founder and her sister, a co-founder, did not engage with the programme (business advisor, space or peers). They also stopped replying to emails I was sending out for cohort meetings. Whereas in the beginning they attended those despite the obvious lack of progress and the repetitive issues related to health or other personal circumstances that always seemed to occur. Nobody really found out what was happening to them - peers or organisers alike. They were informed via email that they would no longer be supported by SVI after they did not attend or respond to the invitation for a six-month review in January 2015. I myself tried to contact them for an

interview and did not hear anything back as well.

The other venture, Fitness Hub, was recommended to SVI by FG. They had been trying to apply for a loan with them and they were not successful. When the conservation finance enterprise left they joined and attended the three day training. As part of the SVI support programme they could apply for FG funding again and after a few months they succeeded. Nevertheless nobody ever saw them again as they were based a long way away from the incubator and had their monthly meetings with their advisor via Skype. In April 2015 Marcus, their advisor, shared with me that they were only in for the money as they had not attended anything and even he had difficulties arranging Skype meetings with them: 'once they got the money they were off, and they have to talk to me once a month but that's it' (fieldnotes, 02.04.2015). The incubator filled their financial resource gap (Rice, 2002) and that was the only thing they engaged with being on the programme. Before the FG loan was disbursed, Mervyn, the other co-founder and partner, responded to one of my event invitations by asking me to delete him from the mailing list as the information was not relevant to them. They never engaged with any element in the programme apart from the loan application and Marcus, at least until the loan was disbursed.

It is clear that the eleven entrepreneurs were a disparate group of individuals, setting up different businesses and having diverse challenges - a varied market segment rather than the specific segment which is the norm in most commercial business incubators (Barrow, 2001). Despite being planned as a rite of passage for social ventures ready to scale and become investment ready (Chapter 4) the rite of separation did not lead to creating a unified and homogeneous group, in this case of ventures at the same stage. The ventures were selected based on perceived growth potential taking into account the venture itself and the entrepreneur's background. Those venture-entrepreneur configurations have implications for the engagement patterns analysed hereafter - thus recognising the importance of homogeneity and uniformity when it comes to creating *communitas* and building BAs-entrepreneur relationships.

I now turn to exploring and explaining how the eclectic mix of entrepreneurs engaged with the programme. In order to understand the value added and impact of the incubation rite of passage, we need to look into the way entrepreneurs were involved and engaged with it. What aspects of the programme did they engage (Chapter 5) with in order to achieve what they did (Chapter 6)? Why did they engage the way they did too?

3. Engagement

As discussed in the previous chapter, entrepreneurs were expected to 'engage fully with the programme', particularly their business advisor, attend the fortnightly cohort meetings, as far as possible base themselves in the Hatchery and be honest, trustworthy and ask for help. Engagement was expected in return for what was offered. The exchange was perceived differently by the entrepreneurs though. Nate for instance struggled with the fact that the exchange process was disrupted and most entrepreneurs did not engage in the same way as he did:

'when we signed up for the cohort one there was a contract, in the sense that we did sign to say that we agreed to... But, in a sense, it was quickly forgotten about and I think that, it would have helped me and I'm not saying it would have helped others, but it would help me to have worked with that contract on a regular basis to have just checked in to make sure that... Because I think that that would have helped me to take the role of a social entrepreneur' (Nate, interview 2)

He really perceived the cohort meetings as time and space to discuss their challenges and successes and thus help each other in the transition of becoming social entrepreneurs. Clearly that was something he needed but others did not value as much (see sections 3.3).

Interestingly at the kick off day (June 2014) none of the entrepreneurs brought their offer letters signed back to me, despite the numerous emails I had sent to remind them. I then had to chase them to collect all those 'Contracts' which specified the relationship between the organisers and entrepreneurs. That contract Nate referred to as forgotten. Having spent long time in employment he had been used to contractual relationships - employer-employee. However in the incubator the nature of the relationships was not determined by what Blau (1964) would call economic exchanges. This chapter analyses the dimensions of the relationships in this very particular space occupied by diverse entrepreneur-venture entities.

Just before cohort 2 joined the incubator in November 2014, Beth sent out an email to all entrepreneurs in cohort 1 reminding them of what they 'expect ventures on the programme to do' (Beth, 2014e). She included the exact five points (see Chapter 4, section 3.2.1) from the offer letter. The same day we also had cohort peer-to-peer meeting to discuss the future of those sessions. Nate always tried to attend. He shared with me and his fellow peers that the email had reminded him 'that he is part of a structure and that he is contracted up into targets. He has forgotten that he said' (fieldnotes, 26.11.2015). The laissez-faire incubation approach and weak authority structure however had led many of the entrepreneurs to engage with the elements of the programme, analysed in the sections below, as they pleased, according to their needs, interests and projects. That

approach caused problems with low levels of engagement and the tendency to forget that they were part of an incubator as the agreement 'was never reinforced' (Nate, interview 3). On reflection after the end of the programme Nate shared that the outcomes and outputs they were expected to deliver (see figure 3, Chapter 4) were unrealistic because of the nature of the engagement and relationship:

'I don't think that we early enough, we worked out what we had contracted to do with the programme. I don't think we explored that, and I'm not saying that I didn't expect to be called in on a one-to-one with Beth or Norman, or whoever is my advisor and called to account. And I think that that's the only thing I'd want to say in terms of the programme, because I think towards the end as we were asked for various reports and, in a sense, it was not too late, but I just felt as though we hadn't been given the support earlier on in the process to deliver on those outcomes and outputs.' (Nate, interview 3)

The relationship between engagement and the outcomes of the programme (also discussed in Chapter 4) was experienced by the entrepreneurs too. The impact on the ventures/entrepreneurs and the programme outcomes are analysed in depth in Chapter 6. This aspect of the incubation process was key as the successful transition and achieving the goal of a rite of passage depends on strong authority structure, with total engagement of the liminal subjects in the process. In this case, I relate the diverse outcomes of the programme to the diverse needs and cohort composition by focusing on the engagement dynamics the latter two determined as authority structures were weak.

Business advisors monitored engagement using a binary assessment system of 0/1 where 0 signified no engagement and 1 - engagement with the programme. This was the only engagement evaluation which was part of the progress spreadsheet (Chapter 4, section 3.2.5) monitoring venture development. However that oversimplified system does not tell the difference between the multiple engagement patterns that existed in the incubator. Some entrepreneurs engaged with some programme elements and participants more than with others. It was surprising that despite the emphasis on the importance of engagement in the contract (Chapter 4, section 3.2.1) the system of monitoring was not able to distinguish between the types of engagement which provided an important insight into how resources could be allocated to better support entrepreneurs and ventures. This is a debate I reengage in the discussion chapter.

I now continue the chapter analysing how the entrepreneurs engaged with the training provided, the Hatchery space, their business advisors, peers and how they used the incubator networks. In brief how they engaged with the social incubation process designed by the organisers.

3.1 The Hatchery

When the eleven selected entrepreneurs first joined the Hatchery it was just a large empty office with a few desks and a couple of sofas. By the end of my fieldwork a lot changed in terms of numbers of chairs and desks that furnished the space in order to meet the needs and demands of the different cohorts of entrepreneurs. In that respect a lot was offered for free (as some of the entrepreneurs mentioned, renting office space in town was not particularly cheap). However the organisers' expectation of the entrepreneurs to base themselves and their teams in the Hatchery, as liminars would be isolated in the seclusion lodge, was not fully met. Some venture founders used it occasionally, like Matt, and others did not come in at all, Deb and Mervyn. The reasons for that also varied. In order for the entrepreneurs to come in and use the space, several factors needed to be considered such as proximity, type of business, stage of venture development, entrepreneur's time spent on venture and personal office preferences/requirements. First of all the entrepreneurs' idea of space is worth looking into. Some considered the provision of space just as free physical office space whereas others perceived it and hence used it differently.

Ever since Flora moved in with three of her team, they were part of the incubator and were in on a daily basis. Their central location (see photograph 6) in the midst of the space made an impression on the rest of the group as 'established, all there;... a hub of people involved with themselves' (Lucy, the academic performance coaching venture, interview 2). Contra to most incubation literature (Barrow, 2001; Rice, 2002), Flora considered that the 'business advice helped, but we probably would get along somehow without, even if it might be not as good, but we would get along. But without the space we wouldn't be able to start building the team, which is essential'. Access to physical office space was the most essential for her compared to the other ventures in cohort 1. Building and growing their team demanded space and since the rest of the entrepreneurs were single person ventures they did not really consider the physical office space as important as it was for Flora.

Both Samuel and Matt also considered the Hatchery not much more than an office space. Both of them used it on occasions. Despite Samuel occupying two desks with desktop computers and a landline, he mentioned that he hardly ever came in before Christmas as he was very busy with clients and after that he managed to come in two-three times a week which gradually reduced to once-twice a week towards the end of the programme. Matt on the other hand moved further afield from town and his involvement in a London-based support programme caused the decrease in his use of the space. He also found the

background noise and lack of private spaces an issue due to his hearing impairment and as a disadvantage in the instances when 'you want to discuss a contract or something' (Matt, interview 2) that was confidential. Those three entrepreneurs engaged strategically with the programme, based on what they thought they needed, something Watson (2001) had also empirically noticed in the way managers engage in organisational contexts.

Others also found the level of noise as a factor which affected their engagement with the Hatchery. In the beginning the office was very quiet due to the vast space and the low number of people in it. Very rarely there were more than four entrepreneurs (apart for Flora and her team) present at the same time as people came in whenever they wanted, they were not strictly bound and secluded. It was not until the second cohort joined, in November 2014, that there were a considerable number of people who created a buzz. That sort of background noise was something that most people wanted, apart from Andrew who told people off for talking. The inequality in terms of needs created different patterns of engagement and thus only a few remained physically connected to the office space. Others like Sandra needed more of the social aspect of the space which was disturbed by Andrew's domination in the office:

'they [Flora's venture] want to create a very quiet programming place, and I think that because they're quite assertive, or they have been quite assertive and nobody's gone back and said, 'This is not really what the point of this is' I think it's affected how that whole room has ended up being.' (interview 3)

Andrew's assertiveness led Beth to clarify the rules in the Hatchery in terms of noise and she posted on slack (the internal communication platform) that 'the Hatchery is not a library - it's a shared office and people will be talking and making calls.... so people should be able to meet, converse, chat and interact freely' (Beth, 2014f). This act on behalf of the organisers was aimed at re-establishing the space as social. It is a central key feature of the seclusion lodge which, in a rite of passage, enables the creation of *communitas*. Sharing the same experience and being bound by the same physical space created those social ties so important for *communitas*. Many of the entrepreneurs pointed out that the benefit the office provided was 'interaction with the people' (Sandra) as this was not possible when working from home.

At the beginning of the programme Alex also shared that the space was not about the physical office space but the 'intangibles' of that space such as networking. The physical space, as Sandra pointed out, facilitated the interaction, which provided the higher value of using it for that group of entrepreneurs. Initially there was a general shared positive experience of that space and its intangible benefits (see box 1). The Hatchery was a place where you felt less on your own. The common thread through all the quotes was the social, intangible aspect of the space and the immediacy of peers whenever there was a

problem or need for support. This experience of support between the peers is something which happens naturally in *communitas* during a rite of passage and similarly it is enabled by the shared space and experience of those who undergo it (Turner, 1969). However here we could clearly distinguish between two types of entrepreneurs: those who were part of the *communitas* and valued it, experiencing the benefit of the mutual support and closeness, and those who benefitted from the rent free physical space not interested in its social aspects.

Box 1: Entrepreneurs' perceptions of the Hatchery

'having people around to talk to and to share experiences to kind of help, and to be helped by them' (Alex, interview 1)

'an encouraging environment' (Karen, interview 1)

'creative environment and I'm always managing that balance between being really overwhelmed, and being stimulated enough creatively' (Lucy, interview 1)

'a massive buzz' (Sandra, interview 1)

'got a great vibe this place, and also it's just the idea of having other people around you in the same stage, or not always at the same stage, but also trying to do a similar thing. Going through a lot of the same pitfalls and problems, and how you'll overcome them and sharing them, the ideas with each other' (Shane, interview 1)

'you've got others to compare and contrast and share, and get excited and get upset about things. And that's really important and I think that that provides it here' (Nate, interview 1).

Some people did not prioritise the provision of office space (Matt) and others were discouraged by the assertiveness and domination of certain cohort members (another indication of the inequality between peers as liminal subjects), as explained above, which impacted engagement and use of the space. In addition venture development led to an increased time spent on the venture, scaling the amount of business generated from clients, and thus the entrepreneurial involvement and use of the office decreased. That was indeed the expected transition in this rite of passage (Chapter 4). Lucy's company for instance was an example of a hatched venture as she really developed her business during the 12-months and was busy with clients: 'I'm not using the space, I'm hardly there, and if I do go in there, I mean ... I'm ludicrously quick because I've got to do one thing and go' (Lucy, interview 3). In fact many times I would see her coming in to print something or see her business advisor (BA) and leave immediately thereafter.

Others on the other hand did not manage to come in as often as in the beginning due to unsuccessful transition. Instead of progressively developing the venture and increasing their time on it, they had to work on their part-time jobs to make ends meet. As Shane noted 'the space is probably the least valuable at the moment, basically because I'm up and down the country anyway most of the time, so when I can, I come here' (interview 2). I also noticed that Nate stopped coming in and later I found out through Lucy that he had two part-time jobs. He battled with the need to share with others and to know what

happened to his peers as he was not able to see much of them: 'maybe they've hatched, so we're in a hatchery, they do the hatch, they've flown the nest and so they're...and that's great, but I'd like to know, I mean, just in terms of my need' (interview 2). And indeed that was what happened to Lucy. Some of the entrepreneurs completed their rite of passage earlier, before graduation, and others dropped out or engaged in employment. That caused the decrease in engagement with the office, and the process, over time. The heterogeneous composition of the entrepreneur-ventures led to different engagement with the office space.

Additionally distraction in the Hatchery was a negative side effect of joining this transitional experience together in a cohort. Most of the entrepreneurs felt that coming to the office was inspiring and distracting at the same time as people would stop by and talk frequently:

'I have really enjoyed being around people, but that has also been a bit problematic at times, because I might have just come in to do some focus work and then I'm seeing people and chatting.... So if I need to really work and get something done, I might not go in there, frankly, because I get distracted and people come over and I drift over to people.'
(Lucy, interview 3)

The negative aspects of the Hatchery were not experienced in the beginning when the entrepreneurs were still learning from the events and training offered as well as their peers. Once that process was taken over by their day jobs, either on the venture or other part-time jobs, the entrepreneurs increasingly found the space distracting (rather than inspiring, creative and encouraging - Box 1) and their engagement with it decreased. In that sense the creative aspects (Turner, 1969) typical for organisational liminality (Lindsay, 2010) were not experienced throughout the social incubation rite of passage. In organisational life, the latter argues, organisations benefit from drawing on multiple resources because 'niche organizations located on the margins of their institutional fields will exemplify characteristics qualitatively different from organizational actors well enveloped at the centre' (p.165). Creativity was initially enabled by the physical proximity of entrepreneurs in the office space which they experienced in the beginning of the programme (Box 1). Later however the experience of creativity gave way to distraction. Attendance gradually decreased with time due to the needs as well as projects and interests (Watson, 2001) of entrepreneurs.

Sturdy et al. (2006) had found that liminality is not an absolute quality as it increases proportionally with distance from the workplace - the further away from the office business dinners were held the greater the experience of liminality. Here I noticed that the liminal condition and its positive effect of support and creativity fostered through the shared space decreased with time - the opposite of what Sturdy et al. (2006) observed. Liminality was bound by the process of incubation and use of the office space, hence the less

entrepreneurs used the office the less they were part of the process and experienced the creative potential of the liminal condition. However others like Flora, were physically present all the time but never used or appreciated the creative potential of the liminal space as their venture was beyond the transitional phase of the early stages of venture development, when the venture consists of a single entrepreneur, learning and establishing it all alone. Within the boundaries of the seclusion lodge some entrepreneurs were not connected to the social aspects of the space (the *communitas*) and thus did not experience the liminal condition. As entrepreneurs they have managed to complete the transition before joining the programme (Flora was part on another incubation programme prior to this one) and then they were able to carry out the transition for their ventures without the need of support - Chapter 6, section 2. Hence two transitional processes become apparent - that of the entrepreneur and that of the venture - Chapter 7, section 2.2.

3.2 Training

Training talks and events, some of the most obvious vehicles of imparting knowledge in this rite of passage, were offered to cohort 1 as part of their entrepreneurial journey (Chapter 4, section 3.2.4). However attendance was not mandatory - table 1. Once again there was a dichotomy amongst the entrepreneurs - those who did not attend the trainings and those who did. The reasons why this division existed are explored here as well as the way people experienced the training.

Table 1: Training attendance

Date	Sandra	Lucy	Karen	Shane	Flora	Nate	Alex	Matt	Samuel	Training
06.08.2014	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Unlimited funding awards
26.08.2014	x	x	x	x		x				Social media
02.09.2014	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		Strategy (business schools)
03.09.2014	x	x	x	x		x	x			Finance (business schools)
04.09.2014	x		x	x	x	x	x			Leadership and Teams (business schools)
17.09.2014	x	x	x	x	x		x			Intellectual Property
26.11.2014	x	x	x		x		x			Belbin - team roles
20.04.2015	x	x	x		x					Theory of Change (business schools)
20.04.2015	x	x	x		x					How to Scale your Venture (business schools)
13.05.2015		x	x							Social Media (business schools)
15.06.2015			x							Frugal Innovation (business schools)
23.06.2015		x	x		x					Social Impact Measurement
20.07.2015					x					Social Impact Tracking (cohort 4)
21.07.2015					x					Investment Readiness

Karen shared that having freedom to choose what to attend was 'an adult way of handling it, it wasn't like you've signed up to this programme, you must come to every single teaching session' (interview 3). It was perceived that the needs entrepreneurs had were different and it was up to the entrepreneur to make the decision about what to attend and what not to - once again that is an indication of a weak authority structure in the rite of passage at SVI. However there was a different sort of opinion about how much nascent entrepreneurs actually know. According to Samuel entrepreneurs did not know what they need to know in the beginning 'because it's all completely new. So those advisors there should know all of that in advance, so you can imagine saying, well, this for this period of, say, six weeks we're going to have a number of workshops and seminars' (interview 2). His view on structured training provided in incubators however totally contradicted his place on the programme as clearly he had all the knowledge and did not benefit from the training:

'My background is in marketing, so I know and it's easier for me to do marketing and business development and get that income in, in theory. But unless you have some formal structured training in marketing, and other things you're kind of, you're going to find it really tough as a social entrepreneur.' (interview 2)

According to Beth, as pointed out earlier, training was not efficient beyond a certain point and that could be true for entrepreneurs like Samuel and Matt whose background was in business development and finance (section 2). That is in accordance with Park (2005),

Shane (2010) and Gertner (2013) who establish that education positively contributes to the venturing process. In this case it leads to less engagement with the rites of incubation (the training) designed to inculcate entrepreneurs into practices how to run a business. Similarly Flora noted that most training 'was no longer relevant, because I'd already had exactly that kind of workshop in the previous incubator' (interview 2). Rice (2002) had also pointed out that training and education was not high on entrepreneurs' and organisers' agendas in incubation contexts.

With time the other entrepreneurs also dropped their attendance (Table 1). Whereas some obviously did not engage at all with that element of the programme, 'I know how to run a business, I know finance and all that sort of stuff' (Matt, interview 3), and others engaged very selectively depending on what they really needed (Flora and her team), some found the trainings deeply motivational and inspirational (like Karen and Lucy) but also very emotional experiences. That latter group I would like to discuss here as they were the entrepreneurs who experienced personal transformation.

I talked to Sandra over a drink at the Christmas event at a pub in town. We invited all entrepreneurs from cohort 1 and 2 as well as all partners. It also coincided with the third day of the initial three-day training for cohort 2. Some of the entrepreneurs in C1, like Sandra, attended the final pitch that they were supposed to do and pitched themselves to the new cohort. One of the entrepreneurs in cohort 2 refused to pitch and Sandra explained to me at the pub that she had a similar experience to Heidi's (an entrepreneur from cohort 2) and completely sympathised with her. Similarly to Heidi, Sandra felt that different mentors were giving her different advice which confused her and brought her down. Beth also pointed that to me, as she knew I was interested in 'that sort of thing'. These emotional responses to mentors' questioning and scrutiny (Chapter 4, section 3.2.4) showed that the process affected some of the entrepreneurs deeply and others not at all. As one other entrepreneur in cohort 2 explained 'it is a challenging process, because you are being challenged on something that you consider... It's very hard to be challenged on something that you thought was perfect, because if I thought about it, why it wouldn't be perfect?' (Andrea, C2 women's health app entrepreneur, interview). This is consistent with the individual's experience of liminality as it 'refashions the very being' of the liminal subject (Turner, 1969), and emotions and experiences of uncertainty, anxiety and ambiguity are typical for the liminal phase (Simpson et al., 2009). The intensity of that experience was heightened at the three-day training which was a compulsory event all had to attend.

However, new and useful ideas emerged in the process of questioning and scrutiny over the three days. Lucy for instance shared that the ten minutes she spent with Nick at the

training changed her thinking entirely and it 'completely changed her whole model' (interview 1). Sandra shared that another mentor at the three day training asked her some very personal questions which helped her reposition her product 'to organisations rather than to candidates' (interview 1). And Karen confirmed that another mentor at that training was 'massively influential in her thinking meeting her made me really think outside the box' (interview 1). The impact on the entrepreneurs' thinking was coupled with emotional reactions which made the learning both a difficult and creative experience of incubation liminality. That was all part of a rite of passage - that of becoming a social entrepreneur.

Three months into the programme, Nate reflected on his relationship with all the training provided. At our cohort meeting on 29th October 2014, he said that he began questioning himself. He suspected that he was avoiding running the business by attending all sorts of trainings and courses. This kind of doubt and procrastination was another sign of uncertainty typical for the liminal phase of a rite of passage. He asked 'When do we stop being needy?' looking for answers from the other two entrepreneurs in the session. I recall a similar comment about attending trainings from Lucy at another meeting. He explained that he was feeling cosy there, on the programme, and that made him wonder about the time when he would have to become self-sufficient. This training dependency for some he interpreted as a strategy to avoid actually running the venture, seeking more and more things to learn before they actually began running their ventures. Doing this he avoided making the transition to social entrepreneur running a venture as he was still feeling unsure and was thus stuck in a limbo. Similarly to Rottenburg (2000) analysis of the bar as 'a social space and time in transformation' (p.87), the limbo state of liminality here was experienced as painful and enjoyable too, it possessed a 'distinct attraction' for some and thus it was difficult to make the transition to running the social venture.

As Samuel pointed out it had something to do with the confidence building of the social entrepreneurs who did not consider themselves business people (Lucy, Nate, Karen - they did not have any business education or experience) and felt they needed training. For them confidence building was part of the passage to becoming a social entrepreneur. And unless one gains confidence she is stuck in liminality like Nate. Lucy confirmed that at the end of the programme:

'I think there's a definite shift in the sense that I do realise that I can be an entrepreneur, I am an entrepreneur. I have a company ... yes, I do feel like an entrepreneur and I have the confidence now that I can run a business, and that I don't have to know about every part of the business.' (interview 3)

Finally those who benefited the most from the training were the ones who lacked the formal business background. However learning to be a social entrepreneur was not only attributed to the trainings offered by the programme as we shall see later.

3.3 Cohort and peer-to-peer support

Whereas the provision of training and free office space in the Hatchery were elements of the programme for which engagement was equated with attendance, engagement with the cohort was more complex. That's why, conceptualising the cohort as *communitas*, which the organisers expected to develop over time, shifts the attention to the social interaction between the peers rather than the utilitarian view of peers as a provisional support element of the programme. In order to benefit from the cohort as a resource, certain relationships needed to be established. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in order to facilitate engagement amongst peers there were fortnightly cohort meetings and entrepreneurs were encouraged (and also contracted) to attend. However this was not strictly enforced, apart from sending emails and requesting rsvp's. These were rarely returned and therefore it was a mystery every other Wednesday how many of them would actually turn up (table 2). Nevertheless there was informal interaction which was facilitated by the co-location of some of the entrepreneurs in the Hatchery (see 3.1) or as Shane said 'we caught up and we do that anyway, so you don't have to do it as part of an official weekly or two-weekly meeting, it happens anyway' (interview 2). Indeed that was the opinion of the organisers themselves, beyond a certain point those sessions seemed 'to have run their course, and I know many of you meet up and support one another in different ways' (Beth, 2015d).

Table 2: Cohort meetings - attendance

Date	Alex	Matt	Sandra	Lucy	Samuel	Nate	Karen	Shane	Flora
06.08.2014	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
26.08.2014			x	x		x	x	x	
17.09.2014	x		x	x			x	x	x
01.10.2014			x	x	x	x		x	
15.10.2014				x		x		x	
29.10.2016	x					x	x		
12.11.2016	x		x		x		x		x
26.11.2014	x		x	x		x	x		
10.12.2014				x		x			
21.01.2014				x		x			
Total	5	1	5	8	2	8	6	5	3

For Matt engagement with the peers was driven by whether that would be an opportunity to leverage on people's networks - a functional use of peers resources and no time spent on developing relationships and bonds essential for *communitas*. He admitted halfway through the programme that 'just one of the peers here made an introduction to one of his contacts, and through that I made a couple of friends that, conceivably, could have taken it forward six months and saved me maybe £150,000-£200,000' (interview 2). Samuel also did not see the value in the formalised group meetings where most of the times 'everybody else is talking, or presenting about something and it's - in the nicest possible way - it's not effective use of the time that you've got here in the hub, which is absolutely precious' (ibid.). He shared that it was commonplace for people to stop by his desk and ask for advice. Flora was actually explicit about the fact that the process was one way as she could 'think of most examples where we've helped the other companies, because we were further ahead' (interview 2). Other entrepreneurs also perceived them as out of place. Lucy shared that she did not consider Flora a peer as she never sat down and had a chat with her as her company 'grew very big and were very self-involved and insular' (interview 3). Those three entrepreneurs were the ones whose ventures were developed more than the rest (see section 2) and thus needed less support. Therefore they engaged with their peers one way - by perceiving themselves as providing advice or engaging only when they would benefit from a resource such as contacts as in Matt's case. The inequality and heterogeneity of the cohort thus created different patterns of interaction than in *communitas* as they are homogeneous and uniform in their nature. Thus the empirical case here offered an opportunity to explore the impact of heterogeneity of cohort

composition on *communitas* formation. It also explained the different outcomes of the process (see Chapter 6).

The offer letter clearly stated that in exchange for what is offered they were expected to 'attend fortnightly peer-to-peer sessions at the SEBC' (SVI, 2015c). Nate seemed to really be 'grappling with what he's doing there. What it's meant to be giving him, what he's supposed to be giving back' (Lucy, interview 2). He always tried to attend despite his busy schedule. In November 2014, at a meeting, the cohort decided to change the structure of those sessions as they had become a bit 'stale when you just have what we did, what you're doing and what we need' (Sandra, interview 2). They decided that they would focus on one business each time. Lucy sent an email after the meeting to all peers in the cohort informing them about their decision:

'... Next session will be me in the hot seat. We're going for an action learning approach. I will either bring a topic that I want to explore or simply go with any questions that peers ask me. Putting one entrepreneur on the hot seat will help them to think clearly (as we would not be providing advice but simply asking open questions), and would help the audience to practice framing open questions in order to elicit information - a skill we need when meeting prospective clients and funders. We felt generally we weren't great at this.' (Lucy, 2014)

At this meeting, 26.11.2014, attendance was high and it was notable that some of the people who did not generally find these meetings valuable did not attend. Samuel and Matt were present in the Hatchery but decided not to join the rest of us. When I questioned them, Samuel made an excuse to leave and Matt bluntly stated that he was not going to join the meeting. Lucy actually considered the fact that they were physically present in the office but did not attend the meeting as a statement in itself. Nate believed that this was due to the fact that the contract was not reinforced alluding to the weak authority structure once more.

The most intimate talk I witnessed was at the very last cohort meeting before Beth officially announced their termination. Lucy and Nate were in the hot seat to share things that concerned them with the group. Interestingly, only the two of them attended on both occasions taking turns being in the hot seat. In our last meeting as I mentioned earlier, Lucy admitted that in the beginning she would have time to hang around and attend all sorts of events, but that was no longer the case. She said that she thought only Nate was thinking about the Hatchery and the overarching process that they were all part of (he gave an analogy with an umbilical cord, and how they were attached to the Hatchery through it). Even Lucy admitted that she was not that attached and did not perceive it the way he did and she thought that all their other 'colleagues' were not even thinking about it. They were just focused on their business. This discussion suggested that the initial cohort dispersed after work intensified for most entrepreneurs. Nate mentioned he had had his

six-month review and he had been reminded about the work he needed to put in and the 'contract' with the programme.

In fact non-attendance to the peer meetings and training was a breach of the contract they had all signed but it happened anyway (see attendance tables 1 and 2). The giving and receiving dilemma Nate had was a reaction to not fulfilling the contract, the economic institution 'that stipulates the precise terms of the exchange' that was designed to 'specify the exact obligations incurred in a transaction' (Blau, 1964: 112). He was very much used to contractual relationships in his employment. However, as the analysis above showed, the contract was not reinforced in the context of an incubator. Entrepreneurs' engagement and interaction was based on what Blau defines as social exchanges characterised by 'unspecified obligations the fulfilment of which depends on trust' (Blau, 1964: 112). Similarly, in *communitas* the relationships are based on social exchanges rather than economic ones - as exchange of food and gifts is typical for the transitional periods (van Gennep, 1960). Nate realised that others did not have the same social need as he did to get 'together as a group to explore what that means, what's the reality of actually being on this programme in terms of the expectations and the boundaries, and what does that mean' (interview 3). Meetings attendance was the most visible aspect of engagement in the programme because meetings with the business advisors were one-to-one. And hence it was the most obvious breach of the 'contract'. The contract was not enforced and their exchanges were thus not bound by it.

Nate found this ambiguity particularly uncomfortable. The group of entrepreneurs that valued peer support and had spent time together in the beginning of the programme - Nate, Lucy, Alex, Sandra and to some extent Shane and Karen, had the chance to develop exchange relations 'starting with minor transactions in which little trust is required because little risk is involved' (Blau, 1964: 94). One such transaction happened early into the programme, when the work desks were all aggregated on one side of the room. I was sitting at my desk opposite them and could observe the group of entrepreneurs who were trying to find their way setting up the processes and structures of their businesses. Lucy asked the others sitting around her about accounting packages and Alex suggested something immediately. She admitted that they both had a 'soft spot for each other' because of the 'evening spent with each other that actually helped us clarify our visions and our pitches, and got us on here' (interview 1). Those type of exchanges were intensified during cohort meetings amongst the attendees. People would suggest contacts, offer help and advice in similar fashion. Their formal nature and facilitated approach would really focus the peers' efforts on sharing their achievements and challenges and thus create the opportunity for others to offer support. Attendance to those sessions was often rewarded by receiving help for problems shared. Those meetings

facilitated the social exchanges which were an important prerequisite for developing the *communitas*.

However exchange relations evolve slowly (Blau, 1964) and somehow that process was interrupted for the group of entrepreneurs that valued it. Just before Christmas attendance dropped and as mentioned earlier their use of the Hatchery also dropped. They were in less frequently and spent less time in the Hatchery, as some were getting more business in (Lucy), others had a job (Shane), did not need any peer support (Samuel), or engaged less due to the size of their ventures (Flora).

Entrepreneurs' perceptions of what the cohort meetings offered them changed too. In the beginning Sandra, one of the great advocates of peer support, used to say that the benefit of the programme was the peer-to-peer support. The peers shared the same journey thus they could provide 'moral support' (Alex, interview 1) as the transition was emotional. This type of support was not in 'direct relevance to business, but it's important emotionally for me, so it does have an impact on the business' (ibid.). Entrepreneurs experienced an 'extraordinary sense of not being on your own' (Lucy, interview 1). Nate specified that this support was through 'that sense of going on a journey together, and being able to share each other's successes and failures and challenges' (interview 1). Those feelings and experiences are typical for liminality which offers a 'special sense of community' (Czaraniawska and Mazza, 2003: 273) provided by *communitas*. This was especially helpful when entrepreneurs were going through challenges and started questioning why they were doing this, moments requiring peer moral support in order to manage to persevere and overcome the difficult periods. Those moments of weakness, typical for the liminal period of a rite of passage, illuminate a side of social entrepreneurship which is covered less in the field where heroic representations of social entrepreneurs dominate as Dacin et al. (2011) had criticised. Award ceremonies and competitions have been conceptualised as rites of enhancement, where the social entrepreneur's status is elevated (Trice and Beyer, 1993). Rites of passage offer an opportunity to look into social entrepreneurship from another lens, a less glorious one, where the struggles and rollercoaster rides are part of the everyday life of the entrepreneur. Thus incubators, reconceptualised as rites of passage, are the support mechanisms which aim to facilitate that transition, shedding light on the ordinariness of social entrepreneurs.

An example of peer support related to a crisis Sandra faced in the beginning with her first workshop. Only two people had booked places on her workshop and Sandra wanted to cancel it. However, through a conversation with Lucy, she realised that she needed 'to be really thankful and grab hold of my supporters, and take as much as I can from the feedback they can give me and try it again in a different way: reposition it, redesign it, do

whatever it takes' (Sandra, interview 1). Lucy reminded her of the lean approach to starting a business advocated by the programme too. Two other peers (Mary and Karen) attended the workshop to help her after she asked for help at the cohort meeting. Those instances of gradually increasing social exchanges between the core of peers that needed moral, emotional and shared experience types of support, were numerous and were taking place not only in the formal fortnightly meetings but informally too as part of the everyday life in the incubator. The reciprocity between the entrepreneurs generated 'a spiral of rising trust' (Blau, 1964: 71) as they regularly discharged their obligations and proved themselves 'trustworthy of further credit' (ibid.: 98). Those who failed to prove their trustworthiness (Matt, Samuel and Flora) were in the periphery of the *communitas*.

The fragile *communitas* established through the programme dissipated gradually after the initial height in the months until November 2014. The termination of the formal meetings, together with the varied progress of some of the entrepreneurs and their ventures as well as their involvement in other types of work damaged the social aspect of the passage process - the *communitas*. Indeed, being part of an overall structure with expectations of engagement and expectations of venture progress at the same time seemed to make it more difficult for entrepreneurs to do both. Lucy felt 'a bit disappointed in the peer mentoring side of things' but at the same time reconfirmed, as in the beginning, that 'it's really important that everybody encourages each other' (interview 2). In her second interview Sandra shared that the importance of the peer support for her had changed compared to the beginning. She felt that 'the emotional support from the peers' was still important but it was more significant in the beginning when she 'pivoted and changed what my strategy was, as living through that is quite draining' (interview 2). And finally at the 3rd round of interviews Lucy, Sandra and Nate shared that the group did not manage to continue what they experienced and reported in the beginning of the programme:

'So if we talk about - I feel like the first six months were quite different to the second six months. I think that I felt at the start like, yeah, the peer-to-peer support that we get is definitely the reason, the main reason why being on something like this is so useful. But since March that's really not - well, I haven't been coming in as often and I really don't know about the others in the... I mean, it was interesting when it was our leaving thing last week, that we were sat around the table and they had given an update on what everybody was doing, as though it was like my expectations, I think, were that we would have been much closer as a group on each cohort, and between the cohorts and we would have known things. Like you were saying before, are there other people in the group that's going through the same sort of crisis as you are? I'm sure there are, but we don't - I am not close enough to anybody in the group to know that. So I don't feel that that connection has really solidified and really developed properly over the year.' (Sandra, interview 3).

Somehow the initial experience of being together and not on your own disappeared as the social exchanges between them decreased. This left some disappointed as they were expecting to continue the relations between peers throughout the year. However that was an indication that those entrepreneurs had not managed to gain the expertise and

experience to rely more on themselves and thus move forward to graduation and completion of this rite of passage. For others the rite of passage was complete before graduation and thus they did not need to engage with the programme as much. Exchange processes were important in an incubation rite of passage as they solidified the bonds between peers, leading to the creation of *communitas* that could offer the emotional support needed for the entrepreneurial transition. Once that transition was completed and the entrepreneur managed to take the venture off the ground, developing and scaling it, *communitas* was no longer needed. I reengage the discussion in Chapter 7.

3.4 Business advice

All the ventures were assigned a business advisor - either Marcus (the lead business advisor for SVI), Beth or Norman. In fact Norman was a business advisor working on another programme within the SEBC. He agreed to mentor two ventures, Nate and Joy. Beth mentored Karen and Sandra, and all other entrepreneurs were allocated to Marcus. As their key relationship on the programme, ventures were supposed to engage proactively with their advisors. However that proved to be difficult, as Marcus explained in an interview in March 2015. He constantly needed to chase the entrepreneurs and thus he was trying to think of a way that would make them responsible for booking a slot with him. That difficulty was experienced by other business advisors too - earlier I mentioned Joy who did not keep in touch with Norman at all. Rice (2002) has looked in depth into the nature of the relationship between incubator managers and entrepreneurs, and identified that entrepreneurs' readiness to engage affects co-production of business assistance. Despite the narrow focus of his incubation process study he identified engagement with the manager, or in our case the business advisor, as an important prerequisite of incubation. The entrepreneur-advisor dynamic pictured quite a different relationship to the one between a master of ceremony and a neophyte. Entrepreneurs did not engage with the business advisors obediently, totally submitting to their instruction. The different types of engagement patterns between the two parties were determined by factors such as the venture's or entrepreneur's needs which in turn determined the type of exchanges taking place between them.

Flora, whose venture was further ahead, engaged with the business advice very strategically. In early October, Andrew, her co-founder, was about to go to the US to pitch to investors. Thus they asked two of the business advisors - Peter and Marcus - to help them with practising their pitch. Their engagement with BAs was to receive 'feedback on how to approach things, and how to approach investors' (Flora, interview 2). They also sought advice related to the challenges that their dual entity structure imposed on

communication and structure. Therefore they exemplified a venture that was scaling up and thus required advice and feedback on the business - these were specific and focused types of exchanges. This was also the main expectation of Beth and the designers of the incubation process - a venture-centric incubation model.

Others however were in need of what Marcus called 'personal coaching' type of exchange with their business advisor. Nate for instance shared that his relationship with his advisor had been quite difficult, especially after he decided to go back to employment. He needed to talk this through with someone and in that case it happened to be the business advisor in one of their monthly meetings:

'And so I'm not saying that it was a difficult meeting because he wasn't sensitive, I mean, I just think it was a difficult meeting because I'd made the decision to have a job. And so I was in a position and maybe I didn't want to have a mentor, business mentor, I just needed someone, a sort of pair of ears to listen and maybe a bit of, yeah, just understanding. And I think that there was a mix up there in terms of his role as a business mentor, and my need to have just someone to hear me out.

...I'm not going to repeat myself in terms of business mentor, that was his role, and me needing just a bit of social, just to chat about where I was and a bit of understanding, and I didn't get it as I was hoping.' (interview 2)

Later on, in our last interview, Nate admitted that he had not met his business advisor since that particular meeting, therefore terminating any exchanges between them long before the programme was over. Others also acknowledged that they needed deeper engagement. Sandra's personality, she considered, was very determined and 'so sure and focused on what I needed' (interview 3). Thus at the final interview she noted that that might be the reason why she 'felt like they (advisory meetings) were scratching the surface, rather than really delving into what I needed' (ibid.) through questioning and scrutiny. She had reached a point at graduation when she was confused what her next steps with the venture should be and did not 'know what to do, I feel like I need much more delving into just as I've come to the end of it' (ibid.). She needed to continue the exchange relations with her business advisor she admitted. She needed the reassurance and security provided by the availability of the support, 'the fact that I know that they're there means a lot to me. And so I'll just continue to think that I'm still part of it until I'm ready to think otherwise, really' (ibid.). She did not make the entrepreneurial transition necessary to take the venture forward as she had always been so sure of what she had to do and not questioned enough. That once again reconfirms the importance of questioning and scrutiny, as part of liminality which contributes to the entrepreneurial transition - an entrepreneur-centric incubation model.

Lucy is an example of an entrepreneur who had a transformational journey in a classic RoP sense. Initially the most important element of the programme for her was the peer support, and she referred to the business advisor mentoring as 'just starting to build,

because it takes time to realise just what you don't know' (interview 1). Later on she started engaging with her advisor more and on an informal basis too in addition to the regular monthly meetings. At our second formal interview she recalled that she popped into the office at a time when she was trying to scale her work at a college and they had been a bit resistant about her bringing another colleague in. Then Beth suggested to her to spend ten minutes with Marcus going through her agenda and what she was going to say. She practised it with Marcus and 'it all came out really smoothly, really clearly the next day. So, I mean, moments like that are just crucial' (interview 2). She had learned to engage with him differently than other people. At the end of the programme it led to inviting Marcus to be on her advisory board. For her part, Lucy had also tried to be honest and engaged proactively with her business advisor. She had been busy and ill in autumn 2014 and thus did not come in for a couple of weeks. She however decided to send an email to explain what happened and to arrange to meet with Marcus, as she admitted she felt she had lost her focus a bit. Once again the slow process of social exchanges taking place between them, not only on a formal basis, had contributed to developing trust and a positive relationship between him as a master of ceremony and her as an entrepreneur going through the rite of passage, a successful one indeed.

For others such as Matt and Samuel business advice was not a priority. Matt did not perceive the business advice as life changing:

'the advice I've received has been perfectly competent and well-meaning. I wouldn't say it's changed my life or the business at all, but it's reaffirmed what I need to do or challenge what I need to do, or encourage me to explain myself better. So I think the ongoing dialogue is always a very positive thing with the mentors.' (interview 2)

In the role and spirit of a rite of passage, challenging and questioning are two processes that are part of the transformation. For those entrepreneurs challenging and questioning were not transformational. Samuel on the other hand did not even see the need to engage with the advisor if there was not an immediate need to do it: 'our business advisor is really just like a school tutor to kind of keep you chivvy along, and then if you need support go and speak to them, but if you don't need support then don't speak to them' (interview 2). They both had less need for initiating exchanges with their advisors and the exchanges had less of an impact on them compared to other entrepreneurs, such as Lucy. They had a background and experience in running a business compared to the rest of the entrepreneurs. As previous research indicated prior entrepreneurial experience, education and industrial experience positively affects new venture creation (Gertner, 2013). However in the context of a social venture incubator it led to less engagement with the process, which ultimately made me question the benefit and impact of the process for those entrepreneurs and their ventures. That is something I explain and evaluate in Chapter 6.

3.5 Connections and networks

As in any incubator, connections were an important element of the programme. For some entrepreneurs they were the most essential element and their only objective when joining the programme. Samuel and Matt had been engaging with the programme quite differently and a common thread was their early focus on tapping the incubator's networks. Samuel indicated connections as his key challenge for scaling the venture in the application process (see Appendix 3). Similarly Matt admitted, in a conversation we had in the kitchen, what his background was and that made me wonder what the benefit of being on the programme was for him. He then told me that he benefited from being part of the community, and being challenged and inspired, as he could easily get into a habit, and also that this was a way to leverage on networks. He had been renting a desk at ThinkHub, a co-working space in town, but that was superficial compared to SVI, he thought. The incubation programme he said was more about the people. His networking aspiration included the cohort itself as well as the networks of the peers.

Later on in our interview halfway through the programme Matt admitted that 'one introduction here has advanced me probably six months' (interview 2). In his case the benefit of being on the programme was not that he could not get as far as he did but rather the speed with which it happened, one of incubators' main aims (CSES, 2002). At the end of the programme he was arranging clinical trials for his technology and another introduction through Beth saved him not only time but a substantial amount of money too:

'So she said, 'I knew somebody' and I made the effort and I rang them up, made the introduction, and all of a sudden I could do clinical trials in the Isle of Man which took me three months, and maybe 70 grand. Here in the UK it would take me nine months, twelve months, and maybe cost me 600 grand.' (interview 3)

Samuel on the other hand, having the same aspirations as Matt, struggled to gain the trust of Beth initially. Two months after he joined the programme, Beth shared that she did not know much about him and thus could not recommend him for funding. In her meeting with him he came across as defensive and a week after our chat, at the next steering group meeting in September 2014, she shared that he was not engaging and being open. In this case he did not discharge his obligations. His non-engagement meant that he would not be introduced to relevant contacts and that could hamper his progress as networks were the most important outcome from the process for him. To him things looked different though as he believed he engaged a lot - he had attended one cohort meeting and met regularly with his business advisor. Engagement with the programme thus meant different things to different people. Developing exchange relations with business advisors was

important because it could impact the connections and introductions entrepreneurs could tap into.

In fact Matt attended only one cohort meeting less than Samuel and they both attended only one training session during their whole incubation. However Matt used the Hatchery much more in the beginning whereas Samuel was hardly ever there in the beginning. This made Matt much more visible to the organisers than Samuel. Samuel pointed out that after Christmas he used to spend at least a couple of days a week in the Hatchery and thus increased his visibility. In the end he benefited and achieved what he came to the programme for. The one and only talk he attended was with UnLtd and as he pointed out he was already in touch with them. However:

'being on this programme actually identifies to those other organisations, all those other networks and connections that actually you're a serious social enterprise; there's something about you that others have seen, so you're worth paying attention to. But I think that if we weren't on the programme making those connections would have been harder, or breaking down the barriers to allowing us would have been even tougher' (Samuel, interview 2)

Towards graduation Samuel's venture was accepted on the Big Venture Challenge programme which he considered 'a real big step up, so that's a big successful outcome. And that's what we set out, and I always wanted to achieve through SVI, and that's what we got' (interview 3). Having engaged selectively with what he perceived to be useful for him, Samuel managed to secure the outcome he expected. However tapping into the incubator's networks required engagement with the people in the incubator - programme director, business advisors and peers, as they all had the potential to provide access to contacts. In Samuel's case the lack of engagement especially in the beginning nearly cost him the support for achieving his goal.

Despite the two extreme examples above, all other ventures also needed and benefited from the networks and connections directly and indirectly through the people in the incubator. Lucy described an interesting account of the serendipitous networking outcomes from attending events part of the rites of passage in an incubator. She attended an event suggested by Marcus. The event was attended by very few people so she networked a lot with the medical company staff and they were willing to do some pro-bono work for her. Lucy was very pleased with their work on her new brochure which looked much better and more up-market than the old one. She was positively amazed by what came out of it. She therefore tried to attend a lot of the events that were advertised 'as one never knew what would come out of them'. Similarly Karen found an opportunity at the very first three day training workshop. The caterers were advertising waiting services but Karen found that they could not deliver on those and therefore a partnership formed between her venture and the caterers. The following day 'someone emailed and they

booked us for something in December' (interview 1). In the very beginning another informal chat enabled merely by the co-location with a big cloud-computing company brought another beneficial outcome for Karen. After a conversation in the communal kitchen, an employee of that company offered and set up a programme for keeping her data - 'just the most sophisticated, yet, also simple thing that I've seen that would really help us, which is fantastic' (ibid.). Attending training and other events as well as using the space provided opportunities for expanding the entrepreneur's networks through engaging in unplanned social exchanges.

Flora and Nate, two very different entrepreneurs and ventures in terms of their needs and development, both did not find the connections as crucial as the rest of the cohort peers. Flora shared that she 'can only think of one investor contact I got through being here... the network we got from being here was mostly to the other companies in the space I think' (interview 2). Nate also talked extensively about the contacts he had made based on shared interests within the group of entrepreneurs in SVI only.

Therefore connections and networks were a resource the incubation programme provided through - business advisor (including programme director), peers and space (see Chapter 7, section 2.4, figure 6). The way entrepreneurs engaged with all the latter determined the sort of networks and connections they would access.

4. Key findings

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the separation rite planned by the organisers did not lead to a unified and homogeneous communitas. It included ventures at different stages, spanning a variety of sectors. Entrepreneurs also had different background in terms of prior entrepreneurial experience, education and industrial experience. Those venture-entrepreneur configurations had implications for the engagement patterns with the programme elements. There was a clear divide in engagement between the entrepreneurs who needed venture-centric incubation support and those who needed entrepreneur-centric incubation support. In addition the engagement patterns were influenced by the weak authority structure in the incubator. They were allowed to engage with the elements of the programme as they pleased and the monitoring system was not able to indicate that. Communitas was formed amongst those entrepreneurs who needed entrepreneur-centric support. It was created gradually through the social exchanges facilitated by the co-location in the Hatchery and the fortnightly cohort meetings. Social exchange relations characterised the engagement with business advisors too. Engaging with both business advisors and entrepreneurs provided access to contacts and networks, important for venture development regardless of stage.

Entrepreneurs engaged strategically with the elements based on their venture and personal needs (skills and knowledge gaps). Entrepreneurs with business educational, industrial and entrepreneurial background did not engage with the training or peer elements of the programme. They sought venture-centric type of support - through their business advisors and contacts, and used the space to accommodate their teams. Entrepreneurs who lacked the aforementioned background appreciated the *communitas* which the physical space enabled. In addition some entrepreneurs managed to complete their RoP before graduation (in terms of personal learning and venture development), indicated by their decreasing engagement with those elements of the programme. Others contrarily needed support beyond graduation. The liminal condition was experienced by those entrepreneurs who needed entrepreneur-centric type of support. The former entrepreneurs did not go through a personal transition. They did not change themselves but used the elements of the programme to develop their ventures as the organisers had initially envisaged.

I now continue with an analysis of the incubation impact on venture development and growth as well as on the entrepreneurs.

Chapter 6: Incubated

1. Introduction

In the first findings chapter I presented the design of social incubation as a rite of passage, its structures and participants. It also focussed on the purpose of this rite of passage and what it was set out to achieve. Essentially those aims were investment-readiness and scaling the ventures. The indicators for venture development and growth were presented too as designed by the organisers and determined by the funders. Similarly to all incubation programmes the social venture incubation programme was 'designed to ensure new ventures have an easier passage into the business world' (Barrow, 2001: 9). Here I discuss the impact on C1 venture development and growth analysing their progress along the aforementioned indicators. In addition I also analyse how prepared entrepreneurs felt for incorporation into the business world and how successful their rite of passage to the new state was. Have the ventures been transformed? Have the entrepreneurs been transformed?

The chapter is divided in two parts. The first part focuses on the rite of passage to becoming investment ready and scaling the ventures. The results presented focus on the progress of the ventures along the expected outcomes and underpinnings of a successful business set out by the organisers and discussed in the first findings chapter. At the end of it the reader is able to understand how many of them actually completed the investment-readiness passage. The reasons and details of the entrepreneurs who did not manage to achieve those aims are included in the account too.

In the second part of the chapter I focus on the entrepreneurs and the impact of incubation on them. It starts with the entrepreneurial journey being a series of ups and downs, a rollercoaster, where they try to find a way to cope with a fluid, dynamic reality - starting and running a social venture. Thus I continue with the impact of the programme on the entrepreneurs' emotions. This section provides further detail on the way the incubation rite of passage emotionally affected the entrepreneurs. The following subsection focuses on learning as another entrepreneurial outcome of the programme. I analyse the experience of each entrepreneur's learning journey and the programme's impact on learning. I conclude the chapter with what graduation meant for entrepreneurs. I analyse the entrepreneurs' rite of passage and their readiness for incorporation into the business world.

2. Venture progress.

Here I focus on the ventures and their transformation over the 12 months. The data used was obtained from the quarterly reports submitted by the entrepreneurs as part of the monitoring system at SVI as well as the entrepreneurs' perception of their ventures' progress shared in the interviews.

2.1 Expected outcomes

2.1.1 Accessing loan finance

Only three C1 ventures applied for loan finance during the incubation period. One of them was Fitness Hub, the venture that did not engage with the programme in any other way (Chapter 5). The other two were Karen and Flora's. They both used the loan in time when it was crucial for them to sustain the business. The loan enabled Karen to go full-time on her venture as of April 2015 so her 'time is now on my venture, whereas before it was divided' (interview 2). She used to have two part-time jobs, then she transitioned through another part-time job before applying for the loan and becoming a full-time entrepreneur.

In fact a lot of the entrepreneurs worried about money, both personal finance and grants rather than venture debt capital. They shared that they needed money every time we had a cohort meeting. In September 2014 Alex realised that he needed to get back to work as it was not sustainable for him to continue working on his venture:

'... this is my major preoccupation at the moment, is that I'm spending time on this but really I shouldn't be spending time on this, I should be spending time earning money. Because if I was 25 and it was just me on my own, it would be fine; I could live off baked beans for the next six months. But I'm not 25 anymore, and I've got a family so I have two children, so I need to earn money and I'm not earning enough. So I'm literally thinking today, okay, maybe I need to just stop doing this for a few weeks and just to build up that money again, and then come back to it. That's tough, that's hard!' (interview 1)

This was the harsh reality that a lot of social entrepreneurs needed to deal with, in his case coupled with the lack of motivation lead to dropping out of the programme after the six-month review. Shane and Nate also had part-time jobs and Nate, halfway through the programme accepted a very good job as a CEO of a charity four days a week. He confirmed what Alex experienced early on and elaborated on the relationship between not having money and driving the venture forward and the impossibility to do the latter in the comfort and security of a well-paid job:

'Well, I suppose, because I've got a job - I mean, there is something that I'm losing and I think that edginess and unpredictability, and, yeah, living on the breadline, really. I think that that really - so because I wasn't getting any money in, that really focuses your mind and attention on your whole life and body, on making the venture make money to live. And

that's really - it's very uncomfortable, but it's very healthy, but now...so what my worry or concerns, is that I'm going to lose that a bit. So I'm now comfortable and I've got a four-day a week job and it's quite a good salary, and its status, it's a CEO's job. And so I'm sort of worried the venture will just become my hobby or my - just a sort of a little bolt-on, but I hope not. I need that edginess of not making any money to drive me on, but I'm not going to have that.' (interview 2)

Flora on the other hand used the loan together with Andrew to secure the salaries of their three employees 'to make it through until we got investment' (interview 2). They were not planning to use any debt finance but the timing of their investment delayed and they needed to apply for money which proved very critical. Securing some form of capital finance was crucial for the venture transformation. And equally, it was important for sustaining the entrepreneurs on their journey. Almost all of the entrepreneurs believed that some form of grant capital is essential for the entrepreneur initially:

'providing a stipend as part of the award would certainly help future ventures get off the ground. Because that's been frustration for all of us; we do talk about it amongst ourselves and it's one of the biggest problems we all have is not...giving us support, but not giving, but having to, not having the financial support is a big problem.' (Shane, interview 2)

The entrepreneurs' interest in debt finance was low but their interest in grant capital, especially securing 'bread on the table' (Nate, interview 2) was ongoing and it led to some entrepreneurs giving up on their ventures. This indicated the intricate relationship between the two - the subject (entrepreneur) and the object (venture) of incubation.

In one of the reports to the programme funders Beth pointed out that 'the demand for loan finance has been far lower than initially projected. This is due to overly ambitious projections of the need/appetite for debt finance in general and also the early stage of the ventures recruited' (SVI, 2015d). That led to alterations of the programme, changing the initial plan where the ventures could only progress through the programme by applying for loans (Chapter 4, section 2.1.3). To that Marcus added that due to personal finance struggles and its impact on venture development 'it's probably something that we need to build in to our process, which is understanding the entrepreneurs' personal situation and personal finance situation' (Marcus, interview).

In brief only three out of the 11 ventures benefited from the availability of loan finance.

2.1.2 Increase in revenue and sustainability

Getting money commercially was something that Samuel emphasised as the main preoccupation of the social entrepreneur and key to sustainability:

'Our social enterprise isn't built upon getting grants, whereas many in this sector - I'm not saying within the hatchery here, I don't know - but the majority within this sphere are. You can't sustain it like that.' (interview 2)

He was the only venture on the programme ready for growth and had been in business for the past few years. He pointed out the link between social impact and revenue thus emphasising the importance of the latter as a means to achieve the former:

'For me, it's always getting in business, so that's always in my mind, that's all I think about new business, new business, new business, yeah, that's my... Why? Because without it you can't deliver any social impact. So you can worry about people's health and anything like that and ours is for carers, but, to be honest, if I worry about them that doesn't do any good, that doesn't achieve anything and I'm just going to worry. But if I worry about the money, then I'm going to get the money and then I get the money to help, so worry for, it's always money... And generating it, so it's all, yeah, you need money, don't you? Yeah. Commercially, not by getting grants or loans or anything like that, because that's not a sustainable revenue stream'. (ibid.)

His interpretation was in line with Dacin et al. (2011) who also agreed that economic value creation is as important as social impact creation for social venture development and growth. The stage of the other ventures was a long way before generating money commercially which necessitated other revenue streams such as grants, loans (covered in the previous section) and investment.

The 'increase in revenue' success marker and expected outcome was monitored through the quarterly reports submitted by the entrepreneurs (see table 3). Only Samuel, Nate, Karen and Lucy had managed to generate revenue from sales. However the latter three entrepreneurs were not making enough for the venture to be financially sustainable. The ventures passage to investment-readiness and growth was not successful for most of them as they did not manage to reach revenue big enough to be financially sustainable. Lucy was a true success story. She started with making just over a thousand pounds of revenue from sales in the beginning of the programme to making a good living out of it. Her reflection on that transformation over the year is summed up below:

'But I certainly didn't expect myself to be here, because I set myself a goal halfway through the incubator, and I was hoping that I could have a turnover of about £25,000...and maybe I could... Yes, and maybe I could be earning about £15,000 or £16,000, just enough to live on. Well, in my sense it's just enough to live on. But I'm beyond that now, so I certainly didn't expect this and I couldn't imagine myself having taken on two colleges. I set myself a goal of taking on two colleges by October this year, but I've beat that by February this year. So what is that, six or seven months early that happened.' (interview 3)

Table 3: Outputs (as at graduation)

	Lucy	Sandra	Nate	Karen	Shane	Samuel	Flora	Matt
Loan				x			x	
Revenue	sales	0	sales	sales	0	sales	investment +grant	investment
Jobs created	2	0	1	0	0	2	9	0
Investment ready	n/a	n/a no	no	n/a no	no	yes	yes	yes
Social Impact	work in progress	too early	simple output	simple output	not clear	specific to project	work in progress	too early

Samuel was focused on generating money and working on the venture full-time thus being able to sustain it and live off it before he actually joined the programme. Shane and Sandra did not generate revenue over the twelve months and Matt managed to secure investment from companies to the value of '£200,000 worth of investment in; most of that is contribution in kind, which hasn't cost me anything' (interview 3). Flora managed to get investment too:

'by the end of January [2015] all the signatures from 15 angel investors, of a total of £200,000 investment. And then we got the match funding from the Big Venture Challenge of another 100k, so we got a total of 300k as fundraising round' (interview 3).

Table 3 and the analysis above show that Shane, Sandra, Nate and Karen cannot not be classified as financially sustainable, the most important element of investment readiness in the social investment market (Hazenbergh, 2015). Their ventures thus did not complete the rite of passage successfully. However their perception of incorporation readiness was different than that of being investment ready. I elaborate on this in section 3 below.

2.1.3 Jobs created

In addition to revenue, entrepreneurs were asked to report the number of people employed on a quarterly basis, another criteria for the successful venture rite of passage. This number was confusing for some entrepreneurs because they reported the number of people on their team who did not receive any salary but were counted as team members. Jobs created was the number of paid employees, which the funders were interested in and also marked a successful incubation transition. Thus I have combined the numerical data received by the entrepreneurs with the data from the interviews as often there was a mismatch. For instance Matt reported that he had 1 employee in the second and third quarter and 2 employees in the last quarter. However from the interviews it became apparent that one of them was his chairman and he was not being paid. Lucy on the other

hand did not report any paid staff over the twelve months but she had hired two people by the end of the programme:

'...and since March as well, the other big thing is I've taken on another occupational therapist, so the company staffing to expand. Because of the amount of work this college has given me, it's too many clinical hours per week for me, so I've been training up an occupational therapist and she'll start in September.' (interview 3)

What became clear was that jobs created (table 3) and the number of people on the venture team (see 2.2) were two different numbers. The Cabinet Office was interested in the former whereas it was quite difficult for some of the entrepreneurs to distinguish between the two. They considered all people who worked with them as part of their team and venture. In fact the founders Flora and Andrew worked on some additional consultancy projects in their free time to make ends meet until January 2015 and used the grant money to employ the people on their team. By the end of the programme they managed to employ 9 people and pay themselves a salary too, thus creating the largest number of jobs compared to the other ventures.

2.1.4 Investment ready

As mentioned earlier investment readiness includes delivering on the expected outcomes during the incubation programme and putting in place the underpinnings of a successful business (discussed in chapter 4). Those elements align the SVI process with the current studies on what investment readiness entails in the social investment market (Hazenberg, 2015). The only element that did not feature formally, was 'a willingness and desire to seek investment and become investment ready' (ibid.: 868). Thus here I analyse entrepreneurs' willingness and desire for investment.

In table 3 I have indicated the companies which had already taken investment. Flora for instance completed the first round of investment in January 2015, halfway through the programme, and a year later raised further 500k with some social investment finance intermediaries as investors (funded by the follow up Cabinet Office fund - The investment and contract readiness fund which focuses on more mature social ventures rather than start-up social ventures (CO, 2012)). Others however did not even consider investment or debt finance, such as Lucy and Karen. Lucy had done most of her work bootstrapping and 'never envisaged taking out money' (interview 1). She was what some call equity averse due to lack of or wrong information about equity investments (Van Auken, 2001; Silver et al., 2010). However when she joined the programme she started changing that perception starting with the Social Venture Weekend where one of the tutors 'was talking about investing, and that the more, the deeper the investment the higher the growth can be' (Lucy, interview 1). Later on she started doubting whether she needed to apply for money

anyway as the business was already generating revenue and she was growing it organically. As Marcus had pointed out in the progress spreadsheet at graduation she had lots of business in and her finances looked good too. Thus investment-readiness was not her aim as the venture managed to incorporate into the business world successfully. Karen and Sandra also wanted to grow organically but did not manage to be as successful as Liz by the end of the programme.

After C1's graduation, at my leaving do at the pub, I witnessed an interesting discussion on investment-readiness. Sandra confided in me, Karen and Jana (C2) that she did not know what investment-readiness was. She shared that now more than ever she did not know what to do. She struggled with whether she should take investment and focus on the venture only or take a part-time job to support herself and work on the venture on her own as she had done during the programme. She reasoned that if she took investment she could hire a developer but she felt guilty to give herself a salary until the venture was successful. Jana thought that it was necessary and a matter of sustainability to do so. She also believed that 'there are a lot of people who want to give you money' which Sandra found encouraging. Sandra still needed to be around people who would encourage her, as in the beginning of the programme, because her venture did not generate revenue or grow. She really was relieved to have that chat and wanted to stay in touch with those peers. She admitted that her business advisor always told her that she was not ready for investment but never told her what she needed to do to become ready. This peer pep talk appeared to indicate that Sandra, a recent SVI graduate, was not clear what she needed to become investment ready and did not feel ready for incorporation into the business world (section 3.3). She had not managed to complete the rite of passage herself nor did her venture.

2.1.5 Increasing social impact including ability to measure

Social impact and defined social missions were some of the key elements in determining investment-readiness in the social investment market managed by the social and investment finance intermediaries (Hazenbergh, 2015). Therefore it was strongly emphasised by the organisers in social incubators as organisations developing the demand side of the social investment market in the UK. It was emphasised early on by the selection criteria for the programme (see Chapter 4) and at the SVW, however formal training was only provided in May 2015 (see table 1, Chapter 5) attended by Karen, Lucy and Flora from C1. The results from the quarterly reports were mixed and represented the diverse stage of social impact definition and measurement of the ventures (see table 3).

For some of the ventures it was too early to report on social impact: 'I do measure my progress, but in terms of a social impact I'm not there yet' (Sandra, interview 3).

Even those who attempted to report on social impact actually reported on what Buckland et al. (2013) call outputs rather than outcomes. For instance Karen's measure for social impact was the number of hours engaged with young women which did not equate to the sought impact which she correctly phrased as outcomes for young women in her website profile:

'New found confidence to apply for work:
Improved communication skills when engaging with the public
Relevant and real work experience serving the community
Improved skill set, job prospects, aspirations and networks
Integration into other community groups
Increased awareness of local, national and international issues' (SVI, 2014e)

The formal social impact measurement training was moved earlier for cohort 4. Due to the delay with cohort 1 most of the ventures did not have it in place, despite the fact that some had already raised investment - Flora for instance. She declared that their impact measurement was 'still a work-in-progress, so it's not done, but as the platform itself is also still a work-in-progress, I don't think we're behind schedule with that' (interview 3). The same applied to Lucy who was very much preoccupied with it:

'I've got a grant from the social incubator to...and I've now got a social impact measuring system. So that I've already got that; I've got it now and I've been stopping to look at it. So I want to implement that by September, and I feel very strongly about that, and that's the shift since March for me as an entrepreneur, and really feel strongly about measuring what I'm doing' (Lucy, interview 3)

Other entrepreneurs were also offered money towards demonstrating impact near the end of the programme such as Karen and Flora from cohort 1. Marcus explained why social impact measuring was implemented late by social entrepreneurs:

'And that's probably because the priority's been to get out a minimum viable product, and to actually find a market and to get a minimum viable product to test the market, because without that then doing more business planning and things like that is pretty pointless.'
(Marcus, interview)

The emphasis on product/service development and also the financial sustainability of the ventures had led to the late prioritisation of social impact measurement. However ventures' expected social impact was defined and included in each venture profile on the incubator website (see Box 2 below). What some of them attempted to do was to develop the measurement system with the help of the funding offered.

Finally due to the early stage of the ventures no increase in social impact was registered. Therefore none of the social ventures managed to generate social impact and report on it, despite that being one of the criteria for the ventures' successful rite of passage. However

the ability to measure was enhanced through the formal training and the provision of the funding towards measuring it for some.

Box 2: A list of C1 social impact statements

It will speed up discoveries, diagnoses and treatments for genetic diseases. It will save health services money. It will save people's lives. (Flora)

game changing mobile application for lift sharing is poised to bring about large changes in our society's transportation options. Drivers and passengers will save on the cost of travel. Businesses and institutions will improve on their carbon targets and wider society will benefit from the associated reductions in petrol consumption, pollution and traffic congestion. (Shane)

We are set to make quite an impact in terms of enabling people to achieve equality through partnering in the workplace. (Sandra)

The progress of hearing loss is slow and silent. It brings with it feelings of social, emotional and commercial isolation, cognitive impairment and depression. Our solution, effectively a big hearing aid in the sky, can address this, and it can address it now. (Matt)

We will positively impact the lives of vulnerable people who want to live independently in their own home. It will raise and maintain the standards of home-based care and provide a national voice for those who want to manage their own care at home. In so doing it will reduce social care costs for both governmental and non-governmental bodies, whilst improving the experience, quality of care and safety for those in need. (Nate)

We support businesses and organisations in creating a culture and team dynamic, which is effective for them and their employees thus achieving a positive social and commercial impact. (Samuel)

enhancing the overall businesses performance whilst also funding support for local students. By addressing both these trends using performance coaching, one is able to offset the costs of the other, helping students and employees to sustain success. (Lucy)

2.2 Underpinnings of a successful business - progress

Table 4 presents the progress of the ventures along the elements of a successful business analysed in the sub-sections below, all part of the successful venture incorporation in this rite of passage.

Table 4: Venture development - as at graduation

	Lucy	Sandra	Nate	Karen	Shane	Samuel	Flora	Matt
business plan	no	incomplete	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
team	3 + advisory board	2 + advisory board	1	advisory board + volunteers	3 +	3	9	2+
social key metrics	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
financial metrics and management accounts	yes	yes	some	yes	maybe	some	yes	yes

2.2.1 Business plan

Whereas at the final round of interviews some found putting in place 'business plan, cash flow forecast, advisory board, quite grounding' (Karen, interview 3), others did not perceive any value in those unless they were needed for their venture transition. Lucy shared that she did not have a business plan as she 'didn't have to apply for money' (interview 3). Sandra was disheartened by preparing a business plan a number of times without actually knowing how things would work out:

'The amount of times I've written down a business plan and done a costing model, and how is it all going to work? After you've done that a few times you just think, well this is just like some sort of I'm writing a fictional story, because this is how I want it to work but, actually, making it happen and getting the very first thing in...' (ibid.)

She never completed it, though she started putting it together in the very beginning. Marcus also agreed with the entrepreneurs: 'It tends to be driven by funding, in that if somebody wants and needs funding, they have to have a business plan' (Marcus, interview). This was a more flexible approach to business planning as most other business incubators would insist on a plan to be accepted in and then to develop that plan considerably by the time of graduation (Barrow, 2001). It is understandable as one of the investment criteria in the social investment market is a business plan which is concise and socially oriented (McWade, 2012). Therefore the business plan was initially considered important as incubation was planned as a rite of passage of becoming investment ready. However the findings showed that not everyone needed it or prioritised it as not all entrepreneurs needed or wanted to apply for a loan or raise investment. The venture rite of passage happened anyway for some, without ever finalising a business plan. Other ventures never really made the successful transition, thus entrepreneurs did not see the point in writing a business plan.

The ones who raised investment or were planning to do so (Flora, Matt, Samuel), had all prepared a business plan. At the graduation ceremony Andrew extensively talked about its importance to get their funding.

2.2.2 Team (skills to develop the venture)

Having discussed the difference between team and jobs created, I will now focus on teams and who the entrepreneurs reported as their team members. The team was envisaged as a way to address the skills gap that existed in the entrepreneur's expertise:

'... a team, so building around you the people that you need, so that might be a board, it might be an advisory board, it might be employees, partners, interns, volunteers' (Marcus, interview)

Thus organisers emphasised teams from the very beginning, at the initial three-day training. There was a whole day dedicated to teams and team roles. It was one of the investment criteria to have a credible and skilled management team/board (McWade, 2012). Thus it was an important venture passage rite to increase teams and skills.

Most started as sole entrepreneurs but others had a co-founder or other people involved. Nate for instance had some shareholders and a paid bookkeeper but he never talked about them. He perceived himself as a sole entrepreneur as he was the one working on the business. Therefore he was not considering the others team members who could help him:

'...I'm doing every task there are some things that I'm really good at, and there are other things that I always felt I had to do but I realised I'm not very good at it. And so I need to learn how to outsource the things that I don't like doing, and I'm not very good at.'(interview 1)

Shane on the other hand considered he had a team and its size varied through the programme. Those were people who he managed but did not employ: 'I've got a team of friends who are working for sweat equity who are software developers' (interview 1). He admitted the difficulties he had on 'running this on a shoestring' and it impacted the development of his product as he had to work with them over the weekends and at nights as all of them had day jobs. All those volunteers he had managed to gather around him actually gave him confidence to continue his work and not give up. There was confusion with regards to the number of people on Samuel's team too. He also, like Nate, considered to have done everything alone, in line with the heroic social entrepreneur stories pervading literature Dacin et al. (2011) indicated. However he recognised that support, in terms of a team, was crucial:

'it's always better to do something like this when there's more than one of you. I've pretty much mostly done it on my own, which is really tough, because you don't have anybody else to support you' (interview 3)

Sandra on the other hand was always on her own and later hired a developer to help her out without paying him. She recognised the importance of having a management team in the face of a second co-founder:

'maybe having a co-founder or somebody more involved than the advisory board is, in looking at the direction at this point is maybe this is the experience that I needed to go through to recognise that I need to have a co-founder, and to open me up more to doing that.' (interview 3)

Both Sandra and Karen have formed advisory boards and started meeting formally. Alex was on Sandra's advisory board and at the last interview Lucy shared that she had also managed to set up an advisory board and invited Marcus, her business advisor, to be on it.

Forming a team was a way to fill the skills gaps entrepreneurs had as 'no entrepreneur has all the skills necessary' (Beth, interview) once again alluding to the ordinary nature of social entrepreneurs. Most of the ventures managed to fulfil that investment criterion, marking a successful venture rite of passage in terms of creating a team. Personal learning and skills entrepreneurs managed to gain during the programme are discussed in section 3 - impact on entrepreneur.

2.2.3 Financial metrics and management accounts

This indicator was monitored by the business advisors on a quarterly basis. It demonstrated their confidence whether the entrepreneur had financial control over the venture, an important prerequisite for a successful venture transition. It did not necessarily mean that they had any sales revenue, as in Matt's case or Sandra's case. Matt's background in finance as well as his management of the investment he received meant he was scored highly on financial control.

Beth helped Karen to learn how to use a free online accounting programme, which gave her financial control over her business. Lucy on the other hand still felt a bit 'fuzzy around money, I mean, that's true, and if you ask me what my costs are each month I can tell you they're between £300 and £400 a month, exactly what they go on I still haven't done that' (interview 3). Flora had employed a financial officer one day a week 'bringing Amanda on to take care of the finances would be such a relief, so that was good' (interview 3).

The timely access and submission of the requested financial metrics in the quarterly reports was perceived as good financial practice and management of the venture's accounts. Samuel employed an accounting service, but did not have access to

management accounts and thus delayed with the quarterly reports. This left an impression of poor financial control in the organisers. Similarly Nate employed a bookkeeper as mentioned earlier but did not have immediate access to the accounts, which lead to huge delays in data submission and scoring low on financial control.

The investment criteria set out by SVI (figure 3, chapter 4) and analysed above also aligned with Hazenberg's (2015) criteria for investment readiness in the social investment market, the goal of this incubation rite of passage too. However only three of the ventures had managed to achieve most of those by the end of the programme (Table 3) - Flora, Matt and Samuel. Was the rite of passage then unsuccessful for the rest of the ventures? Despite not reaching all the venture transition outcomes, discussed here and expected by the organisers, the rite of passage happened and affected both the ventures and the entrepreneurs (as I explain in the next section). This account offers an insight into the complex outcomes and impacts on both and the variety of transitions that occurred. Thus a social venture rite of passage is not uniform or the same for all ventures. Some needed investment and thus had to fulfil the investment criteria, however others grew organically and did not need to become investment-ready. In addition my in-depth involvement into the programme showed that impact extended beyond the venture and affected some of the entrepreneurs too. To this incubation impact I now turn.

3. Impact on entrepreneur

'at the end of the day, most of them are driven by an entrepreneur who is behind this... behind the business is a person, and how you engage with that person is probably the key to the process'
(Marcus, interview)

Marcus recognised that engagement was key (Chapter 5, section 3) and it influenced the entrepreneurial journey. He explained the three different outcomes for the entrepreneurs and the programme's impact on them very well:

'I think the ones who are engaged most it's probably been, I would say and guess, a life-changing kind of thing for them. I think one of the things that a lot of the ventures have to overcome is imposter syndrome, that they've got this idea for a venture, but they're really trepidatious about why me, am I really an expert, can I do this, can I run a business, will people believe me, will they buy in to the idea and the business model? So I think for people like that, ventures like that it's probably been life-changing, because by the end of it they realise that, yes, people will buy in to it and they have got an idea and a business model which is sustainable, and I think that's great. I think for some other of the ventures, it's been useful and more of a - this was probably the ones who are more on a business advice kind of point of view. So probably the entrepreneurs who are more experienced, where it's been a case of giving them business advice, making introductions for them, giving them concrete suggestions. And I think they found it useful, and they found it valuable, but probably not life-changing, and probably some of those that have engaged the least, and probably found it useful, to a certain extent, but, frankly, if they hadn't come on the incubator they would have probably done what they're doing anyway.

I mean, I think - I don't think any of them have come out of it with nothing at all. I think even the ones who probably haven't engaged to a great extent, have come out of it with some useful advice, introductions and ideas that have moved their venture on a bit. So it's moved the venture on a huge amount, and, as I say, at the other end of the spectrum, for some people it's probably been life-changing I would say.' (interview)

It is that first group of entrepreneurs I would like to address here and focus on the sort of influence this programme had on them. The other two groups of entrepreneurs did not experience the transition and only developed their ventures (already analysed in section 2).

In fact most entrepreneurs (apart from Matt) referred to their entrepreneurial experience as a series of ups and downs which is typical for a rite of passage. At the end of October 2014 most of the entrepreneurs experienced that rollercoaster. I remember walking out to take a call in the kitchenette. I noticed that Lucy and Sandra came and sat down for a cup of tea. I returned to the office and after a while they came back with Samuel and Shane talking keenly. I overheard them saying that when they were not physically in the office that did not mean they were not working. At that point Shane mentioned that it was good to know that the others experienced the same ups and downs, the uncertainty typical for the liminal condition of all liminars. Sandra once again said that this was the benefit of being with people in the same boat to which Shane added like 'a family'. He elaborated that as an entrepreneur you 'go through phases and question your own judgement'. Later on he referred to this conversation our interview as an example:

'It's really encouraging to know that you're not the only one who goes through it's like a rollercoaster when things take off, and look like they're taking off and you're making great progress, and you're really productive. And then a few days later you're down in the dumps, and things aren't going as well as... But it's good to know that you're not the only one'. And sometimes you're wondering what the hell am I doing? Why am I wasting my time doing this? Why don't I get a proper job? What am I doing this for? But everyone goes through that, and you can see it in people's faces pretty much.' (interview 1)

A week later, after an emotional cohort meeting (Chapter 5, section 3.3), the one when they decided to change the format of those sessions, Alex talked to me in private. He had been observing people's emotions for a while and they were sharing what was bothering them. He realised his idea was not where his heart was and his heart was (he realised through the experience of trying to run his venture) in helping other people on the 'emotional journey of being an entrepreneur'. He had been researching the possibility of this new idea of his to start a business – 'something like what Lucy was doing for students but he would be doing for entrepreneurs'. He talked a lot about the emotions he had observed in people here and asked them to share those with him – he noticed the fear and anxiety they felt, part of the 'frightening, bewildering' experience (Boland, 2013: 230) of liminality. The journey is going through ups and downs and he wanted to help people in

that. He recognised that himself being a participant and discovered what he really wanted to do. When I asked if he had given the venture idea up he confirmed that he had.

Those type of chats and observations led to including emotions as part of the journey as well as how they changed over the course of the programme.

3.1 Emotional impact

'I think one of the keys to being a successful entrepreneur - not that I'm successful yet - but I believe one of the keys is being resilient to all those moods, to all those rollercoaster rides. To be able to understand that this is a natural process and you'll go through this, and having the resilience and the stamina to hang in. And once you've - if you can hang in on, then I think you'll be successful, because you put the work and effort into it.' (Shane, interview 1)

Having realised that the entrepreneurial journey is emotionally challenging for the entrepreneurs, it is important to explore how the environment in the incubator affected it. In times when one felt down what the incubator provided was emotional support. I have already noted that challenging entrepreneur's ideas was intense and difficult experience (Chapter 5, section 3.2 and Chapter 4, section 3.2.4). And yet this was what most early stage social entrepreneurs needed:

'early stage social entrepreneurs need challenging on their value proposition, and need to question, question, question, and so on, in a supportive way' (Beth, interview)

However what sort of emotional reactions questioning ignites in liminars has not been studied much (apart from Boland, 2013; Turner, 1969). Sandra for instance shared that in the beginning the emotional support provided by the peers was very crucial to her when she pivoted and changed her strategy:

'...living through that is quite draining. And getting other people's perspective and just being with other people that's going, 'That's okay, I did that as well' that really helps, as well as getting ideas from other people and sharing ideas. So I really, really have benefited from that.' (interview 2)

This environment provided a shared experience and thus sole entrepreneurs did not feel alone on their journeys. Sandra talked about the energy they received from being together:

'So I don't think that I would be where I am with it, if I hadn't have been on the programme. I think my energy levels would have meant that something else happened, either I just decided to take a career break, or maybe I would have gone back doing something else, I don't know.' (interview 2)

Both Nate and Sandra did not feel that they have achieved what the programme wanted them to achieve in terms of venture development but both of them felt that the programme helped them last longer than they would have otherwise managed. This powerful potential

of the *communitas* had helped entrepreneurs, especially the ones at the early stages of venture development who needed more peer support and encouragement.

Shane explained the impact of the *communitas* in their transition from employee to an entrepreneur:

'anyone who wants to start off with something different in their life and makes a transition to get out of their normal nine to five kind of role you're in, you want to start something and make a break. You've got to have some kind of passion to drive you to do this in the first place, but when you're with a room full of people with passion, all trying to do the same thing, then it really becomes quite an exciting buzz' (interview 3)

The *communitas* passion and moral support was making it easier to transition from a state of being an employee to the new and unsettling state of being an entrepreneur. However the downside was that it became too exciting: 'it gets too interesting, because when you come in here you tend to spend a lot of time talking to the other ventures to find out how they're doing, and vice-versa they're asking you how you're doing' (ibid.). The same was experienced by Sandra, Lucy and Nate, a healthy, invigorating distraction for Nate though. Thus managing the balance between dipping into the *communitas* and running the venture was key. To be successful they needed both depending on their venture stage of development.

Another aspect of the incubator liminal space that helped the venture founders with their transition to becoming entrepreneurs was its sense of familiarity. Sandra elaborated on the way she ended up in the role of an entrepreneur. It was not planned, it emerged from the situation she was in:

'I think a lot of people, certainly for me, I've always been used, I haven't been an entrepreneur all my life, I didn't necessarily think what do I want to do? I want to be an entrepreneur, what can I do? I just - this need emerged and I was like, well, I've got the right experience to do this and then the drive, so I'm going to do it' But I've always been used to working for brands, established companies in the past and you don't know how much working for something that's already established affects your own behaviour, and your own conduct, and your own expectations of how quickly you can progress things. Until you're not doing it and you're doing it for yourself.

And so being part of an incubator that's supported by bigger companies brings back some of that familiarity, and makes you feel like you're in a slightly more familiar, comfortable situation, even though you're completely exposed. So it does - it's really helpful for that.' (interview 3)

The familiarity of the situation and space therefore brought the comfort of the known in the rite of passage of becoming an entrepreneur. That feeling of being exposed Sandra alluded to was further intensified by the visibility some experienced. Once again it was both motivating and stressful at the same time. Similarly to the emotional visibility Shane referred to previously, success and failure were visible too:

'I mean, stress, anxiety, this is very visible, actually, we're highly visible. Whether I sink or swim everyone will see that, and we're very aware of it, all of us. And that's odd, because

I'm sure it's the same for everyone, I mean, like Alex he's just come into this, his idea is quite recent. Maybe most people are like that, but I was chuntering along for a while quite privately, thank you very much. My friends kind of knew what was going on and I was telling them about it, but nobody was looking at my accounts, nobody was waiting to see how are you going to do? Are you going to do well and are you going to do the social incubator proud, and everything that they've put in? You feel a sense of that, in a way. So that's quite interesting, is highly motivating - it's a very motivating factor.' (Lucy, interview 1)

In her second interview Lucy shared that she thought it was hard to be around people who were doing really well when your business was struggling, referring to others as her business was doing well. And in the final interview she elaborated once again that:

'the incubator is a particular space in which you can compare to other people, and feel intimidated. And I think that must happen for most people in an incubator, and maybe that's encouraging for some people, but that has never helped me. I'm not somebody who finds unfavourable comparisons to other people a motivating factor. So there's been some businesses here, as you know, big ones like Flora's that I can look at and feel intimidated by.' (interview 3)

The fact that the cohort did not comprise of uniform and equal ventures and entrepreneurs, as in a typical *communitas*, caused some entrepreneurs like Lucy to experience the negative aspects of incubation liminality such as unfavourable comparisons and intimidation. Despite that Lucy confirmed that she had changed a lot as a person. The main transformation for her was increasing her confidence. She was a good example of an entrepreneur who achieved a great personal transformation throughout the programme thus showing that growth did not only apply to the venture:

'I can't quite believe it's going so well and I'm changing a lot as a person, and my confidence has been growing and growing. It was really knocked in the NHS - my confidence - and I look back there and I think I would never have been able to go up the ladder and take on more responsibility, just it wasn't going to happen. Even though people could see I had it in me, I just wasn't going to fit. So the fact that I can do this - so, I mean, I am really, really chuffed to bits, actually, really delighted and every day... I mean, I'm tired and I'm working harder than I have in a long time, but I just feel really chuffed and proud of my life and what I'm doing. And that's just such a good feeling, Christ, you know!' (Lucy, interview 2)

And yet constant change was tiring. Even Samuel commented that the journey is 'very challenging, very hard mentally, physically, emotionally just draining, and it's hugely, it's only when there's only one of you really just driving it' (interview 3). There was this contradiction inherent in the entrepreneurial journey both being at the same time 'really stressful, and a lot of pressure; but, equally, very rewarding and very exciting' (Karen, interview 3). Constant change meant that some entrepreneurs 'never ever feel completely settled' (Sandra, interview 3) but at the same time it was relative to how they felt in terms of where they were on their journey. If they were progressing and their ventures were developing that meant that the change would not be experienced as negative. As Lucy had mentioned, the incubator was a place where people compare to others and if things were not going well it made it an uncomfortable place to be in. According to Sandra in order to cope with that constant change and tiredness 'you do need to have a lot of

energy' (ibid.). Energy, as they admitted earlier, was derived from being together with likeminded people, encouraging each other, essentially being part of the *communitas*.

But the emotional support did not only come from peers. The business advisors in their support role did not only provide venture support and advice but also their very presence positively influenced the entrepreneurs' anxiety and fear. The entrepreneurial journey being scary, as many have pointed out, necessitated a support mechanism for them to cope with it. One of those mechanisms was the *communitas*. However for others there was another comforting element on the programme. Sandra explained that just by knowing that she was supported by expert people in the field, masters of ceremony in this entrepreneurial transition, reassured her and helped her battle the fear of the unknown:

'even though it's a perception, I'm not kind of sitting down with Beth and going through everything that I'm doing, but the fact that I know that she's there really does make a difference. And Colin, you know, even Colin, I've had like one meeting with him, one or two meetings, but every time I see him I catch up with him, I'll text him occasionally, he's put me in contact with a few people. And I know he's there, Norman, the same. I don't have very much contact with these people, but I know that they're there... and also to know that - I'm in contact with companies and five of them could turn around at once and say, 'Yes, we want to go' and for some reason, because I know that these people are here, they're not going to be doing it, they're not going to be helping, but the knowledge that they're there gives me the confidence to not be afraid by that. Or to blast through any fear that I might have a bit, and be like, 'Well, it's okay, it's going to be okay'. I think that's where I am now, yeah.' (interview 2)

This section provided an overview of the emotional texture of liminality, the experience of the liminal condition and its impact on entrepreneurs. The rite of passage framework offered a shift in incubatee focus from the venture to the entrepreneur, showing that the process sometimes impacted the latter as much as the former. I now turn to another incubation outcome - entrepreneurial learning.

3.2 Learning

Learning through sharing ideas and experiences was expected to be facilitated through a cohort approach to incubation. This was less obvious and structured than the learning from planned workshops, talks and trainings (Chapter 4, section 3.2.4). Here I focus on the impact of the programme on entrepreneurial learning. In fact learning was also part of the journey of the incubation programme itself. As a new approach to social venture support, the best way to incubate them was not certain: 'Our vision is to understand through delivery, research and data gathering the best methods for supporting social entrepreneurs to scale' (document concerning the future of the programme).

Some entrepreneurs, like Matt, did not learn much about running a business. Flora for instance shared that she had already learnt a lot about that in the previous programme she attended and here she had the opportunity to share the knowledge but 'probably

didn't have the same kind of output, or the same kind of benefits as the other companies because we're at a different stage' (interview 2). However she had learned a lot about 'building the team... and how to deal with people' (interview 3). Matt learned that it takes a lot of patience and perseverance in dealing with people and managing them. Samuel had realised that being a lone entrepreneur was not good and he changed that by the end of the programme. Those three entrepreneurs had learnt from their entrepreneurial journeys and did not attribute any of the learning experiences to the programme as a direct impact. It was learning which emerged from running their ventures and would have happened anyway. Thus incubation impact, similarly to social impact itself (Clark et al., 2004), is only a portion of the total outcome that would have happened anyway if the venture did not join the programme. For instance Samuel did not decide to expand his team as a result of the programme recommendations but rather learned the hard way through his experience in running everything on his own.

Others however benefitted a lot from the learning opportunities in the incubator. Karen shared that she learnt through talking and through 'being shown' (interview 2). Thus she learnt a lot of things related to the practical running of a business like online accounting:

'I wouldn't have known where to start with that and I would have freaked out, and got really stressed when it became a mess and I hadn't done it. But, actually, having Beth and other people saying, 'Right, have you tried zero? Right, this is how you use it. This is a bank reconciliation. This is where and how you need to file your accounts, this is...'. And, actually, I really enjoy it and it's very straightforward, to an extent, most of it is, I'd say 90 per cent of it is. But no one's ever sat down with me and explained those things, so I've learnt how to do those things, which I think, well, I was never taught business at school and I never looked it up. So I guess I've just learnt various legal things, or financial things that is new to me; but, equally, a lot of it isn't rocket science, it's just the language or the façade of it. So I think it should be taught more. I've learnt, I think, how important networking is, and how important your links, your personal link is in regards to spreading word.' (interview 3)

Lucy was very surprised herself to have learnt 'about business models and business plans, and financing and investment' (interview 1). Similarly to Karen she learnt a lot with regards to numbers and cash flow forecasts. She learned a lot from her business advisor and the peers: 'being in that environment where people are discussing and talking, and sharing ideas that has been very helpful for me. But, yeah, it's learning from each other' (interview 3). And her personal progress was enormous, a real journey, a transition: '...and I've learnt that I can run a business, I mean, I just wasn't sure I could and now I know I can' (ibid.). She gained confidence that she could do that and she had become a social entrepreneur successfully establishing a social venture as a result of being on the programme. The incubation rite of passage impacted her as an entrepreneur as well as the venture (see section 2).

There were some missed opportunities in learning too. Both Nate and Sandra experienced that. In the beginning Nate started with learning a lot about the lean startup

approach in social venturing and the language related to start-ups like business model, minimum viable product, grant funding, loan funding, equity funding etc., all part of the special language (van Gennep, 1960) used in the incubation transitional period, vocabulary unknown outside the start-up community. As mentioned earlier the cohort sessions were an opportunity to learn about becoming an entrepreneur for him, learning from peers (Chapter 5, section 3.3). Hence he experienced the termination of the formal cohort meetings as a drawback. He really emphasised the learning from the whole programme through sharing their stories. This became evident at the graduation party, which he referred to as 'celebration of the successes'. However for him the failures, or the less successful entrepreneurial stories, were resources to learn from: 'I would have benefited I think from listening to people's stories in terms of the things that have gone well, and things that haven't gone so well, and I would have enjoyed more time to do that' (interview 3). For him learning was the most important outcome of the programme:

'you can still say the programme is also about learning, getting people to learn about their journey in terms of going down a cul-de-sac, hitting the buffers or whatever;... I've learnt a huge amount from it and that's my learning. But I just think that that learning won't be heard by other people in other cohorts'(ibid.)

Furthermore, Nate personally did not feel a failure when he decided to go back to employment. For him this was a learning experience, a personal entrepreneurial journey:

'I don't think that I'm leaving the programme and going back into the charitable sector, I hope what I'm doing is I'm taking social enterprise principles and practices into my work with the charity that I'm with at the moment... I'm obviously taking a year's long learning about social enterprises back into the charitable sector.' (ibid.)

Sandra also regretted that she had to learn the hard way how long it took 'to sell into companies' (interview 3). Her plans and projections about how she was going to generate money were 'ridiculous' but she could not understand why and felt like nobody questioned her enough: 'they never got me to think in the detail about making the idea into reality, and that was where I was going wrong' (ibid.). Her idea was big and she did not manage to turn it into reality over the course of a year because she was always 'so sure and focused on what I needed' (ibid.). And when it all came to an end she felt that she 'needed much more delving into', she did not know what to do. The venture had not started generating income and the idea still needed support to become a reality:

'it's that gap between the detail of day-to-day reality and making it real, and the ideal story behind the vision that you might present as part of a business case. And that gap definitely exists and, yeah, I'm really glad that I've learnt it, but I think how would I have reacted if somebody had said that' (ibid.)

She herself has learned a lot through going through the journey, but somehow the impact on that learning was through her own experience and she missed the practical support, the 'detail of day-to-day reality'.

Finally Shane believed that sharing ideas with one another was helpful as well as sharing experiences and 'pitfalls and problems, and how you'll overcome' (interview 1) them. He did not talk about a life-changing learning journey but the sharing environment created by the incubator, as they were all there together. Nevertheless the commonality of shared ideas, problems, solutions, and experiences generally had made the most impact on him. He referred to one of his applications for funding and he shared that Flora and Samuel gave him some very good tips about the words he should use as they had had a lot of experience with those types of applications. So that was an example of the 'mutual learning' (Nick, interview) envisaged by the organisers.

The enquiry into learning as part of the incubation process shows that learning happened through various routes - peers as much as business advisors. Learning was not an outcome for all entrepreneurs, similarly Hirschman et al. (2012) suggest that not all rites of passage are successful (Chapter 7, section 2.3). In an incubation context not only failure was possible but a wide spectrum of outcomes, different than the initially envisaged by the organisers (Chapter 4). Learning was an intended outcome but did not happen for all. Similarly not all entrepreneurs were emotionally affected by the transition (section 3.1). And finally the impact on the ventures themselves varied too (section 2).

4. Graduate - What does graduation mean?

I have already discussed the proceeding of graduation and what it entailed as a ceremony in chapter 4. Here I focus on what graduation and being a graduate meant for the entrepreneurs. I also evaluate their perceived readiness to incorporate into the business world. The texture of post-liminality is presented as a range of possible outcomes from the social incubation rite of passage.

up-and-running and self-sustaining

Lucy felt a success and proud of what she had achieved. In fact she had exceeded her expectations as initially she 'couldn't visualise the future, I wasn't sure. But I certainly didn't expect myself to be here...' (interview 3).

At graduation she felt confident that her venture would be sustainable in the future. She was certain that all that was due to 'what the incubator has given me' (ibid.). Her need to go at her own pace and grow organically also meant that scaling would be a slow process: 'so I can see myself maybe in three years' time and I would have been, really starting to scale-up' (ibid.). Even though that at the very last cohort meeting she could only picture herself as a chicken spreading her wings trying to fly by graduation, she actually ended up

feeling ready to fly the nest and stand on her own two feet, 'up-and-running and self-sustaining' (ibid.).

Karen was also feeling the same way as Lucy, though not generating the revenue Lucy did. She pictured graduation as 'launching' and was ready to 'crack on'. She even started seeking less help from her business advisor 'so it feels just a natural ending, really' (interview 3). Similar to Lucy she did not expect to have achieved what she did by the end of the programme 'in regards to how the business model was changed, and the bookings that we're getting, because even for me it was quite a foreign concept to ask for money and payment' (ibid.). Their graduation was equivalent to a successful transition both as entrepreneurs and ventures. They both felt ready for incorporation and had managed to develop their ventures further even though they did not achieve the venture transition designed by the organisers ticking all their criteria for investment-readiness (analysed in section 2). Venture incorporation was determined by those but in practice it involved different outcomes as in Karen and Lucy's case. Achieving all the growth and venture development criteria was not essential for venture incorporation into the business world outside the incubator.

ready but not-self sustaining

Shane felt good about graduating even though he did not manage to launch his product. Nevertheless he shared that graduation meant that he had 'completed a phase in my business journey and I'm ready to stand on my own two feet' (interview 3). He felt more confident as a result of completing the programme. However his expectations at the beginning were not met. He expected that by graduation he would have given up his part-time job, secured funding and located a team in the Hatchery (a venture transition). He also expected to have launched the product. He did not manage to meet his expectations but nevertheless felt good about completing the programme. He attributed slow venture progress to lack of funding. Nevertheless this had made him more resilient 'to come up with other options' (ibid.). Through the programme he made a few connections and he was collaborating with them, thus entering in reciprocal exchange arrangements for completing his product.

still very much baby

Sandra and Nate felt a bit disappointed because they did not feel self-sustainable at graduation. Sandra really experienced tension between feeling proud and successful for completing the programme and at the same time disappointed because the venture was 'not revenue-generating, the business isn't ticking over, it's not supporting itself, it's still very much baby, albeit it's been validated massively this year, it's still very much in its

infancy' (interview 3). She was grappling whether she felt a bit of a fraud because of that controversy. Receiving the graduate logo and badge really meant a lot to her because she had 'got some seriously experienced people in social entrepreneurship believing in my venture enough to allow us to put a graduate badge on it' (ibid.). The symbolic value of that allowed her to feel successful regardless. Her rite of passage had been very different from that of Lucy and Karen and thus the incorporation rite was experienced differently. She experienced the entrepreneurial transition but not that of the venture. In Shane's case it was the same though he was more upbeat and less wordy about it. The only difference between the two of them was the fact that despite not being self-sustaining at the end of it he felt he was ready to stand on his own feet and she admitted she was not. In addition he had been working on his venture idea for years before joining the programme and she started only a year earlier. In a sense he had already been on his own and he was thus more confident about it after the programme too. At the end of the programme she admitted that she had 'come out of the process feeling more confused than I have been throughout it' (ibid.) and that was why she really felt the need to be part of a support system (section 3.1). She was happy that she could keep in touch with the mentors and peers through slack (the communication tool): 'the fact that I know that they're there means a lot to me and so I'll just continue to think that I'm still part of it until I'm ready to think otherwise, really' (ibid.). She was not ready for incorporation as she was still experiencing the ambiguity typical for the liminal condition.

Nate was actually feeling a bit of a failure even though he received the graduate badge too. He admitted he had accepted a well-paid job at a charity. Nevertheless he was going to keep working on his venture one day a week. He made a reverse transition back to employment. However he did not feel he personally failed as he was 'going back into the charitable sector and applying the learning that I've got from social enterprise and taking it back into the charitable sector' (interview 3). He went through a personal learning journey, but the venture journey was not successful in terms of generating him the income he needed to live on and thus he had decided to have a well-paid job taking the entrepreneurial learning back to being an employee.

a detached view of it

There was another group of entrepreneurs who did not really think of graduation as having any particular meaning or importance. Both Samuel and Matt did not think the word graduation was appropriate because this was 'not like a university where I've got a degree' (Matt, interview 3). Samuel even pointed out that it was not a programme where an expectation of certain achievements was necessary in order to graduate:

'This didn't feel like any kind of programme of graduation; you graduate from a course or a programme and you receive some kind of certification at the end of it, because you've achieved x. SVI wasn't a programme that you graduated from to achieve x.' (interview 3)

Looking at the diverse range of graduates and their achievements, he was right to think that it did not resemble any degree graduation as such. However the organisers had specific expectations and aims that they wanted to be achieved in terms of venture development and growth (chapter 4 - also see fig. 3). The fact that people graduated without achieving them caused people like Samuel and Matt to have a detached view of it. Nevertheless Matt admitted the programme was hugely beneficial for him, in a very narrow and specific way, attributing this to the less need for help he had:

'... I never was really part of it, to be honest. For me, it was just a place I could work from and benefit from if it happened. I had a more cynical perhaps detached view of it than others, but then I probably needed less help than others. But the help I got is invaluable, and that networking help is absolutely, it's critical to where I am today. So there's no question about it, being part of the programme has been of enormous benefit.' (interview 3)

The incubation programme was not an entrepreneurial rite of passage for them but rather a place to grow their ventures via tapping into relevant networks or using the free office space (using the resources). Flora also, as previously discussed, did not need the support in terms of advice that much and did not learn much. Thus she equated graduation to moving out of the free office space. She had benefitted mostly from that aspect of the programme as they were at the stage of developing the team and growing its size, thus benefiting mostly from infrastructure's economies of scale (Bruneel et al., 2012). The free provision of office space had enabled that and saved them a lot of money especially at the stage prior to their first investment round which happened midway through the programme. They moved out and rented an office within the SEBC, something the organisers expected of the graduate companies. Graduation meant office independence she explained: 'we're independent and we can decide how to - what our business should look like in terms of office space, and we can arrange it as we want ' (interview 3). However their venture incorporation and transition was not an outcome of the incubation process but a result of the entrepreneur's skills and abilities, acquired beforehand, and their strategic engagement with the provision of free office space and tapping into incubator's networks. The organisers' expertise and peer support were not what they needed in their venture rite of passage.

5. Key findings

The last findings chapter demonstrates that incubation was a rite of passage for both the entrepreneurs and the ventures. The indicators for venture development and growth set by the organisers (see Chapter 4) showed that none of the ventures fulfilled them all. The ventures who needed venture-centric type of support became investment ready. However no increase in social impact was noticed as the ventures were pre-revenue or delayed the development of their impact monitoring systems as priority was given to their product development and financial sustainability.

Incubation impact extended beyond the venture and included entrepreneurs too. Being part of the incubator *communitas* supplied entrepreneurs with energy to last longer, it offered support in difficult times and helped the transition to becoming an entrepreneur. This finding illuminated the less heroic side of social entrepreneurship. Together with the positive impact of this liminal space there were negative impacts too. It was a highly visible space where success and failure were easily noticed. The heterogeneity of the ventures and entrepreneurs was intimidating and at the same time motivating. The emotional volatility of social entrepreneurs became apparent which countered heroic representations in literature. In addition to emotional support incubation offered entrepreneurs a learning opportunity. Entrepreneurs who needed entrepreneur-centric support acquired a lot of knowledge related to running a business. The others did not learn anything new. Knowledge was imparted by both the business advisors as masters of ceremony and the peers too.

Finally the texture of post-liminality included a range of outcomes. The incubation rite of passage led to a successful incorporation into the business world offering both an entrepreneurial and venture transition. For others the incubation programme was a means to grow their venture (venture RoP) but did not involve any entrepreneurial transition (those who needed venture-centric support). For another group of entrepreneurs graduation did not mean incorporation, they were not ready to be on their own even though they learned and changed a lot themselves (entrepreneur RoP). Lastly some did not change any aspect of the entrepreneur-venture dyad, leading to their dropping out of the programme earlier.

I now bring all the main findings of this thesis together into a discussion of the contributions I make answering the research questions.

Chapter 7: Bringing it together: the social entrepreneur-venture rite of passage

1. Introduction

In this final chapter of the dissertation, I would like to return to the research questions and discuss the findings in the context of the extant literature:

- 1) What is the nature of social venture incubation?
- 2) How and why do entrepreneurs engage with the social incubation process?
- 3) What are the impact and outcomes of this rite of passage on entrepreneurs and their ventures?

The first section of the chapter discusses the nature of social venture incubation. I argue that social venture incubation is a transition of both entrepreneurs and ventures, thus clarifying the nature of the incubatee being an entrepreneur-venture dyad. Then I proceed with a discussion of each of the three incubation phases - selection, incubation and graduation. I discuss them through the lens of rite of passage and show how this theory sheds light on the incubation process. Further to that the empirical data shows that those phases are not the same for all. My analysis of the empirical setting offers an opportunity to expand the theory itself. Here I also focus on the texture of liminality exploring in depth the incubatees' experiences and feelings associated with incubation, once more contributing to conceptualisations of liminality. Then I discuss the nature and dynamics of the elements (business advice, networks and connections, cohort, space, training) of social venture incubation most of which have also been studied by other incubation scholars. Here I explain how they relate to one another using rite of passage theorisation. Following a discussion of entrepreneurial engagement with the incubation elements I continue with explaining the basic processes of social exchange within the incubator.

I then turn to the central role of engagement in the incubation process. A matrix of business incubation models is presented where they differ along two dimensions: engagement and need for support. Then I discuss the engagement dynamics during the course of the SVI programme and show that different incubation models are needed at different stages of entrepreneur-venture development. I focus on the social exchanges taking place in the incubator, and show how the concept of social exchange is useful in explaining *communitas* formation and maintenance in a context with weak authority

structure. Further to that social exchanges between business advisors and entrepreneurs enable access to resources such as contacts and knowledge.

The next section addresses the third research question and provides insight into the relationship between engagement and incubation impact. I also look into the nature of impact and discuss 'softer' outcomes for the evaluation of incubation impact. I then examine incubation impact at the level of the venture and the entrepreneur. I contribute to incubation studies as the impact upon entrepreneurs was underexplored in previous studies. I explain the relationship between entrepreneurial background, stage of venture, engagement and impact and present a matrix which categorises incubation impact according to its locus - the venture or the entrepreneur, or both.

Finally I bring all the contributions together in a separate section. I identify contributions to incubation studies, organisational studies, theory, entrepreneurship studies, practical and methodological contributions.

2. The nature of social venture incubation

Addressing the first research question I use the theory of rite of passage to contribute to the myriad of efforts to theorise incubation Hackett and Dilts (2004a) have discussed. This provides an insight into the nature and dynamics of relationships at the incubator, the meaning of the incubation phases and the value of the incubation elements.

2.1 Guiding and supporting social ventures

The social incubator was designed as a support programme for early-stage ventures with the aim to accelerate their growth and help them become investment-ready. However scaling social impact was as important to the organisers as growing the ventures (Chapter 4, section 2.2). Social venture incubation places social impact at the very heart of the process compared to other incubators where the aim is to become investment-ready and reach financial sustainability only (Campbell et al., 1985; Bearse, 1998; Barrow, 2001; Hackett and Dilts, 2004b). In that sense SVI had a different aim which needed to be addressed in terms of support and monitoring activities.

The organisers adopted a venture-centric incubation model (Chapter 4, section 3.2.5). Thus their collection of data and monitoring activities focused on venture size, financial sustainability and social impact. The expected outcomes and the means to realise them related to the venture only (Chapter 4, see fig.3). Similarly most current studies on business incubation emphasise the firm level of analysis (Bergek and Norrman, 2008;

Grimaldi and Grandi, 2005) when it comes to defining the purposes and processes in business incubation. At SVI the organisers made the distinction between growth and development – as suggested by Bearse (1998) - and monitored both via quarterly reports and the venture progress spreadsheets respectively (Chapter 4, section 3.2.6). The underpinnings of a successful business were the indicators of venture development and business advisors focused their efforts on achieving them.

The intended transformation of a venture idea into a viable business was initially a multi-step loan application process and progression was determined by whether or not the venture obtained debt capital. The acquisition of debt capital was supposed to develop and grow the venture enough to become investable by the end of the programme - a transition of the venture. The incubation programme, designed to guide and support the ventures, was, I have argued, similar to that of a rite of passage in traditional societies where the purpose was to guide and support people through life changes of state, social position, place and age (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). I have already discussed the application of liminality in current organisation studies literature in chapter 2. Its processual character, as part of a rite of passage guiding people through transitions, has been neglected by scholars (Beech, 2011). Moreover not very many formal rites of passage exist in secular societies which guide subjects through social transitions (Meira, 2014). However there is another transitional process happening during incubation. In this modern setting the incubation rite of passage transforms the ordinary person into an entrepreneur (Chapter 6, section 3.2) – a person with special (sacred) status in contemporary society (also in line with the heroic representations of social entrepreneurs criticised by Dacin et al., 2011). However that transition was not observed in all entrepreneurs.

2.2 The subjects and objects of incubation – the entrepreneur-venture dyad

My study suggests that assuming that social ventures are the objects of incubation is inaccurate. The outcomes of incubation include a transformation of the venture (Chapter 6, section 2) - Lucy's, Karen's, Samuel's and Flora's ventures have developed and grown over the incubation period. The entrepreneurs however also experienced a transformation, those were the ones who did not have any business education or entrepreneurial background. The rite of passage of inanimate objects has already been studied by Hirschman et al. (2012) establishing that 'all matter and spaces pass through transitions' (p.372). Ventures are also inanimate objects in Hirschman's sense. The incubatee is thus a dualistic entity comprised of an entrepreneur and a venture - the subject and object of the incubation rite of passage. The contractual and monitoring

regime underplayed the individual with all efforts being directed toward the venture (Chapter 4, section 3.2). That caused entrepreneurs like Nate, who lacked the business/entrepreneurial background and/or were at an early stage of venture development, to experience difficulties with engaging with the process of incubation. I discuss engagement in section 3 below.

Applying a RoP framework has meant that the inseparability of the entrepreneur from the venture is clear. Similarly to the organisers at SVI most incubation studies focus on the objects of incubation, the firms and very few on the entrepreneurs (Bøllingtoft and UihØi, 2005; Ebbers, 2014). Some of the former have admitted not taking entrepreneurs into account as an omission in their research (Hackett and Dilts, 2008). However a pragmatist view of the liminal entity would take into account both entrepreneurs and their ventures, in a subject-object dyad as the experiencing subject and the experienced object are one and thus cannot be studied separately (Hatch, 2013). The complex composition of the liminal entity is a contribution to the theory of rite of passage too, adding an inanimate object to the liminar, the animate subject. In addition, understanding incubation as a process affecting the entrepreneur-venture dyad will also have implications for the future design of incubation programmes, and social incubation programmes in particular. In some instances the process changed the entrepreneurs more than the venture (as in the case of Nate). The nature of incubatees will have an impact on incubation evaluation studies (Bearse, 1998; section 4) and the design of incubation models (section 3, fig. 7).

2.3 Incubation phases

In addition to clarifying who and what the incubatees are, the rite of passage theory provides theoretical insight into the purpose and nature of the incubation process as a transition. It comprises the phases of incubation (selection, incubation and graduation) and the elements of incubation (space, training, business advice, peer support, networks) thus providing an integrated dynamic model of the business incubation process which Phan et al. (2005) called for. Hereafter I discuss those phases and structures.

The purpose of the selection phase was to separate the social ventures with the greatest potential to scale and become investment-ready. These Cabinet Office aims were adopted by the organisers (Chapter 4) and thus positioned the programme as a venture-centric incubation process, enabling the rite of passage for the ventures. In the case of social venture incubation, establishing that the venture was social was key at the separation phase. However the interpretation of 'social' was quite broad. In fact the range of ventures that applied and the ones that joined the programme included technology companies, environmental (cleantech), mental health service based businesses (Chapter 5, section

2), in short ventures from any sector that share one thing in common - the aim to have social impact and/or create social change. Therefore the SVI separation rite was not effective in terms of creating a uniform cohort with common needs and interests, essential for the development of *communitas* (Turner, 1969). The initial aim to recruit ventures ready to scale was impossible as applicants ranged from ideation to growth stages of development. This seems to be a contradictory reality that social incubation support programmes have to accept and manage. The SVI organisers quickly realised that the non-uniformity and inequality of the ventures was an issue and a distinguishing characteristic of social venture incubators. This had implications on venture engagement with the elements of the programme which I discuss next. RoP provides a theoretical explanation why most incubators specialise in a particular sector such as technology which is considered an incubation success factor (Smilor, 1987; Aerts et al., 2007).

The ceremonial dimension of the selection process was the social venture weekend, which I have analysed in detail in chapter 4 (section 3.1.2). The venue where it took place was as attractive as what it stood for - a well-respected business school with expertise in entrepreneurship education and its very own Social Innovation Centre. The separation rite includes a ceremony to symbolically detach the person from their previous place in society and/or state (Turner, 1969). At the SVW business school staff aimed to educate social entrepreneurs in starting a business as most of them did not have that background. They introduced the social entrepreneurs to business practices such as defining a value proposition, developing a business model and pitching. The entrepreneurs not only became familiar with the organisers 'who will supervise their excursion into liminality' (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003: 279), but also were introduced to the practices associated with starting a business.

Dacin et al. (2011) have pointed out the aim to inculcate social entrepreneurs into practices specific to the sector 'reinforcing the expectations associated with social entrepreneurship' (p.1209). In contrast here the organisers at SVI, and the incubation programme in general, were trying to inculcate social entrepreneurs in conventional business practices and teach them how to start a business with social impact at its heart. Understood in terms of the rite of passage the event and ceremony intended to detach them from their previous focus on the 'social' mission and shift attention to 'venture' creation. The weekend culminated in a business 'Dragon's Den' event - pitching to a panel of judges, which was also part of the assessment in the selection process. Despite pitching being only one element of the assessment, its ceremonial arrangement led most participants to experience it as the only significant assessment process. This pre-liminal rite was similar to the one discussed by Simpson et al. (2009) of MBA students on their

journey to becoming managers. The social venture separation rite was a necessary step on the journey to becoming a successful social entrepreneur.

In addition some aspects of the typical liminal condition were experienced during the rite of separation too. Some authors have already discussed emotions and experiences from the liminal phase seeping into post-liminality (Simpson et al., 2009). In chapter 4 (section 3.1.2) I have discussed emotions and experiences typical for liminality which were experienced in the pre-liminal phase too - scrutiny and anxiety. Imparting knowledge was emphasised too - a practice typical for the liminal phase. The function of the separation rite ceremony was expanded beyond its original aim of detachment from the previous status or state in society. Therefore boundaries between the two rite of passage phases blur here too. The condition of liminality is not bound by the separation and incorporation rite.

Graduation was also celebrated with a ceremony and a party, both aiming to showcase the entrepreneurs' achievements. The symbolic meaning of the graduation phase was to celebrate success and to show the transformation, emphasising the impact the programme had made on social venture creation. In addition the aim was to highlight the foundations that were established for the future, a ritual showing that they were ready to incorporate into the business world and end the rite of passage. However not all reached that desired state (Chapter 6, section 3.3). Sandra and Nate did attend the event and received a graduate badge but were not examples of venture success stories. They felt fraudulent as their ventures were not financially viable or investable to incorporate into the business world. Their position was akin to temporary workers or consultants (Garsten, 1999; Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003) in that they felt that they were in permanent liminal condition, in a position of ambiguity and uncertainty. Careers generally are becoming increasingly liminal (Tempest and Starkey, 2004) and (social) entrepreneurship as an alternative is inherently liminal as I have observed programmes designed to guide and support transitional experiences, such as SVI, do not always lead to the desired incorporation either.

Very little attention is given to graduation as opposed to selection in incubation literature in general. Apart from the exit point from an incubator after 3-5 years (Bergek and Norrman, 2008) and interest being focused on graduation rates (Peters et al., 2004), there is no insight on how graduates perceive their future. Using ethnography and the rite of passage schema has provided insights into the varied nature of the graduates and the significance of graduation. The observation that not all of them reached incorporation into the world of business indicates that we have to question the success of the designed rite of passage. Readiness to graduate thus needs to be taken into account by incubator practitioners.

Allowing a group of entrepreneurs at various stages to graduate devalued the graduation badge for the ones who had achieved venture investment-readiness (Chapter 6, section 3.3).

In addition these findings make a contribution to the rite of passage theory itself. The fact that some entrepreneurs dropped out and did not graduate means that not all transitions are successful, a weakness in Van Gennep's and Turner's theory. This is also acknowledged by Hirschman et al. (2012), who point out the possibility of failure in transitions of unanimated objects. I observed a similar phenomenon in the context of social venture incubation. Not only was failure possible, but also a whole spectrum of venture-entrepreneur graduate configurations emerged (Chapter 6, section 3.3). My findings question the assumed infallibility of the rite of passage schema. There is not only the possibility of failure but also all the nuanced outcomes of such a passage which lie between the two ends of the spectrum - success and failure. Those include entrepreneurs who felt ready, confident they could make it on their own, despite the lack of financial sustainability. There were also graduates, like Nate and Sandra, who did not feel ready to be on their own nor did they become self-sufficient according to the organisers. The emotions associated with the liminal phase such as ambiguity and uncertainty, which Sandra also experienced at graduation, seep into post-liminality (Simpson et al., 2009) confirming the permeability of boundaries between these two distinct phases.

The middle incubation phase started with the kick-off day when the selected social entrepreneurs were introduced to the programme structure, aims and staff team. This was an initiation rite into the liminal phase, acquainting the selected entrepreneurs with the organisers who would take them through the transition. In a similar fashion employees are introduced to the consultants in the context of organisational change (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003). This phase is the longest and it is dynamic, both in terms of (1) changes taking place within the entrepreneur-venture dyad and (2) engagement of the entrepreneurs with the elements of incubation. The entrepreneurs' business ideas were challenged and questioned by the programme organisers. Many of the entrepreneurs found this process of constant scrutiny difficult. These ambiguous and uncertain transitional experiences are characteristics of liminality (Turner, 1969; Simpson et al., 2009). Nate's story very well depicts this in that he was unsure about whether he should continue attending workshops to learn more about how to run his business, or whether he should just get on with it. Sandra was not sure whether to cancel her pilot workshop or run it for the two people who booked it. Worries about the incubation process preoccupied the entrepreneurs.

Some entrepreneurs experienced the temporal nature of this passage quite strongly. Such experiences of the approaching end of support signalled the fear of incorporation into the world of business (Chapter 5, section 3.4; Chapter 6, section 3.3). That fear was related to the worry that the desired outcome, self-sufficiency, would not be achieved in time for graduation (*ibid.*). Thus some of them perceived the end of the programme as a looming edge off a cliff (Sandra). Those entrepreneurs who did not reach the desired sustainability experienced doubt which spilled over into the post-liminal phase (also noted by Simpson et al., 2009). They expressed anxiety about their approaching graduation and the prospect of leaving the comfort of the incubator and the support provided. Thus anxiety and uncertainty during the liminal, middle phase are also caused by the temporal nature of the passage, the approaching end.

Further to the typical liminal experiences of anxiety, ambiguity and uncertainty, there were others specific to the incubation context. Incubation widened the span of liminal situations thus adding to the list of properties of liminality which Turner (1969) claimed as incomplete. Although most members of the cohort reported that just being selected had enhanced their credibility, the liminal phase was still characterised as an emotional rollercoaster. Enhanced credibility is typical for entrepreneurs being accepted into an incubator (Dee et. al., 2011). The challenges, questioning, and the variable success of their ventures led to some entrepreneurs feeling emotionally volatile. This emotional dynamic was intensified by the visibility of their liminal work space. They were all in it together and how well they did was transparent (Chapter 6, section 3.1). As Lucy mentioned 'whether we swim or sink, everyone will see that' (interview 3). The visibility was caused by the ongoing monitoring of entrepreneurs' success which in turn led to emotions such as stress and anxiety for some entrepreneurs. In their study of the MBA rite of passage of Chinese students in the UK, Simpson et al. (2009) attribute students' fear and anxiety to the need to adapt to different cultural assumptions and norms. In the case of social incubation at SVI, the feeling of constant scrutiny was not experienced by all. More advanced-stage ventures and entrepreneurs with business-related backgrounds did not feel intimidated by visibility (Chapter 6, section 3.1). Simpson et al. (2009) similarly acknowledged that liminal experiences were not common for all MBA students either. Confidence building is an important aspect of a social entrepreneur's rite of passage (Chapter 6, section 3.1) too and it was achieved through learning more about running a business. Lucy was an entrepreneur whose journey depicted that process very well. These context specific experiences of liminality enrich the theory itself expanding the list of liminal properties identified by Turner (1969) and offer an idea of the texture of incubator liminality at the same time.

Additionally incubator liminality offered reassurance and security to some nascent entrepreneurs like Sandra (Chapter 5, section 3.4) through the business advisors. Despite their questioning and scrutiny, the advisors' very presence and availability created a feeling of security in those who were not ready to incorporate into the business world. This experience adds to the texture of liminality discussed above. Interestingly some entrepreneurs, like Nate and Sandra (Chapter 6, section 3.2), did not experience one of the main functions of a rite of passage which is 'to reduce the harmful effects' of any changes in a person's conditions (van Gennep, 1960: 13; Czaraniawska and Mazza, 2003: 285). It is analogous to the function of incubators, providing safe place in controlled conditions where nascent companies are nurtured (Aernaudt, 2004) hence reducing the potentially harmful effects of starting a business. Others, such as Samuel, Matt and Flora, did not even need that as they were already past their entrepreneurial rite of passage and were only focused on the venture transition. They thus engaged with the elements of the programme which offered the resources for venture growth and development.

I use the rite of passage schema to illuminate the underlying patterns of social venture incubation, a transitional process of venture-entrepreneur support and guidance. Most other organisational studies scholars do not locate liminality into the RoP schema in their applications of the concept and thus take it out of its transitional, processual context as Beech (2011) had argued. Therefore they decontextualize liminality. My study of social incubation considers liminality as one of the phases in the schema of a rite of passage and at the same time as a condition, which organisational literature has predominantly focused on (Chapter 2, section 3.4). I thus explore and connect the phase with the condition of liminality in the context of social venture incubation.

2.4 Incubation elements

Here I discuss the nature of the elements of social venture incubation and how they relate to one another. I also address the second research question of how entrepreneurs engaged with those elements.

The Hatchery

Creating the social space was the harder task for staff compared to the establishment of the physical office space known as the Hatchery. The social space relates to the concept of *communitas* in a rite of passage which naturally happens within the boundaries of the seclusion lodge, within a specific territorial locus with limited character (Boland, 2013). Therefore the physical space is an essential prerequisite for the formation of the specific relationships within the group undergoing the rite of passage. In most business incubators

the peer-to-peer networking is believed to be facilitated through occupying a shared space too (Dee et al., 2011).

The flexibility of use allowed fluctuations in engagement with the physical space (Chapter 5, section 3.2). The proximity of the entrepreneurs to the office and their personal preferences for particular office requirements, despite our efforts to accommodate them, were two additional factors that influenced their decision to use it or not. Thus the mechanism of attracting entrepreneurs to the space relied on offering talks, training and events (such as the fortnightly peer-to-peer meeting that would lure them in) rather than a strong authority structure as in rite of passage.

Despite office infrastructure being the basic function common for all business incubators since the first generation of incubators (Bruneel et al., 2012), in the case of social venture incubation, physical office space turned out to be crucially important only for those entrepreneurs who were trying to develop their teams, such as Flora. Others who were lone entrepreneurs and did not have part-time jobs also regularly used the office. The aforementioned factors were important for entrepreneurs in order to decide whether to use the Hatchery or not. These empirical findings contribute an insight into the nature of the engagement dynamics with the physical space. Current incubation studies do not focus on the physical space beyond providing a brief description (Bruneel et al., 2012). Infrastructure is not as important as other aspects of incubation such as selection and business support which differentiate incubation business models (Bergek and Norrman, 2008). Applying a RoP theorisation explains the role of physical space in the creation and maintenance of the social space - the *communitas*.

Finally the name, Hatchery, also suggested an enclosed and protected space where the subjects/objects of hatching were cared for until they emerged, similarly to the term incubator. The organisers felt they were hatching ideas and turning them into real ventures. Some ventures hatched. However others did not manage to reach self-sufficiency and thus the passage only related to personal learning (see Chapter 6, section 3.2). Nate in particular expected to be hatched and undergo the transition associating the name of the physical space to the idea behind it. However he was disappointed it did not happen and returned back to the comfort of a well-paid job. This is a sign of a backward transition in the context of social venture incubation as the intended outcome was not achieved. Hirschman et al. (2012) have already pointed out the multi-directionality of liminal events and the possibility of revision of transitions.

Further Hirschman et al. (2012) also note that space passes through transitions. The garage is the place in the house which facilitates the transition of goods in and out of the house. It is the liminal space in that context. Shortt (2015) has also studied the role of

liminal spaces in organisational life and determined they are used for privacy, creativity and inspiration. Similarly for some entrepreneurs the Hatchery was a source of inspiration whereas for others it was a distraction and a place where they became visible and exposed to all who used it - organisers and peers alike (discussed in the previous section). Similarly to the way hairdressers used liminal spaces in Shortt's (2015) study, entrepreneurs dipped in and out of the Hatchery. However others, like Flora's team, were permanently there. The meaning of the Hatchery changed for them, a 'shift from ambiguous space to a meaningful space' (p.654), associating it with the security and the homeliness of their own office. The more entrepreneurs and their teams used the space the more they perceived it as their own office space and made it meaningful. Those who used it occasionally were ambivalent about it - it brought inspiration and distraction at the same time (Chapter 5, section 3.1). In this context people attributed different meanings to the liminal space and hence used it differently. Thus I contribute to the literature on organisational liminal spaces by conceptualising the incubator as a liminal space, embodying the characteristics of a seclusion lodge, however distinct with its weak authority structure and flexible rules of use.

The cohort

The broad definition of what a social venture is, their varied size and stage of development (Chapter 5 section 2), and the target set upon the organisers from the funders, all lead to the selection of a diverse cohort. These varied social venture characteristics are also acknowledged in policy literature too (Cabinet Office, 2011). In most pre-modern societies where rites of passage accompany any change in life, the liminal subjects would also comprise people from different walks of life (Turner, 1969). After the rite of separation the subjects would be placed under the same conditions and even physically be stripped of all their possessions. Equality and uniformity were characteristic of their lives in the seclusion lodge. Despite the same offer to the social entrepreneurs they did not become uniform or equal. They joined the programme with different needs and at different stages of their venture development and they remained diverse throughout (Chapter 5, section 2; Chapter 6).

The diversity of the cohort did not include the venture only. Entrepreneurs' personal and career backgrounds (see Chapter 5, section 2 and appendix 3) were also varied. Some entrepreneurs had some business related education, others had passed through another incubation programme and the rest did not have any business related experience. Business education has been confirmed to positively impact the venture creation process in general (Park, 2005; Shane, 2000) also during the incubation process of for-profit ventures (Gertner, 2013). My findings align with this and show that entrepreneurs with

business education engaged less with training, workshops and peers as they did not have knowledge and skills gaps. In addition entrepreneurial experience which has also been proved to aid the venture creation process (Dimov, 2010; Shane and Khurana, 2003; Ucbasaran et al., 2009; Gertner, 2013) affected engagement - Samuel had been running his own business for a while before he joined the programme. Some entrepreneurs possessed industrial experience which provided knowledge related to customer problems (Shane, 2000).

In addition my findings show factors such as personal finance pressures affected entrepreneurial engagement with the programme. The significance of the findings here is of theoretical value as entrepreneurs' background adds another level of diversity to the already heterogeneous venture cohort composition. It thus presents a challenge to the designers of the incubation process. Both the ventures and the entrepreneurs, the objects and the subjects of incubation, are heterogeneous and distinct in size, stage, sector (for the ventures) and entrepreneurial, industrial and educational background (for the entrepreneurs). They thus interacted and engaged with the elements of the programme strategically. The SVI selection process affected the composition of the cohort which in turn created the patterns of engagement discussed here and in section 3, patterns different than the ones in a rite of passage process.

The incubation literature once again falls short on the importance of peer interaction during incubation - with only a few studies indicating that the so-called soft, intangible aspects are of value (BØllingtoft and Ulhøi, 2005; Ulhoi, 2005; Ebberts, 2014). However, even these studies do not explain how and why this element is important. Thus my contribution is applying the *communitas* concept - essential for understanding peer-to-peer networking which the organisers wanted to develop. They expected that co-location would help form the supportive relationships, characteristic of *communitas* (Turner, 1969; Meira, 2014) at SVI (Chapter 5, section 3.3). Similarly for-profit business incubators encourage peer-to-peer networking through the provision of common spaces and rooms (Dee et al., 2011). However the *laissez-faire* approach to its use was one of the issues some entrepreneurs reported. I facilitated the fortnightly cohort meetings which were supposed to promote and facilitate the formation of supportive bonds, essential in *communitas* (Meira, 2014). The entrepreneurs' fading relations as *communitas* over time were weakened by non-attendance at the fortnightly meetings and their decreased use of the Hatchery.

The cohort provided a sense of togetherness, going on a journey together, through the opportunity to talk about their challenges and successes. The incubatees associated being an entrepreneur and starting their business with loneliness. Not surprisingly that

image of entrepreneurs related to the one in most entrepreneurship literature - the hero, possessing all the personal characteristics to start an enterprise (Brockhaus, 1982; UihØi, 2005). However here I explore entrepreneurship through the anthropological lens of a rite of passage which sheds light on the importance of shared experiences, as well as the moral and emotional support the incubator cohort provided, at least in the beginning (Chapter 6, section 3.1). This insight depicts a totally different image of the entrepreneur, or in this case the social entrepreneur. The way entrepreneurs shared their experiences, the challenges of starting their ventures and the rollercoaster rides, going through the good and bad of social venturing, shows that the 'entrepreneurial actor' (Watson, 2013b) is an ordinary person. That finding confirms that social entrepreneurship is an everyday activity as Down (2006) has found for entrepreneurs. This study thus provides additional empirical support for rejecting the heroic conception of entrepreneurs. Down and Warren (2008) had already shown that by exploring clichés in order to 'understand the everyday and ordinary elements of identity construction in entrepreneurs' (p.4). Here I use the concept of *communitas* to shed light on the ordinariness of social entrepreneurs, in need of support and guidance on their transitional journey. Furthermore my account offers another perspective on social entrepreneurs and counterbalances most analyses which 'have tendency to idealise social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurship' (Dacin et al., 2011: 1206). It sheds light on the mundane and ordinary of social venturing through the shared stories and struggles of the characters at SVI.

In addition to the moral and emotional support the cohort also provided contacts. For some that was the only benefit of engaging with peers. Most studies of incubation success factors point out that the degree of entrepreneurial networks, both internal and external, is crucial (Smilor and Gill, 1986; Lewis et al., 2011; Ebberts, 2014), and this study shows that the *communitas* is also a valuable source of such contacts. In Matt's case one introduction by a peer speeded the venture development process and saved him a considerable amount of money. It seems that the cohort was a vehicle to fill some of the entrepreneurs gaps which Rice (2002) identified as knowledge, skills and resources. The cohort provided contacts, as a resource, as well as the moral and emotional support typical for *communitas*. This finding is also significant and important as a contribution to social entrepreneurship literature by identifying needs entrepreneurs have and that those can be addressed by the *communitas*. The knowledge and contact transfer process is thus not one way, but rather multidirectional among the members of the cohort and this is another characteristic of the modern rite of passage where liminars are not detached from their background knowledge, skills and contacts, but rather they are harnessed and utilised as resources in the process of incubation.

The empirical finding above thus adds another function of *communitas* beyond moral and emotional support. Meira has already shown how important *communitas* are for 'organizational emergence' (Meira, 2014: 719). His work is an attempt to reframe liminality in organisational studies by 'bringing *communitas* back to the scene' (ibid.), as indeed is mine. He criticised organisational studies literature for not exploring *communitas* and reducing liminality to the 'ambiguous condition of individuals and groups within organisations' (p.719). The social ties developed between liminars are crucial to the anthropological conception of liminality though. Incubation offers an empirical opportunity to explore the processual nature of a rite of passage (Beech, 2011) including the concept of *communitas*. *Communitas* are essential, as discussed above, for harnessing the peers' potential in social venture creation.

My findings contribute to the extant incubation literature by emphasising the important role of the *communitas* in the incubator and its structural dynamics. Bruneel et al. (2012) categorise incubators in three generations according to the evolution of their value proposition (offering) and the theoretical rationale behind it. It is now time to add another item to the value proposition - access to and facilitation of *communitas* with the rationale of offering moral and emotional support to entrepreneurs (an anthropological conception of incubation emphasising the subjects of incubation). I therefore contribute to the incubation evolution studies by distinguishing a fourth generation of business incubators, still very much in their infancy, trying to find the best way to create, nurture and exploit their *communitas*.

The partners and business advisors

How entrepreneurs engaged with the Hatchery and their peers also sheds light on the *laissez-faire* approach and weak authority structure in the incubator. The incubation programme was designed by the partners (Chapter 4, section 2) and delivered by the programme director and business advisors. The reality is thus akin to a two-tiered masters of ceremony structure. The complex nature of designing and delivering the programme required multi-expertise knowledge, three charitable organisations and a business school, in order to support social ventures to grow. This approach to social innovation and change has been described by practitioners as social extrapreneurship, 'the bringing together of ideas, people and resources by working across or beyond organisational boundaries to create social impact' (Stott, 2015; Tracey and Stott, 2017). Social incubators in essence are an example of social extrapreneurship, a complex and dynamic space supporting social entrepreneurs on their journey but at the same time going through a transition themselves establishing what they are (Chapter 4, section 2).

Most incubation studies do not discuss the complex organisational nature of incubators. Business support is usually delivered by the incubator manager and scholars have only taken their perspective such as Hackett and Dilts (2004a, b). Others have delved into the relationship between entrepreneurs and incubator managers on the basis that counselling is considered the most significant element of incubation (Rice, 2002). That is why Rice focuses on the relationship with the incubator manager. At SVI dedicated business advisors were employed with the sole purpose of providing business support. This was done in a continual and proactive manner via monthly meetings. In addition to that business advisors provided reactive and episodic support (for instance when Lucy needed to prepare for her talk with a college client). The idea was that in-house business advisors could provide the venture support entrepreneurs needed. Hence the role of the programme director was more managerial, and related to running the incubation programme, expanding its networks of partners, liaising with funders and managing the business advisors.

Generally the function of business advisors was to help entrepreneurs address their gaps in terms of skills, resources and knowledge. Those are in essence the forms of wisdom that were imparted to the entrepreneurs in the incubation rite of passage. The concept of masters of ceremony has already been applied to leadership educators (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015) where their function is to:

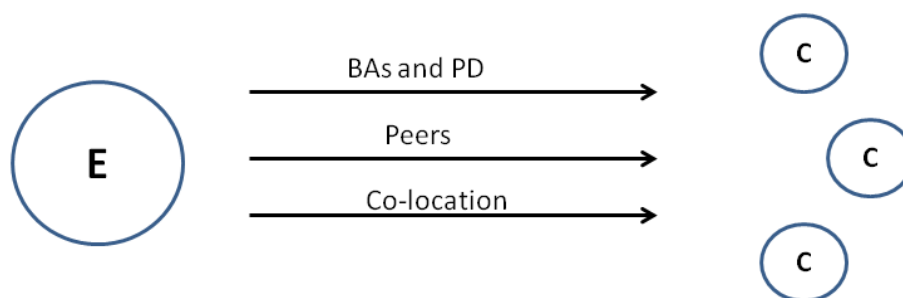
'provide the conditions and support, that make learning possible, and who thereby facilitates a potential transformation in how the student sees himself or herself and the world around them' (p.27)

In order to 'compensate for firm's gaps in knowledge and competences' (Rice, 2002), the SVI programme was designed to offer initial training both at the SVW and the three-day training by the business school partner. After that the venture was assumed to need one-to-one business advice and hence training was organised by either the programme director or the business school based on entrepreneurs' needs. Thus there were two ways to impart wisdom (Turner, 1969) to the subjects of incubation - by the provision of training via the designers of this rite of passage, or through the business advisors. Once again, following the compulsory SVW and the first three day-training, the organisers adopted a laissez-faire approach to trainings where entrepreneurs were left to decide whether to attend trainings or not.

Each of the masters of ceremony, partners or business advisors, filled some of the resource gaps of the entrepreneur-venture dyad. For instance the venture's need for finance was managed by Foundation Group. The access and level of entrepreneurial networks, both internal and external to the incubator, is widely considered a key success

factor in incubation literature (Smilor and Gill, 1986; Barrow, 2001; Rice, 2002; Hackett and Dilts, 2004a; Phan et al., 2005; Bergek and Norrman, 2008; Patton et al., 2009; Dee et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2011; Ebbers, 2014). However contacts and networks were a resource that was enacted by a multitude of actors at SVI. The business advisors' role involved introducing entrepreneurs to relevant contacts and networks. The programme director and the other partners also contributed to entrepreneurial networks. This role of programme directors, acting as advisors too, has also been reported in incubation literature (Bøllingtoft and Uhløi, 2005; Hansen et al., 2000; Tötterman & Sten, 2005; Rice, 2002). Some entrepreneurs reported other means of obtaining useful contacts - co-location, attending events and training events, which had also been reported in literature (Phan et al., 2005). Finally access to networks and useful introductions happened through the peers in the cohort (discussed in the previous section). Thus networks and contacts can be viewed as a resource that the incubation process provided through all its elements - the instructors, the peers and the environment in which the incubator is situated (fig.6).

Figure 6: Means of accessing contacts and networks at SVI



E-entrepreneur; BA-business advisor; PD-programme director; C - connections

Surprisingly Nate sought encouragement and emotional support from his business advisor when he had to reverse the transition back to employment three months before graduation. The absence of strong *communitas* at that time (the fortnightly meetings had already been discontinued) to meet the emotional and encouragement needs of entrepreneurs placed the business advisors in a difficult position to act as 'a shoulder to cry on' too. This of course proved a heavy task for the business advisor and did not provide what Nate was looking for. The relationship with the business advisors did not offer the emotional support needed to compensate for the missing *communitas* element. Thus business advisors fulfilled different types of needs, related mostly to the entrepreneur-venture knowledge, skills and resource gaps.

In a traditional rite of passage the relationship between the masters of ceremony and the liminars is top-down and subordinate. The former are the actors who are assumed to possess the wisdom to help the liminars transition and thus the liminars obey them exclusively. In the extreme condition of the seclusion lodge the masters of ceremony

possess the power and establish the rules. At SVI the designers and business advisors similarly determined the rules of engagement and were in charge of enforcing those rules. The rules were summarised in the contract, which also listed the expectations from the incubatees (Chapter 4, section 3.2.1). The role of the organisers as masters of ceremony was preserved - to impart knowledge and enact the entrepreneur-venture transition. Similarly, in the context of leadership learning, Hawkins and Edwards use the notion of masters of ceremony to refer to leadership educators, 'guiding students through nests of threshold concepts that open up new opportunities for transformation' (2015: 40). The relationship between masters of ceremony and liminars at SVI however was based on mutual trust and social exchanges. These are discussed in the following section. Czaraniawska and Mazza (2003) also refer to the organisers of organisational change, the consultants, as masters of ceremony in the context of the rite of passage employees undergo. The guiding and supporting roles of the masters of ceremony thus have been demonstrated in educational institutions and organisations undergoing change. Both need the expertise and knowledge of either the educators or consultants to facilitate the transition. Each study provides an insight into the relationship between liminars and the masters of ceremony but does not discuss the processes of exchange underpinning that relationship.

Next I explain the underlying processes of exchange that take place in social incubation. These exchanges depend on and further develop trust, which in turn creates relationships among liminars in *communitas* and between masters of ceremony and liminars. I have already discussed what the relationship between the elements of the process is. I have shown how the diverse needs of entrepreneurs led to their engagement with some elements of the programme but not others. Now I look into the underlying process of exchange taking place in this incubation process in order to understand its dynamics.

3. Engagement and social exchanges

Based on the discussion above and drawing together the key findings I have developed an incubation models matrix (fig.7). Rice (2002) differentiated between four different types of firms based on two dimensions readiness to engage (in his case with the incubation manager) and maturity of the firm. Based on my findings the focus of incubation needs to be broadened to include the entrepreneur too. The typology of incubator models illustrated below is based on the need for support of the venture-entrepreneur dyad and their engagement with the programme support (peers and business advisors). Support need is a broader term than the term firm maturity (which pertains to the venture only, used by Rice (2002)) as it takes into account the entrepreneur's background. Hence some

entrepreneur-ventures do not need a lot of support despite their low venture maturity. Consequently they engage less with business advisors, trainings and even peers.

Figure 7: Entrepreneur-venture incubation models

Engagement	high	Entrepreneur-venture-centric incubation model	Entrepreneur-centric incubation model
	low	Venture-centric incubation model	No incubation
		low	high
		Support need	

Venture-centric incubation model

This incubation model focuses on scaling the venture, which requires business advice type of support as initially envisaged by the designers of social venture incubation at SVI. Entrepreneurs do not need to engage with the business advisors or peers much. When they engage, they do so with the business advisors and seek advice on specific issues related to venture development or growth. Types of such ventures in cohort 1 include Samuel's, Flora's and Matt's.

Entrepreneur-centric incubation model

This incubation model focuses on coaching the entrepreneur by questioning and challenging why they are doing this and the way they are doing it. It is suitable for entrepreneurs at the ideation or early stage of development who do not have any business or finance background. They need and engage with the support provided and respond to what Marcus explained as coaching which focuses on the entrepreneur behind the venture more than the venture. They appreciate the emotional and moral support provided by the peers. Examples of those entrepreneurs include Nate and to a lesser degree Sandra.

Entrepreneur-venture-centric incubation model

This incubation model focuses on coaching and mentoring the entrepreneur as well as advising on venture development. Entrepreneurs who benefit from this holistic type of support are already trading but do still have knowledge, skills, resource and emotional support gaps that need to be addressed by the programme. Two good examples of entrepreneurs who benefit from this type of support are Lucy and Karen.

No incubation

This box refers to cases where there is no need for any particular incubation model. Those entrepreneurs have an idea and need mentoring, coaching but are usually unable to engage due to personal circumstances. Two examples where incubation business support was not needed are Joy and Alex who eventually dropped out due to low engagement with their business advisors. Those however found it beneficial to engage with the peers and the training elements of the programme before dropping out.

Engagement itself is dynamic. Some entrepreneurs need one type of business assistance in the beginning then with time, and change in their venture development and skill set, they require a different type of support. Some of those transitions have occurred with Karen and Lucy for instance. Whereas in the beginning they needed an entrepreneur-centric type of support, towards the end of the programme they managed to develop their ventures and thus required venture-centric type of support too. Alex on the other hand was an entrepreneur at the idea-stage who required entrepreneur-centric incubation mostly and later lost motivation and stopped engaging which cost him his place on the programme as he was in no need of incubation (a reverse rite of passage). This dynamic changing character of the incubation model needs within the course of the programme is an empirical contribution to incubation literature. Shifting the focus to the entrepreneur as the subject of social venture incubation is a prerequisite for understanding those varied incubation model needs. The diversity of subject and object configurations necessitates adopting those different approaches to social venture incubation.

In addition the variable engagement of the entrepreneurs suggests varying degrees of liminality. Some seem to be very connected to the liminal space, others less so. Here the liminal space is bound by the process of rite of passage to becoming a successful social entrepreneur whereas in most applications of the concept it has been removed from its processual origin. Being part of the incubation process meant connecting to that liminal space, which in turn was mediated by the entrepreneur-venture need of support. Sturdy et al. (2006) also point out the degrees of liminality in the context of the business dinner. The further away from the office, the greater the liminality and thus the greater the likelihood to share secrets and make strategic use of that liminal space. They are the first to suggest that liminality is not an absolute quality. However they have been criticised by Beech (2011) that have applied the concept of liminality out of its processual context as a phase in the rite of passage. Here I have noted the processual character of liminality and also observed degrees of liminality which related to the entrepreneurs engagement with the incubator liminal space. The need to remain connected to the liminal space gradually decreased as some had completed their transition to social entrepreneurs earlier and

others made a reverse transition back to employment. Here liminality decreased with time (paralleled by venture-entrepreneur development) during the incubation rite of passage (Chapter 5, section 3.1).

Social incubators employ different means to increase engagement as services and space were offered for free as opposed to other business incubators (Barrow, 2001). The contract that entrepreneurs signed when joining the incubation programme was used to specify the exchange terms and obligations between entrepreneurs and organisers. However, as Lucy explained, 'a carrot or a stick' approach was needed in order to make entrepreneurs engage. She gave an example from another programme she had joined, the School for Social Entrepreneurs, where they had solved the engagement problem financially as 'they give us money and they don't give the money if we don't attend' (interview 2). In fact most other social incubation programmes offered finance and capital in the form of grants which entrepreneurs would only receive if they engaged with the elements of the programme. This financial incentive to engage was recognised by Gross (1998) too. He gave incubatees shares in the incubator which in turn owned equity stakes in all companies. This created 'ownership interest in one another's companies' (ibid.: 6) and led to sharing ideas and knowledge. Beth also recognised that financial mechanisms have the potential to change the nature of the relationship between entrepreneurs and the programme because it reinforces and rewards engagement.

In the position of masters of ceremony, the organisers could decide whether to enforce engagement financially or adhere to the laissez-faire approach where entrepreneurs decide what to engage with based on their idea of what they needed and their availability. However if we assume that entrepreneurs have knowledge, skills and resource gaps (Rice, 2002) and they are to be filled by the incubation programme, engagement is crucial to venture success and to incubation impact. The difficulty arose from the different needs of each entrepreneur-venture dyad. As Samuel had pointed out, most social entrepreneurs do not really know what they need and it is the job of the organisers to tell them, thus alluding to a more authoritative, top-down approach. Similarly leadership educators guide the students through the process of learning and the relationship between them and the students is 'a central aspect of the liminal process' (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015: 40) because it 'provides the means through which doubt is encountered, negotiated and legitimised by *both* parties' (ibid., authors own emphasis). How this relationship is formed has not been analysed or discussed by Turner (1969) or any of the organisational studies scholars. I focus on that because relationship formation proved essential for obtaining the resources and skills they needed. I connect the theory of rite of passage with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), applying the concept of social exchange, in order to explain how relationships in an incubator develop as 'social

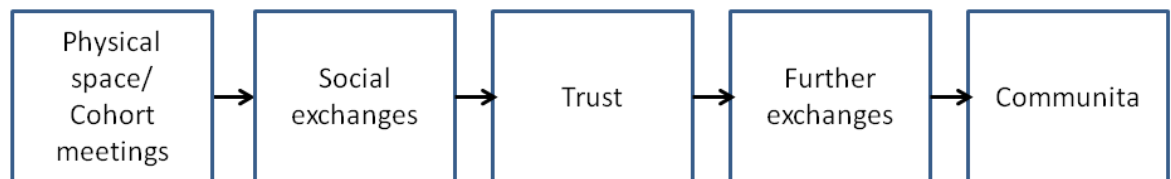
exchange theory explains how people obtain valued resources (information, status, love) through their interactions with others' (Flynn, 2005: 746; Blau, 1964). Van Gennep's (1960) and Turners (1969) theorisation implies strong authority structure and subordination between masters of ceremony and liminars which does not apply to this modern context. Therefore relying on it alone makes it impossible to explain relations between business advisors and entrepreneurs.

Social exchanges are at the heart of developing and sustaining active *communitas*. I have already explained the link between engagement with peers and trust which can lead to useful contacts and knowledge sharing. Developing trust and sharing information with peers was one of the expectations in the contract (Chapter 4, section 3.2.1). Early in the programme the entrepreneurs attended SVW, three-day training, fortnightly cohort meetings and used the hatchery regularly. The high level of engagement led to social interaction where entrepreneurs would share useful information about funding resources at fortnightly meetings, share problems with peers and receive useful advice how to deal with them, share contacts and offer a shoulder to cry on and encouragement in difficult situations (see Chapter 5, section 3.3). Those types of social exchanges were facilitated by attending the aforementioned events and space. They were boosted on those occasions as a lot of them were present, either bounded by the same space in the hatchery or by the time and space of the event. This provided opportunities for social exchange. The numerous occasions and instances of social exchanges prove that there were no expectations of financial return when sharing knowledge or resources, as opposed to what Gross (1998) had observed. Instead there was a high 'degree of altruism and collectivism' (Bøllingtoft and Ulhøi, 2005: 285) which the authors deemed essential in order for entrepreneurs to benefit from one another. At those moments when entrepreneurs were together that would happen naturally. However bringing them together was the real challenge for the organisers. McAdam and Marlow (2007) also found that incubation management had difficulties with entrepreneurs' participation in activities they organised; they simply did not attend. However, my study showed that engagement with the elements of incubation was shaped mostly by the needs (see matrix above) of those who engaged rather than by their purposes, projects and interests as Watson (2001) had noted for exchanges in other organisational contexts.

When attendance to cohort meetings dropped, the *communitas* also dissipated. Initially engaging in regular social exchanges and the following reciprocity between entrepreneurs developed trust. The core of entrepreneurs who engaged with and valued their peers as well as the moral and emotional support they provided, was similar to that in *communitas*. *Communitas* was thus created but its maintenance also depended on further social exchanges which eventually declined and thus led to its dissipation. Therefore social

exchanges are the glue, the strengthening factor that maintains the *communitas* (fig. 8). *Communitas* do not emerge spontaneously as noted by Turner (1969) but through social exchanges in the process of social venture incubation. This finding also has practical implications for incubator management as it provides an insight into the process of creating and sustaining an active peer group, *communitas*, which can contribute to the incubation process through resource and knowledge sharing. Thus processes of social exchange can be facilitated and fostered by staff in order to maintain active *communitas*.

Figure 8: *Communitas* development process



Engagement with the business advisors was also based on social exchanges of knowledge and resources. The more entrepreneurs interacted with their business advisors the greater the help and benefit they would receive, like Lucy who gradually increased the social exchanges with her business advisor over the course of the programme. Those social exchanges built up trust (Blau, 1964). Lack of social exchange led to low trust (Samuel's case) which led to no resource and knowledge access provided by the organisers to the entrepreneurs. The relationship between masters of ceremony and liminars (and thus the impact of the process) in this modern context is based on social exchange and trust development rather than power and subordination as in traditional societies (Turner, 1969).

My empirical study conceptually contributes to the theory of rite of passage by explaining relationship formation within *communitas* using the concept of social exchange (Blau, 1964) and between masters of ceremony and liminars. Furthermore it grounds and explains anecdotal insights from practitioner literature such as Dee et al. (2011) which state that face-to-face interaction builds up trust which then leads to 'more meaningful interactions and exchanges of knowledge, and being part of the space increases the frequency of such interactions' (p.11).

These relational, social exchange dynamics among the participants contribute to developing a dynamic, multileveled incubation model (section 4) which Phan et al. (2005) called for. I now turn to discuss the outcomes and impact of social incubation.

4. Incubation impact and outcomes

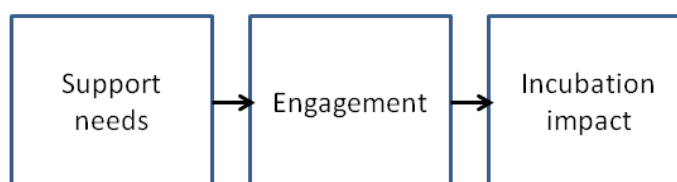
There are two key findings that have implications on studying the impact of social incubation: 1) the dual nature of the incubatees (entrepreneur-venture dyad) and 2) their diverse composition discussed in section 2. As Bearse (1998) had pointed out the evaluation of incubators should be in terms of their main purpose which in SVI was growing social ventures. Success was determined by achieving those expected outcomes (increase in revenue and sustainability, jobs created, investment readiness, increased social impact and ability to measure, accessing loan finance) and implementing the underpinnings of successful business (business plan, team, skills to develop the venture, social key metrics, financial metrics and management accounts).

However, I have already discussed that the subjects of incubation, the entrepreneurs, are integral part of the incubatee, or liminal entity, which consisted of an entrepreneur-venture dyad. The nature of the incubatee thus challenges the main purpose of social venture incubation. Placing the entrepreneur at the heart of incubation, as the subjects of this rite of passage, entails giving voice to their perception of success. They assign meaning to their journey and that of their venture and whether they feel successful, ready to be on their own, to incorporate into the business world. That conclusion is in line with Voisey (2006) who found that success is a broader term than a set of numerical outputs, collected from the entrepreneurs on a quarterly basis at SVI - see section 2.1, Chapter 6. Voisey pointed out the importance of accounting for soft outcomes and distance travelled which partially overlapped with some of the so-called underpinnings of a successful business at SVI. The business advisors assessed the ventures' progress according to the progress along the following: business plan development, team and skills required for venture development, social key metrics and financial control and management accounts. Others such as increased confidence in self and business, increased productive networking with peers, increased knowledge and professionalism, positive publicity (ibid), social inputs, legitimacy and psychological support (Bøllingtoft and Uthøi, 2005) were not factored into the SVI monitoring process. I have included those in a separate section in Chapter 6 summed up under the broad category impact on entrepreneur and divided into two sub-categories - emotional impact and learning impact. Achievement of soft outcomes was considered a great leap for some individuals at SVI (Lucy for instance) also confirmed by other studies (Dewson et al., 2000; Voisey, 2006).

Those soft outcomes and impacts of incubation listed above and section 3 in Chapter 6 need to be taken into consideration when assessing the impact of incubators on the entrepreneurial process. However, engagement also needs to be taken into account as

venture's growth and development cannot always be attributed to the programme. Entrepreneurs who did not engage with the programme actually achieved the expected outcomes and scaled their venture (Chapter 6, section 2). They attributed the success to their personal skills and background predominantly rather than to the programme. In that case a new incubator impact evaluation system needs to be developed which factors engagement as a key mediator to incubation impact on venture development and growth (see fig. 9). Entrepreneur support needs determine how they engage with the programme which in turn affects incubation impact. As Clark et al. (2004) have already pointed out social impact is only a portion of the total outcome that happened due to the activities of any organisation above what would have happened anyway (Chapter 2, section 2.6). This key contribution to incubation literature has direct implications for practice too as monitoring and reporting incubation impact is an essential part of justifying the existence of incubators and applying for further funding (Bearse, 1998; Barrow, 2001; Voisey, 2006).

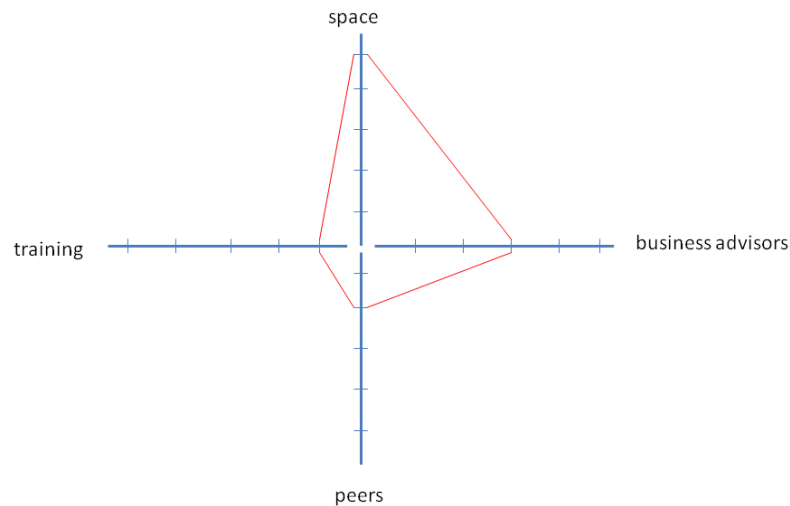
Figure 9: Key relationships in incubation impact evaluation



Engagement was important to SVI organisers as explained earlier and non-engagement caused some entrepreneurs like Joy to drop out, because quite frankly there was zero incubation impact in her case. My study has shown that alongside the hard measures of revenue and growth, incubation programmes need to include a relative measure of engagement in the evaluation of impact. Something more elaborate, like engagement mapping (fig. 10), could tell the evaluators which elements of the programme entrepreneurs engaged with. If a needs analysis is carried out in the beginning of the process, discrepancies between needs and actual engagement can be detected. Conversely no entrepreneur engagement, and consequently impact, can be expected with elements that are not related to the needs of the entrepreneur or venture. The implications of this finding can lead to better resource allocation in incubators. Incubation impact is thus proportional to engagement and the change in entrepreneur-venture growth and development over the course of the programme. Engagement is a value between 0 and 1, where zero equals no engagement (like in Jo's case) and 1 is total engagement like in a traditional rite of passage where the transition can be totally attributed to the process and the masters of ceremony. Using engagement value between 0 and 1 thus allocates only a portion of the change (in revenue, jobs created, venture development) to incubation

impact. The needs analysis on the other hand can include emotional support needs as well as knowledge/skills and resource (capital and contacts). All these needs are addressed by different elements of the programme (space, business advisors or peers).

Figure 10: Engagement map



As pointed out in the beginning of this section, the discussion of incubation impact needs to take into consideration both venture and entrepreneur. Impact on the venture was intended and monitored by the organisers at SVI¹³ as in most other incubators (Bearse, 1998; Voisey, 2006). The Cabinet Office also demanded those numbers that related to venture growth over the course of the programme and after its end. Investment-readiness was one of the key outcomes, which included the achievement and implementation of those expected outcomes and underpinnings of a successful business (discussed in Chapter 6 and also Chapter 4, fig. 3). The outcomes and underpinnings aligned with Hazenberg's (2015) criteria for investment-readiness in the social investment market. However according to Hazenberg willingness to seek investment was as important as all the rest. In fact some entrepreneurs in the incubator, Lucy and Karen, were what he would call equity averse. Others wanted to become investment ready and receive investment but did not make progress along the items on the aforementioned lists and therefore did not reach the desired state of investment-readiness, Sandra for instance. The rest of the venture investment-readiness criteria and progress of the ventures were discussed in depth in Chapter 6.

Does this mean that the programme was unsuccessful? If we consider venture development and impact only the answer would be yes. However if we consider the

¹³ I need to clarify that they measured the change in revenue, jobs created etc but that cannot be equated with incubation impact, as impact is only a portion of that change considering the engagement of the incubatee with the programme as discussed above.

findings in this thesis, discussed above, impact should include the entrepreneur and a well-rounded case for incubation could thus be made. Discussing the findings through the lens of a rite of passage shifts the attention from the venture to the entrepreneur. The incubation programme was an attempt to guide entrepreneurs through the process of becoming an entrepreneur and addressing their needs and resource gaps, a process which is missing in other contexts such as the solidary economy in Brazil (Meira, 2014). There social integration, as in most capitalistic societies, has lost substance and liminality has lost its position in the schema of a rite of passage, therefore subjects are pushed to the margin and abandoned (ibid.). The findings of this thesis point out that in this context there are numerous outcomes for social ventures undergoing the support programme (also confirmed in other contexts Hirschman et al., 2012) and thus incorporation into the business world is not the only outcome. The subjects of incubation also undergo a transition and they indeed change in the process. However whether those outcomes positively impact society generally is a difficult case to argue which requires further research and follow up on the outcomes, beyond the scope of this dissertation. In order to justify spending the money on social incubator programmes we need to prove that impact on individuals, the entrepreneurs, is equally beneficial to society as scaling the social ventures.

Impact on the entrepreneur is something that organisers did not intend to measure as the incubation purpose concerned the ventures only. However my study enabled me to collect enough data related to the growth and development of the entrepreneurs too. Through the conversations I had with them and the more formal data gathered in the three rounds of interviews I could track the change in knowledge/skills, resource access and emotional state of the entrepreneurs. Once again not all entrepreneurs experienced personal development changes. Samuel, Flora and Matt all admitted they learned a lot but it was through their personal experience of running their ventures rather than any imparted knowledge and wisdom on behalf of the programme. As Marcus had come to realise himself, for some the journey was life changing, such as Lucy and Karen, but for others like the aforementioned group, it did not have any personal development or growth impact.

Personal growth and change related to increase in confidence, knowledge and credibility. Some entrepreneurs experienced profound change in their knowledge of running a business, the required skills and confidence to do so. Learning was a multidirectional process both business advisor-to-peer and peer-to-peer. For some, like Nate, peer-to-peer learning was the most important outcome of the programme. Increased credibility was also recognized to be a result of joining an incubator (Bøllingtoft and Ulhøi, 2005; Dee et al., 2015) and growth in confidence was also reported by Voisey (2006). The

emotional impact of the incubation programme related to increased energy, longevity of entrepreneurial efforts, increase in passion and reducing stress and anxiety. All of those were attributed to the peers and the emotional and moral support they provided. Even the authors who advocated the soft outcomes of an incubator did not consider emotional support. Only Bøllingtoft and Ulhøi (2005) mention psychological support as one of the intangible aspects of business incubation but do not explain how it is enacted. Those who deny the importance of peer support such as Gertner (2013) fail to go in depth to recognise the relationship between entrepreneurial background, stage of venture, engagement and impact. In this study it has become apparent that the stage of a venture and the entrepreneur's background impact the engagement dynamics of entrepreneurs with the elements of the programme which in turn determine the incubation impact on the venture and/or the entrepreneur. And finally the programme provided comfort to some entrepreneurs through the space (the familiarity of the office environment) and the accessibility of the business advisors - as experts in the field who are there if need be. Those were certainly soft outcomes of the programme which proved to be important for entrepreneurs like Sandra for instance.

I was surprised to find that the incubator had negative impacts on entrepreneurs too such as increased visibility and unfavourable comparisons with more successful entrepreneurs which de-motivated some venture founders. Visibility in turn increased stress and anxiety for entrepreneurs like Lucy. Additionally distraction in the Hatchery was a negative side effect of joining this transitional experience together in a cohort. Most of the entrepreneurs felt that coming in to the office was inspiring and distracting at the same time as people would stop by and talk frequently. Surely, negative impacts of such programmes cannot be isolated to my study, and therefore further studies might wish to develop this line of enquiry more in order to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of joining an incubator and their impact on venture creation. Applying the rite of passage conceptual framework, similarly to other contexts (family care giving intervention (Gibbons et al., 2014)), helps both practitioners and academics better understand the social entrepreneur transition. This includes the positive and negative impacts of incubation.

The current findings and contributions are summarised in the impact matrix below (fig. 11) where the incubation impact is categorised according to the locus of the transformation - venture and/or entrepreneur. It can be used to evaluate and categorise the impact of incubation initiatives. Thus it recognises the fact that there are multiple outcomes of incubation and the type of social entrepreneur-venture support needs to be adjusted accordingly.

Figure 11: Venture-entrepreneur incubation impact matrix

Impact on venture	high	Venture-transformative	Venture-entrepreneur-transformative
	low	Drop-outs or untransformative	Entrepreneur-transformative
		low	high
		Impact on entrepreneur	

Venture-transformative

This incubation impact is characterised by changes pertaining to the venture only. Those are measured and monitored by the programme and are reflected in the expected outcomes of the programme in terms of sales, social impact and jobs created. This is a journey characterised by venture growth and development. Typical examples would be Samuel, Flora and Mathew's ventures. However the venture transition can only be attributed to the incubation programme when engagement is factored in as a mediator.

Entrepreneur-transformative

Here incubation impact concerns the entrepreneur only and no progress has been made with the venture. Those entrepreneurial journeys can be regarded as unsuccessful in terms of the main purpose of incubation (Bearse, 1998). The venture only exists because of the entrepreneur. The programme has had impact on the entrepreneur in terms of learning and emotional support (soft outcomes). The entrepreneurs have graduated from the programme but do not feel ready to continue with their venture on their own. Typical examples would be Sandra and Nate.

Venture-entrepreneur-transformative

Incubation impact here is most transformative including all aspects of the entrepreneur-venture dyad. Both the entrepreneur and the venture have grown and developed as a result of the incubation programme. Typical examples would include Lucy and Karen.

Un-transformative/ drop-outs

There is no incubation impact in those cases. Those are entrepreneurs who do not engage and drop-out before graduation such as Joy and Alex, or entrepreneurs who graduate but do not develop their venture or themselves throughout. One such example to

a certain extent can be Shane who did not manage to launch his venture despite he shared that the product had been considerably developed and he did not learn much. He benefited from the emotional and motivational support of the cohort. That positive impact is less significant than the one Nate and Sandra shared for instance. In any case that type of incubation impact is signified by no change in venture or entrepreneur growth or development.

5. Contributions to knowledge

5.1 Contribution to incubation studies

My study demonstrates that we can understand the incubation process as a rite of passage. It provides theoretical insight into the purpose and nature of the incubation process as a transition. It comprises the phases of incubation (selection, incubation and graduation) and the elements of incubation (space, training, business advice, peer support, networks) thus providing an integrated dynamic model of business incubation. I contribute to the limited knowledge of the graduation phase. Applying a RoP theorisation I managed to connect all levels of analysis in the incubator context - the companies, the entrepreneurs, the incubators themselves and the systemic level (university, region, country). Therefore this theory offers a 'systematic framework to understand the connection between these multiple levels of analysis' (Phan et al., 2005: 169). It explains how the process works and why. Therefore all studies of incubation should incorporate elements of RoP, taking into account their processual and relational characteristics, the multileveled, complex and dynamic aspects.

The theory shifts the focus to the entrepreneur as the subject of incubation. Thus scholars and practitioners need to take into consideration the entrepreneurs as an integral part of the incubatee. The diversity of subject and object configurations necessitates adopting different approaches to incubation. I have developed a typology of incubator models based on the need for support of the venture-entrepreneur dyad and their engagement with the programme support (peers and business advisors): venture-centric, entrepreneur-centric, entrepreneur-venture-centric. Support need is a broader term than the term firm maturity (which pertains to the venture only, used by Rice (2002)) as it takes into account the entrepreneur's background. This dynamic changing character of the incubation model needs within the course of one programme is an empirical contribution to incubation literature. I have developed an incubation impact matrix categorised according to the locus of the transformation - venture and/or entrepreneur. It can be used to evaluate and categorise the impact of incubation initiatives. Thus it recognises the fact that there are multiple outcomes of incubation and the type of social entrepreneur-venture support

needs to be adjusted accordingly. I have categorised incubation impacts as: venture-transformative, entrepreneur-transformative, venture-entrepreneur-transformative or un-transformative (drop outs). Finally I have also contributed an insight into incubator negative impacts on entrepreneurs. Such accounts are not covered by current incubation studies.

My conceptualisation of the incubation process elicits the importance of the cohort, the group of peers, I have identified as *communitas*. It is essential for understanding peer-to-peer networking and interaction. This has been largely overlooked in previous incubation studies. Hence I provide theoretical grounding to anecdotal insights from practitioners literature such as Dee et al. (2011) which state that face-to-face interaction builds up trust which then leads to 'more meaningful interactions and exchanges of knowledge, and being part of the space increases the frequency of such interactions' (p.11). The incubation *communitas* is essential for harnessing the peers' potential (knowledge, skills and resources) in venture creation. Thus networks and contacts can be viewed as a resource that the incubation process provided through all its elements - the instructors, the peers and the environment in which the incubator is situated.

5.2 Contribution to organisation studies

I use the rite of passage schema to illuminate the underlying patterns of social venture incubation, a transitional process of venture-entrepreneur support and guidance. Most other organisational studies scholars do not locate liminality into the RoP schema in their applications of the concept and thus take it out of its transitional, processual context as Beech (2011) had argued. Thus I contribute to organisation studies applications of liminality joining Beech (2011) and Meira (2014) pointing out that other scholars have decontextualised liminality. A liminal space is bound by a process of a RoP, liminality is thus not only a condition between and betwixt, of ambiguity and uncertainty. In this context too I have identified that experiences of the liminal condition seeped into pre- and post-liminality as Simpson et al. (2009) - an indication of an incomplete RoP. I have contributed to the literature on organisational liminal spaces by conceptualising the incubator as a liminal space, embodying the characteristics of a seclusion lodge, however distinct with its weak authority structure and flexible rules of use. Engagement with the elements of this process-based organisation was shaped mostly by the needs (see matrix above) of those who engaged rather than by their purposes, projects and interests as Watson (2001) had noted for exchanges in other organisational contexts. I have demonstrated that RoP provides an explanation of how organisations based on or involved in transitions and change function and thus reposition liminality in its place in the RoP scheme where it originated from.

5.3 Contribution to theory

I have added texture and richness to the RoP theory by updating and providing more nuance to it. I show how RoP works through exploring a context with weak authority structure and laissez-faire approach to engagement, a context with high heterogeneity and inequality in their *communitas*, where the rite of separation has not managed to achieve homogeneity amongst liminars. I further explain how that leads to a variety of outcomes of RoP including failure. Not only was failure possible, but also a whole spectrum of venture-entrepreneur graduate configurations. I have noted the processual character of liminality and also observed degrees of liminality which relate to engagement with the incubator liminal space. The need to remain connected to the liminal space gradually decreased as some had completed their transition earlier and others made a reverse transition back to employment.

The most significant theoretical contribution is the duality of the liminal entity (adding an inanimate object, the venture, to the animate subject, the entrepreneur) which is applicable to other organisational contexts. During organisational change employees and the change agents have been conceptualised to undergo a rite of passage (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003) but what was overlooked is the organisation as an inanimate entity undergoing the change itself. Hence duality of the liminal entity is a useful concept in other organisational contexts too.

Experiences typical for the liminal condition were experienced in the pre-liminal and post-liminal phase too. Van Gennep's (1960) and Turners (1969) theorisation implies strong authority structure and subordination between masters of ceremony and liminars which does not apply to this modern context. Therefore relying on it alone makes it impossible to explain relations between business advisors and entrepreneurs. I connect the theory of rite of passage with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), applying the concept of social exchange, in order to explain how relationships in an incubator develop as 'social exchange theory explains how people obtain valued resources (information, status, love) through their interactions with others' (Flynn, 2005: 746; Blau, 1964). *Communitas* is a valuable resource in the transitional process as liminars are not detached from their background knowledge, skills and contacts in this modern context. Social exchanges are the glue, the strengthening factor that maintains *communitas*. *Communitas* dissipated over time as social exchanges between liminars decreased.

5.4 Contribution to entrepreneurship studies

I join Dacin et al. (2011) and Down (2006) offering a complementary study adding to the plurality of entrepreneurship studies. My study provides additional empirical support for

rejecting the heroic conception of both entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs in particular, similarly to Mauksch (2017). My account offers another perspective on social entrepreneurs and counterbalances most analyses which 'have tendency to idealise social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurship' (Dacin et al., 2011: 1206). It sheds light on the mundane and ordinary of social venturing through the shared stories and struggles of the characters at SVI. In contrast to other social entrepreneurship literature (Dacin et al., 2011), in social venture incubation the organisers try to inculcate social entrepreneurs in conventional business practices and teach them how to start a business with social impact at its heart.

5.5 Practical contribution

Understanding incubation as a rite of passage of the entrepreneur-venture dyad has implications for the future design of incubation programmes. In addition to the dual nature of the incubatee, their diverse composition would also have practical implications on engagement. The nature of the incubatee will have an impact on incubation evaluation studies. This key contribution to incubation literature has direct implications for practice too as monitoring and reporting incubation impact is an essential part of justifying the existence of incubators and applying for further funding (Bearse, 1998; Barrow, 2001; Voisey, 2006). I propose a new impact evaluation system taking into account engagement and the dual nature of the incubatee.

In addition my insight into incubation impact can lead to better resource allocation. Incubation impact is thus proportional to engagement and the change in entrepreneur-venture growth and development over the course of the programme. Entrepreneurs' support needs determine how they engage with the programme which in turn affects incubation impact. Finally the weak authority structure and separation (selection) rites need to be modified if impact is sought to be increased.

5.6 Methodological contribution

Researchers in that 'scientific' tradition 'have rarely got close to the action through intensive fieldwork' (Watson, 2013c: 67). This is also true for the places of entrepreneurial action called business incubators. Thus through my account I provide a methodological contribution, enhancing the sociological understanding of incubation and opening the 'black box' of business incubation offering an insider perspective (Bearse, 1998). An ethnographic approach enabled me to find out 'what actually happens' and 'how things work' (Watson, 2011: 204) at SVI as most studies have focused on one aspect of the incubation process rather than trying to understand how and why incubatee firms grow in a processual and longitudinal mode (Theodorakopoulos, 2014). I contribute an

ethnographic, longitudinal study to the body of incubation literature. Most incubation studies have focused almost exclusively on incubator managers as sources of data collection and knowledge. I counterbalance that and give voice to the entrepreneurs

I have now finished discussing the entrepreneurial rite of passage of becoming social entrepreneurs, the ventures' passage into investment-readiness, the dynamics of the process and its structural characteristics. I established the importance of engagement for evaluating incubation impact and its diversity, looking into different incubation models as rites of passage. I now turn to another context which the rite of passage schema applies to, discussing my own rite of passage of becoming an academic. The parallels are striking.

Chapter 8: My rite of passage

'The sociology dissertation process is a liminal journey, a passage characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, and crisis in which the student self is abandoned and a new professional self claims a world of power, authority, maturity, and responsibility.' (Deegan and Hill, 1991: 322)

Similarly to the transformation Deegan and Hill (1991) refer to in the quote above, coming to the end of my PhD, I had realised that it is a journey to becoming an academic supported by the doctoral rites of passage programme. It had all the elements - masters of ceremony, a seclusion lodge and communitas. It had a processual character starting with a selection process, interview, induction and finishing with a Viva (for some). The fieldwork itself and the following writing up stage changed my perception of my own journey to becoming an academic. Having spent 15 months at SVI working alongside people on their journeys to becoming social entrepreneurs, I could not help but compare myself to them.

I started my PhD in January 2013 with an induction by the director of research. As I walked into the room there were five other students; three of them (the other two were based at a different campus) became good friends of mine and we supported and encouraged each other along the way. The enthusiasm and passion which oozed from all of us in that room were typical for entrepreneurs too who started the incubation journey. That day we talked about why we wanted to do a PhD and each one of us had different motivations - the prospect of an academic career, the love for research, or contributing to knowledge. However reflecting back on that day we truly did not have any idea what we were getting into.

Samantha, Rick and Seth were the three peers I met that very first day. Later I found that there were more peers who had started a while ago and others who joined shortly after. We spent a lot of time in our seclusion lodge in the faculty open plan office. The same space was shared with the supervisors and other academics, the people we looked up to and aspired to become. Later on we were moved to our own seclusion lodge - a room especially assigned to PhD students. We all attended numerous workshops, trainings and conferences, all part of the rites of passage of becoming an academic. At those events we would share the experiences and difficulties we encountered, such as writing a methodology chapter or battling with the literature and developing a conceptual framework (the pillar of a thesis). Whilst we were discussing those issues on a daily basis, over lunch and at workshops, we also shared many personal issues which arose in our lives. We bonded through sharing the difficulties but also the nice moments of going on this journey together, sharing the achievements and joy of going to the pub, summer barbeques and games nights.

The bonds and relationships we developed gradually over the first year of the PhD created a support group which could withstand the time and challenges that came about. Even when some of us moved to other places (I moved to Scotland and Rick to the north of England) we continued to support and encourage each other. I will always remember the skype calls I had with Rick and Samantha for instance. I would call them to ask how they were doing whenever I felt down, and through sharing the misfortunes we would all feel better. Similarly to *communitas* we were there for each other to encourage and offer a shoulder to cry on and in those moments the ambiguity, uncertainty and crisis, that Deegan and Hill (1991) referred to, would dissipate. We shared experiences, offered solutions and encouraged each other in a similar fashion to the entrepreneurs at SVI. I doubt whether I would have been able to continue with the PhD without this peer support. I thus could completely understand Nate when he shared that the peer group offered 'that sense of going on a journey together, and being able to share each other's successes and failures and challenges' (interview 1). I know that it could have been me saying the exact same words.

Similarly maintaining the group, the PhD *communitas*, was difficult. The occasions on which we would get together decreased with time as some of us relocated further afield. Physical proximity was key here too. On the other hand the faculty organised monthly meetings in addition to the trainings and workshops, which initially helped bring the group together. The choice to attend however was ours. It thus depended on availability and student needs. Physical distance also affected the informal social exchanges within the peer group itself. Naturally some people would be more pro-active in their social exchanges. I was one of those people as Roland (another peer and a great friend) said. Once I moved to Scotland he shared there was nobody else who would proactively organise lunches together or pub nights on a regular basis as I did in the first year.

My personal experience of undergoing a rite of passage of my own helped me understand what entrepreneurs were going through themselves. And in reverse, some entrepreneurs' journeys helped me with mine too. I remember a few occasions when I talked to Ana, an entrepreneur from the second cohort. One day, near the end of my fieldwork, she asked me how my PhD was going. She was one of the entrepreneurs, there were a few of them at SVI, who had done a PhD herself. She really sympathised with me and my struggles. We talked about the time when you need to draw the line and finish the data collection. She also shared some of her unfortunate moments on her PhD journey – changing the study from quantitative to qualitative and thus deciding to change supervisor and how hard that was. For Ana, the uncertainty, ambiguity and anxiety were all part of the doctoral journey too.

In addition scrutiny and questioning were ongoing, especially at the writing-up stage. Being resilient to scrutiny and criticism was essential in order to complete the PhD too. Similarly in this context I had peers who found it difficult and those who did not. The mood swings and rollercoaster rides were typical for our journey too. Samantha and I would often talk about it and through those talks find out that we all feel down and discouraged at times. And just by sharing and encouragement we would find the strength to continue. That's why I knew exactly what Alex meant when he shared that the moral and emotional support the *communitas* offered is very important not so much for the venture but for the entrepreneur (Chapter 5, section 3.3). My personal experiences of a rite of passage thus helped me connect better and understand the entrepreneurs when they were sharing their challenges and experiences in the interviews and at the fortnightly meetings.

The supervisors provided a lot of encouragement and support emotionally too. Their belief in my ability to complete the PhD improved my confidence that I can succeed. They would often encourage me in the supervisory meetings, saying that they do not doubt that I have what it takes to write a dissertation. Despite the numerous comments and feedback I received, they recognised the potential. Their encouragement and belief in me sustained me on my journey so I could actually transform each draft and make it better. I cannot express how grateful I am for their support. Seeing them as masters in my journey has showed me how important their role is in the rite of passage, not only as experts in the field related to the PhD thesis, but as sources of confidence and belief. Similarly in the entrepreneurial rite of passage, Marcus had realised that the relationship between entrepreneur and business advisor should not only revolve around the venture, but take into account the entrepreneur too (Chapter 6, section 3).

When I started my journey I thought that it was all about writing the dissertation in order to become an academic (to complete the passage successfully), that was the object of the journey. However it turned out that it was equally about me, the subject of this rite of passage, the student. The support and encouragement of the supervisors and the peers assisted to transform myself first in order to be able to write this dissertation. I know it would not have been possible for me to continue without the support of both. I can speak for myself and a few of the others who shared a similar PhD experience. For me it was a life-changing journey, as Marcus had defined it, similar to that of Lucy. And others were more like Matt, self-sufficient by themselves and meeting their supervisors occasionally, disconnected from the liminal space of the PhD rite of passage. Finally we all incorporated into the world in different ways - some dropped out, others completed their journey earlier becoming lecturers before completing the PhD, or returned to industry. As with the SVI rite of passage there are diverse outcomes of the PhD rite of passage too.

Lastly, I agree with Meira (2014) that *communitas* is an essential part of liminality. It contains the social ties which are reduced to nothing by other scholars who apply the concept of liminality only as a state between and betwixt, of uncertainty and ambiguity. In this thesis I have shed light on the entrepreneurial incubation rite of passage and the importance of each of its elements - masters of ceremony, space and *communitas*. The latter's essential role in the entrepreneur's journey and the PhD journey have hopefully become apparent. Moreover *communitas* are a passage element we need to maintain and encourage more in academia.

Thank you PhD peer group and supervisors, I could not have completed my rite of passage without you.

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Appendix 1

Photographs

Photograph 1: the Social and Environmental Business Centre (street view)



Photograph 2: a quiet work zone, with office desks



Photograph 3: the built-in meeting room



Photograph 4: the café tables and single desk area



Photograph 5: the 'garden' - a sofa corner with grass carpet and lounge chairs



Photograph 6: Flora's venture area and three of her staff



Photograph 7: a view of the office from my desk



Photograph 8: unpacking furniture and assembling it, July 2014



Photograph 9: pods in the SEBC café, ground floor



Photograph 10: SVW2 panel session



Photograph 11: SVW3 networking



Photograph 12: Informal Discussion (that is the element of the assessment called Informal discussion and observation which takes place at various times throughout the weekend when the entrepreneurs are not in lectures. In this picture you can see Nick on the left, in white T-shirt informally chatting to a group of entrepreneurs and another group by the flip-chart talking to Pete, a Foundation Group representative)



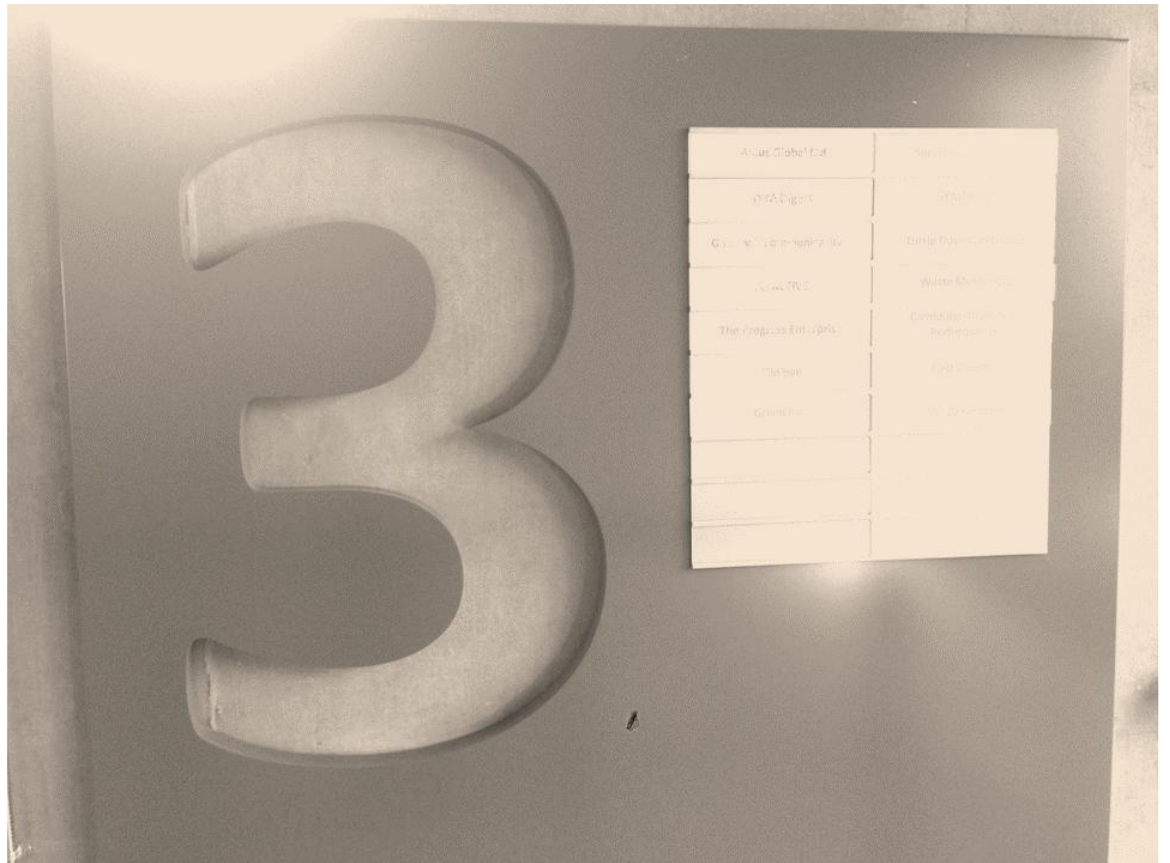
Photo 13: SVW1 facilitator-led activity



Photograph 14: SVW3 switching roles - entrepreneurs as instructors (here you can see Sandra, entrepreneur on cohort 1 facilitating the session for a group of entrepreneurs on SVW3)



Photograph 15: venture's name plates on 3rd floor landing



Photograph 16: Cohort 1 kick-off (Beth is welcoming the very first SVI cohort)



Photograph 17: Cohort 2 kick-off - ventures pitching and sharing needs (Here Andrea is presenting her idea to the rest and asking for things she needs from the group)



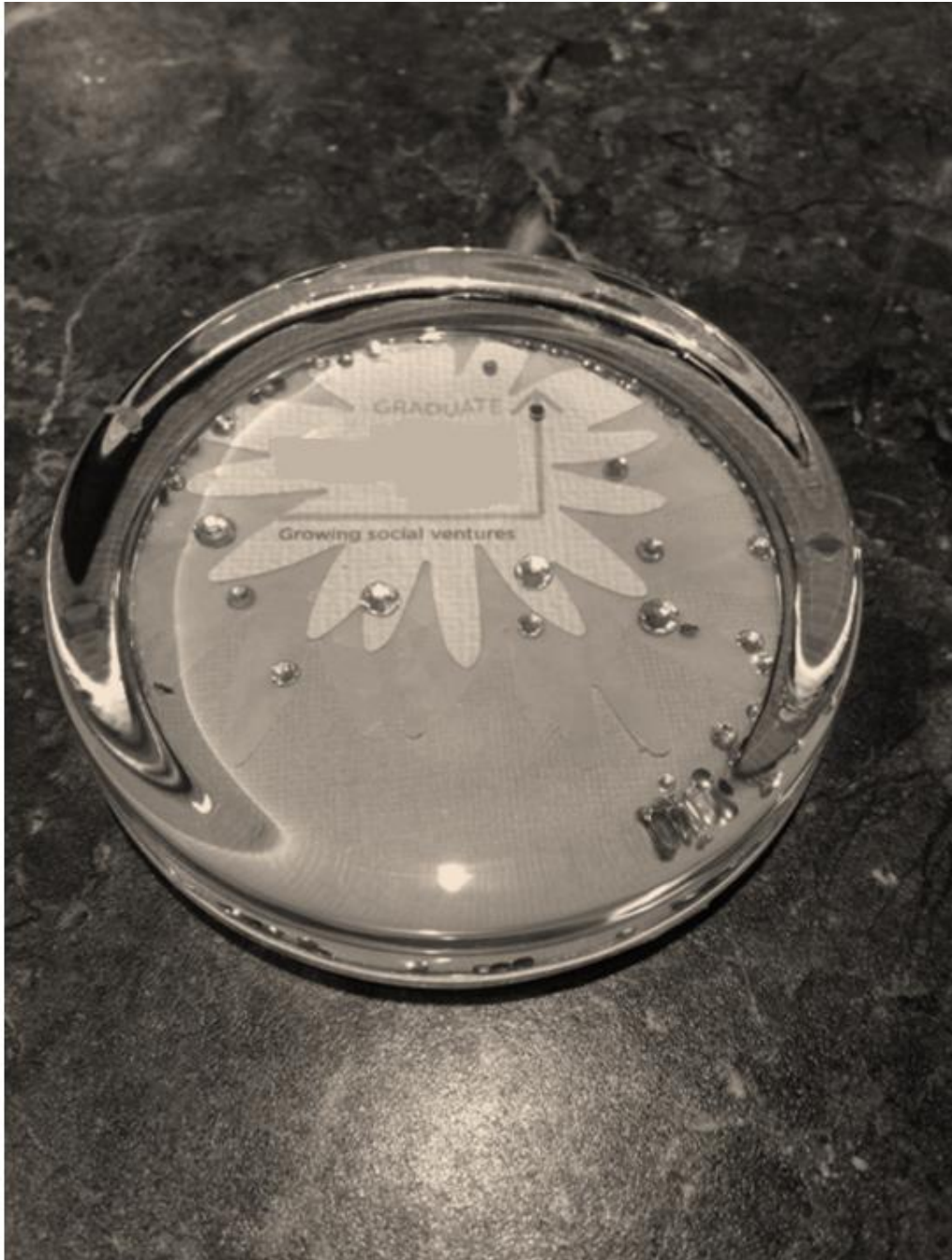
Photograph 18: cohort 1 - 2nd peer to peer meeting - a short talk on social media (five out of the 11 entrepreneurs attended it)



Photograph 19: A talk on investment-readiness - Beth invited a social investor to come and talk to the entrepreneurs on a pro bono basis



Photograph 20: the graduation award



Photograph 21: the graduation ceremony - cohort 1 entrepreneurs having a glass of prosecco and looking at their awards



Photograph 22: Cohort 1 graduation party



Appendix 2

Interview Overview

Pre-incubation phase	Date and Place
Michael	11.03.2014 Meeting room 2
Jen	01.04.2014 meeting room 1
Tom	29.04.2014 his office
Carol	28.03.2014 meeting room 1
Nick	01.04.2014 meeting room 2
James	03.02.2015 HM Treasury
Incubation phase - joining the incubator	Date and Place
Alex	18.09.2014 Hatchery Meeting room
Karen	24.09.2014 Room S11
Nate	30.09.2014 Hatchery Meeting room
Shane	23.10.2014 atrium cafe pods
Sandra	23.09.2014 Hatchery Meeting Room
Lucy	24.09.2014 Room S11
Incubation phase - halfway through	Date and Place
Karen	18.02.2015 atrium pods
Alex	05.02.2015 2nd floor break out area
Flora	10.02.2015 atrium cafe pods
Matt	16.03.2015 atrium cafe pods
Shane	29.01.2015 atrium cafe pods
Sandra	29.01.2015 atrium cafe pods
Lucy	19.03.2015 Skype
Nate	15.04.2015 meeting room
Samuel	24.03.2015 meeting room
Incubation phase - graduation	Date and Place
Karen	15.07.2015 Room S11
Shane	07.07.2015 meeting room 2
Sandra	14.07.2015 Room S11
Matt	16.07.2015 2nd floor break out area
Lucy	13.07.2015 telephone
Flora	21.07.2015 their own office
Samuel	29.07.2015 telephone
Nate	27.07.2015 telephone
Beth	11.06.2011 meeting room 1
Marcus	07.07.2015 meeting room 2
Andrea (cohort 2)	09.07.2015 Hatchery Meeting Room

Consent form: Signed by all interviewees listed above (hard copies available upon request). Signed hard copies are not anonymised.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Working title of the project: Business incubators as liminal spaces – longitudinal ethnographic case study

Main investigator and contact details: Irina Popova

Members of the research team:

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the research.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University¹⁴ processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me*

Name of participant (print).....Signed.....Date.....

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Working title of the project: Business incubators as liminal spaces – longitudinal ethnographic case study

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Signed: _____ Date: _____

¹⁴ "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges

Permission Letter: anonymised

Business Centre
names and
company logos
deleted

Irina Popova
LAIBS
Anglia Ruskin University
East Road
Cambridge
CB1 1PT

19 February 2014

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: PhD Research Undertaken at Social and Environmental Business Centre

I hereby grant permission to Irina Popova to carry out research at the Business Centre, Cambridge. We consent that she can use the data collected throughout her fieldwork at the Centre and publish the findings. The name of and Business Centre can be used, and we agree to Ms. Popova gaining individual consent from our tenants to include their details in the dissemination.

Yours Faithfully,



Centre Director



Appendix 3

Cohort 1 venture summary (as at selection)

	Lucy	Sandra	Nate
Entrepreneur	a mental health Occupational Therapist having specialised in supporting students from within the NHS. She offer individual sessions for students, also teacher training and parent workshops on how to improve academic performance generally for students.'	'a single mum of two young children with an MBA, BSc and 15 years experience in commercial management across Energy and Financial sectors. '	Nate has had 7 recent years as CEO of a disability charity with a similar focus to the venture, as well as 20 further years of national director and senior management experience across education, and health and social care sectors, all founded on an MSc in management, and MSc in clinical medicine from the University of Cambridge.
Venture	a professional performance coaching service for students which blends supervision, mentoring, coaching and therapy thus removing the 'stigma associated with counselling'.	'a one stop online service that matches jobshare applicants with each other and provides them with resources and support to develop successful partnerships.'	It enables disabled, elderly and vulnerable people to employ Personal Assistants (PAs) or care staff so they can continue to live at home. Providing distance-learning resources, payroll support and membership to a Guild of Employers of PAs, the 'lived experiences' of employers of PAs is at the heart of the business model.
Aims and intentions	1. 'to grow it, how to reach all the students that needed this service and how to do so in a way that would allow me to work with students who couldn't afford the service' 2. 'to build strong relationships with local businesses, private colleges and international colleges over the coming year' 3. 'The ultimate vision is of an academic performance centre within every academic centre in the region, enabling students to achieve their potential and driving those Royal College of Psychiatrist's statistics down'	The intent is for the matching to be automated as much as possible, like a match.com for Jobsharing' "Within the year, I expect the venture to be recognised as the match.com for job sharers. My mission is to create a national Jobshare Network and equal employment opportunity for jobshare partnerships. I expect to be franchising partnership building workshops nationally, and launching online partnership building games."	the ambition is to scale the venture
Challenges	to work out a business structure that allows me to offer my service to students who can't afford to pay for my coaching time. to think how to scale up in terms of other staff and how that would work	the process is manual matching based on location and games to build partnerships.'	Translating 'needs' into 'wants'.....enough for customers to purchase the venture's products and services Maintaining quality with growth Securing the first major contract / customer; I currently have 2 major charities expressing very real interest, with a month to go before launching the venture's first product.

	Shane	Alex	Samuel
Entrepreneur	Shane is an experienced software engineer and project director with a background in aerospace, defence, automation, media and publishing technologies.	a background in economics, software development, genomics and interaction design,	Samuel's experience stems from the hospitality industry before moving into digital, advertising, marketing and the creative sectors. He has worked with household brands and blue chip clients, climbed the career ladder, lived life full on and learnt a great deal on the way. He now brings that same hunger for success, to creating social change through the venture.
Venture	It is the first "on demand" UK travel service for car lift sharing for corporates and organizations. Making use of the latest innovations in mobile and web technologies, the venture provides a secure connection, links drivers and passengers together who are sharing a journey in real time while automatically brokering secure payment. We believe that we have created a universal lift sharing platform that will significantly impact carbon emissions, pollution, road safety and related issues.	It is a simple technological innovation that will help the hospitality sector automate waste monitoring, as recommended by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP). Automating the capturing of food waste data is more labour efficient, energy efficient, accurate, affordable and scalable than existing food waste solutions.	It is a pioneering social enterprise that supports businesses and organisations to create and implement engaging projects focusing on improving mental and emotional health for their employees and customers.
Aims and intentions	with multi-billion dollar companies like Uber setting the stage and priming the market, we have a chance of globalising our concept and targeting 1 billion car owners' 'Within the first year First Thumb aims, with Social Incubator East's help to: - Solidify resources -Hire a full time team - Pilot the concept - Gain funding/ income to progress beyond the region'	to scale the venture	It is a priority ambition to expand UK wide and overseas. We have successfully developed products that can be taken to market, a portfolio of case studies, have the right personnel in place for operational delivery and excellent opportunities in the market place,
Challenges	Social engineering the service to be just right to meet the sweet spot of social transportation needs.' 'we're still in the social engineering phase and we've got some technical challenges we're still butting up against, and some user interface challenges that we're trying to overcome as well making our service slicker and easier to use.'	Building a team is the main challenge.	the main challenges we face in scaling up our social enterprise are: 1.Finance to employ people on a full time basis Having finance in place will enable us to employ those currently working part time on a full time basis and allow me to achieve this. 2.Experience of business growth, inc., overseas Our growth to date has been organic, this needs to be more structured and mapped out. Having someone looking into our social enterprise from the outside and using their experience and knowledge of business growth will help achieve this. 3.Business connections The products are created, case studies at hand, personnel and operational structure formed. The final piece is to connect with the right people in targeted organisations. Once this challenge has been achieved, we have the capability to win new business and successfully deliver, which in turn will generate income and new business.

	Karen	Flora	Matt
Entrepreneur	Karen has 12 years experience in youth work, four as a young women's development worker focussing on issues such as domestic violence and homelessness. She has also worked in a variety of other settings such as a residential unit for children with autism and a charity, working with street children in Brazil.	Flora is an experienced bioinformatics scientist specialised in genetics with a background in software development. Awarded 'Best Contributed Lecture' at the NBIC Conference in 2011 and shortlisted for the 2013 WiSE Innovation Award, Flora is a pioneering social entrepreneur in the healthcare sector.	CEO & founder Matt (ex Director of Corporate Finance at Ernst & Young, Brussels, CEO of Bord na Mona Environmental) has been hearing impaired since birth.
Venture	We provide young women with opportunities to develop self esteem and confidence, job opportunities, networks and financial prospects by running creative events and gaining work experience in café settings.	The venture builds and hosts Open Source software projects that support and incentivise best practices for genomic data sharing. The tools are built with a focus on collaboration, community and good scientific practise for ethical data sharing. Our first product is a data discovery platform (think TripAdvisor for datasets), which is based on ideas originating at the charity collaborative brainstorming events.	We seek to develop a software solution that enables hearing-impaired people to receive a personalised audio signal based on their hearing loss direct to their mobile phone or device.
Aims and intentions	I really want to see and can see the potential for us being scaled successfully.' 'to develop a succinct business plan, working towards providing salaried positions for staff and young women' 'to further develop relationships with the local council, creating further opportunities for young women be involved in providing services at their events' to develop relationships with Cambridge venues and community groups, creating further opportunities for young women to be involved in running events'	our ambition is to scale as big as possible, since it will be the reach and usage of our platform that determines our impact.	Once proven in the UK, this patented technology can be rolled out globally after 15 months.
Challenges	not having business expertise and knowledge. The founder needs to have space to discuss things in order to get my head around things, make plans and move forward. She is in need of a sounding board with business / project management skills and understanding to talk to	making the right partnerships with customers and potential customers that will be good for us both now and in the future.	The main challenge now is to raise initial funds for the demonstration model thereafter to migrate the service over to a mobile telecoms and IP platform to prove - internationally - to the major telecoms carriers that this is opens up new customer profiles, new revenue streams and complies with corporate social responsibility issues.