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ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR NEOLIBERAL PEACEBUILDING: THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC POLICY DRAFTED BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN POST-CONFLICT COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of international organizations implicated in fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem in post-conflict countries by shaping public policy to establish a lasting peace through economic stability. Literature relevant to public policy and entrepreneurship – specific to post-conflict countries as well as international organizations' implication were discussed. An empirical study was conducted that focused on three post-conflict countries and involved twenty interviewees from different INGOs and intergovernmental organizations implicated in shaping public policy to promote entrepreneurial endeavors. The research provides insights of the overall dynamic of post-conflict public sector policy and the establishment of an entrepreneurial environment centered on inclusive practices and value creation. The research highlights on various contextual factors such as socio-economic issues, political climate, and ideological structures. Research findings show that most post-conflict countries were subjected to a forced injection of public policy from international entities without considering their local context, focusing only on economic factors – which led to ineffective entrepreneurship initiatives. In addition, study results show that international organization are directly involved in reconstructing public sector practices by involving startups in providing public services to achieve a lasting "Liberal Peace" influenced by the "Washington Consensus". Additionally, findings indicate that numerous entrepreneurial ventures were not sustainable, as most start-ups were heavily dependent on external assistance. Ultimately, the research proposes a conceptual framework for understanding how international organizations involved in creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem go about drafting public policies. In addition, the study offers a new perspective on "Liberal Peace" by examining entrepreneurial endeavors. The paper reveals many research gaps and suggestions new directions for future research on entrepreneurship in post-conflict countries while crisscrossing the discipline of public management. Our study also helps policymakers to design an effective entrepreneurship policy considering the specific requirements of post-conflict contexts.

KEYWORDS

entrepreneurship, post-conflict countries, economic recovery, public policy, liberal peace

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INTRODUCTION

After a war ends, a post-conflict period begins. This phase necessitates a halt in military confrontations, the initiation of peace talks or the implementation of a ceasefire, and the beginning of a reconstruction process (Kreutz, 2010). Many countries that have experienced conflict continue to be unstable, with issues such as political turmoil, economic stagnation and resulting challenges, and social tension being common (Junne, Verkoren, 2005). Experts suggest that a post-conflict phase is considered successful upon its completion, achieved through establishing stability and security via disarmament, state administration rebuilding, restoring law and order, implementing peace agreements, and resolving underlying issues (Moritz et al., 2023). In today's world, with the increasing number of international and internal conflicts, post-conflict recovery is a significant challenge (George et al., 2016, IASIA, 2019). Both governments and international organizations have made significant efforts to help these countries transition to peace and economic stability (Reychler, Langer, 2006).

In times of conflict/post-conflict transition, concerned countries often face fragility and frequent episodes of violence that pose obstacles to peacebuilding efforts (Junne, Verkoren, 2005). Nevertheless, peace, economic rejuvenation, and a working public sector are crucial requirements for lasting progress and are key objectives for the United Nations (George et al., 2016). However, countries handle these challenges in different ways, and there are many different approaches to post-conflict reconstruction that are evident (OECD, 2016). Most scholars and practitioners agree that public administration is crucial in reconstructing post-conflict countries by delivering essential public services to achieve peace (Brinkerhoff, 2007). In this context, post-conflict countries were introduced to a new state-building model by various entities including the United Nations, International Financial Institutions, and International Non-Governmental Organizations. According to a neoliberal perspective, if the state is reconstructed, public services are distributed equally, and the economy grows, there is no need to go back to a war-time state (Williams, Vorley, 2017).

In many cases of post-conflict intervention, the main priority for international organizations is to establish favorable conditions for business growth through public sector means, which in turn promotes economic recovery and innovation (Audretsch, Link, 2012). Indeed, Entrepreneurship is viewed as a mean to quickly drive reconstruction, promote sustainable economic development, and facilitate the transition of post-conflict countries, as highlighted by multiple experts (Desai, 2011, Bernal, Mousavizadeh, 2010, Bozzoli et al., 2013, Rapp, Olbrich, 2021). However, post-conflict entrepreneurship is quite different from a "normal" entrepreneurial setting – and requires different factors to be considered (Moritz et al., 2023). To many scholars, a comprehensive view of entrepreneurship in post-conflict country should consider historical, temporal, institutional, spatial, and social aspects (Welter, 2011). International organizations have worked on the post-conflict public sector, a more specifically on public policy to create the necessary conditions of an ecosystem capable of creating a business-friendly atmosphere in post-conflict countries to attain a sustainable peace through economic stability (Murshed, 2019). However, in recent years, many academics have viewed this approach as inefficient, ineffective, and unsuitable due to the unique characteristics of each nation (such as socio-cultural, historical, and anthropological factors) that can impact the implementation of the new system as is (Blunt, Turner, 2005). On another note, most entrepreneurial initiatives stopped once international organizations withdrew their funding from the post-conflict project (Aldairany et al., 2018).

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how international organizations contribute to creating an entrepreneurial environment in post-conflict nations by influencing public policy to promote economic stability to achieve long-term peace. The paper will outline post-conflict entrepreneurial public policy based on existing literature. An empirical research project was carried out in three post-conflict



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environments, interviewing twenty individuals from various INGOs and intergovernmental organizations that play a role in shaping public policy to support entrepreneurship. The study adds to the existing knowledge in the field of public management and entrepreneurship in post-conflict environments by pointing out various aspects like the impact of poorly designed public policies on entrepreneurial ventures, the shortcomings of liberal peace, etc. It also guides policymakers in creating entrepreneurship policies tailored to the unique needs of post-conflict situations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Liberal Peace & International Organizations Intervention

After the end of the cold war (1947-1991), and with the multiplication of conflicts across the globe various international actors engaged in peacebuilding efforts have developed the concept of post-conflict development (Ahmad, 2006, Belaid, 2012). Post-conflict rebuilding refers to efforts to find ways to enhance peace and prevent a relapse into conflict (Nhema, 2015). This idea is now a crucial aspect of the peacebuilding strategies of global organizations such as the UN, INGOs, IFIs, etc., to attain a lasting peace (Obuku et al., 2017). Put differently, international entities fund a reconstruction process in post-conflict counties which involves creating new incentive systems from within, drafting new public policies, etc. (Boyce, 2007). This is achieved by providing post-conflict aid, which involves giving resources such as money, technology, and more. Different ways of support include (Garriga, Phillips, 2014; Obuku et al., 2017): (1) Multilateral Public Aid launched by International Organizations (i.e. IBRD, World Bank, IMF, UNDP, OECD DAC); (2) Bilateral Official Aids which is a direct agreement between two countries; and (3) Private Aids from developed country's private sector to underdeveloped nations. All these efforts aim to build a strong economy through different means – as ensuring economic steadiness will achieve stability and social cohesion (OECD, 2002). This can be achieved by using a neo-liberal economic approach to peace – known as "Liberal Peace".

"Liberal Peace" is an approach aimed at restoring fragile states by strengthening national institutions linked to sustainable peace and creating tools to resolve the root causes of conflict, such as social cohesion and economic development, from a liberal perspective (Richmond, 2008). To guarantee liberal peace, it is necessary to have an intervention led by external entities such as international and charitable organizations, because the problem is internal, but the solution must come from outside. Their participation consists of a top-down, fragmented approach to nation-building. Hence, it is an introduction of a new way of thinking ("liberal") (Autesserre, 2011). Furthermore, the objective of the interested parties is to reduce and prevent conflicts, by improving national and local skills in conflict resolution (Castillo, 2003, Richmond, 2008, Oliveira dos Santos, 2019). Also, strategies for achieving liberal peace include post-conflict reconstruction, the promotion of democracy and justice, market-based economic reforms, the creation of other institutions linked to 'modern' states to foster peacebuilding and the empowerment of the population (Oliveira dos Santos, 2019)

Post-Conflict Entrepreneurship Public Policy

Within the context of liberal peace, international organizations work on drafting and executing public policies that foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem. The idea is to initiate and incubate policies that encourage micro-businesses as well as the development of key factors underlying entrepreneurship (i.e. loan guarantees, support for exporters, advice and information provision, incubation and acceleration



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programs, efficient labor market projects, etc.) as well as macro-economic policies, such as interest rates, which affect all businesses but have deep impact on entrepreneurial risks (Abramov, 2009). The idea is to create the incentives (i.e. financial profit), the means (i.e. coaching, incubators, laws and regulations, etc.), and the market (Chowdhury, 2011, Djib, 2014). Such policies have an impact on economic growth and dynamics in the post-war economic.

Adaptability, resilience and the ability to manufacture small goods and to provide services with a high degree of flexibility and cost effectiveness by micro-businesses are hallmarks to the post-war economy (Bray, 2009; Desai et al., 2013). On another note, micro-businesses are particularly important for bringing innovative products and/or services to the post-war market, nurturing talent, and creating employment – specially for the former-combatants, alleviating poverty, increasing social and economic participation of women, youth, and minorities (Aldairany et al., 2018, Bongomin et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research was conducted to investigate how international organizations are implicated in the drafting of public policies fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems and subsequently entrepreneurial activities. This approach was deemed to be appropriate since such a process enables a proper understanding of the studied topic and provides insight on why and how particular things occur during specific events (Eisenhardt, 1989). Three middle eastern countries (Lebanon, Iraq and Syria) were chosen given the unstable nature of their environment (a continuous stalemate of war – post-war periods). On another, the thousands of INGOs and their funded projects in Lebanon have made such parties the third wheel of public policy (Abou Assi, 2006). Indeed, such entities have been actively engaged in public activity, impacting public policy (Najam, 2000). On another note, when it comes INGOs entrepreneurial projects these countries – given the variability of their objectives – the outcome of such activities varies.

Data was collected from twenty (20) INGOs, International development agencies, Embassy programs, intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, etc. implicated in shaping public policy in the said countries to promote entrepreneurial endeavors. The sampled entities aimed to provide a comprehensive coverage of their origin, nature, interest, objectives, etc. – thus avoiding over emphasis on a specific type of activity (Palmatier et al., 2007). This decision allowed the researchers to capture a wide range of international entities' perceptions (Gersick, 1988). Interviewees were selected based on their experience as well as their current and past involvement in post-conflict entrepreneurial activities and public policy implication. All interviewees had at least three years of working experience in the three studied post-conflict countries. Over a period of two years (2022-2023), interviews were conducted that concentrated on two main inquiries: the entrepreneurial initiatives that were supported by such entities, as well as the process of participating in formulating and implementing public policies the three post-conflict countries, were conducted. A semi-structured qualitative protocol was employed given that each entity had a different identity with a different mission – hence, operated in a relatively different context. This allowed the researchers to adapt the questions to both the interviewed organizations' representative and their work.

Data collected from interviews and existing literature were used to properly outline the studied topic (Eisenhardt, 1989). Since the researchers are situated in France, interviews were conducted using Zoom. Every interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Twenty (20) interviews were carried out under similar conditions to avoid bias and ensure reliability (Guba, Lincoln, 1985). Researchers were prohibited from recording the interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and transcribed.



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Researchers used a triangulation methodology incorporating interviews and archival sources to enhance the reliability and validity of the data (Yin, 1994). The extracted data was classified by origin (interviews and archives) by the researchers. This was done as to when qualitative data from various sources matched, the findings were considered stronger and the patterns more valid. On the other hand, conflicting data were gathered in another analysis group to be re-analyzed, re-studied or thrown due to inadequate verification (Eisenhardt, 1989). In conclusion, data that were collected were cross-referenced with previous literature to confirm the contributions made in both theory and practice (Eisenhardt, 1989).

FINDINGS

The Challenges of Post-Conflict Entrepreneurship Public Policy

The challenges to entrepreneurship public in post-conflict environments are similar yet very distinct from those where war is an ongoing phenomenon – given that a conflict (and its derivatives, in the post-war period) takes place on a spectrum:

- **State Rebuilding:** In most cases, either the public administration will not help the launching of such initiatives, or the rebuilt model is not compliant to the expected outcome.
- **Lack of Security:** Security is a crucial element in post-conflict settings. Nonetheless, development must be coupled with security to avoid economic stagnation and civil unrest, while security alone can also imperil economic growth and potentially cause a total economic collapse.
- **Insufficient Peace Support Activities:** In most cases, peace support activities were insufficient as they were not transformational – in other note, the injected content (system) did not have a proper impact on the culture, the mindset and the behavior of the community.
- **Complicated Administrative Structures:** They can be the result of the old public sector or the new one – however, in most cases, it created fragmented economic and labor markets, scarcity of financial support, unfriendly regulatory environment, etc.
- **Lack of Real Financing:** Given the financial risk level, access to capital outside of external funding, whether from formal or informal sources is quite difficult and, in some cases, non-existent.
- **Difficulties Empowering the deprived Population:** In most cases, post-conflict entrepreneurial initiatives fail to include women, minorities, etc. in the all-in-all process.
- **Inadequate Programs:** Most international entities do not consider the particularities of each country and its context and offer entrepreneurial programs that will not help with the process as is.
- **Lack of Facilities and Human Capital:** In most cases, there was a lack of incubator, accelerators, facilities, equipment, access to technology, etc. On another note, there was a lack of skills, competencies to initiate the project – as well as the lack of qualified human resources to either develop or sustain the project that was already launched.



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Non-Sustainable Entrepreneurial Dynamics

Most international organizations have adopted a similar approach to post-conflict entrepreneurial initiatives regardless of the community, region, country, etc. In other words, without considering any particularities or specificities of each environment (i.e. anthropological, social, etc.).

On another note, most INGOs and international organizations were heavily involved in any entrepreneurial project (more or less) given that they were getting funding to fund such projects and export the know-how. They had to spend all their budget on a yearly basis – which resulted in the funding of non-serious and non-sustainable projects. Indeed, many projects that were supported, were very unimpressive, artisanal, and primitive – with no serious impact on the economy.

Furthermore, many projects were wrongly incubated given that several training programs were inadequate, and many proposed initiatives were non-compliant to the existing environment (i.e. high-tech projects).

DISCUSSION

Post-Conflict Liberal Peace

Post-conflict countries are perceived as weak, fragile, and in most cases faltering states. Nevertheless, liberals argue that employing liberal peace can address the problems created and suffer. International organization linked with neo-liberal IFIs advocate for liberal peace strategies to develop states in this scenario. The objective is to reform the public sector and modernize its establishments to deliver top-notch services to citizens uniformly across all areas, with the goal of averting a return to tumultuous periods.

Specific characteristics and assumptions characterize liberal peacebuilding in post-conflict nations, including:

- 1) frequently led by foreign entities, portrayed as non-political and with good intentions;
- 2) emphasizing internal problems with seeking external solutions;
- 3) prioritizing international interventions over local actions and favoring top-down state-building over bottom-up approaches;
- 4) aiming to establish a market economy and modern institutions as essential for peace-building;
- 5) covering sectors like security, development, humanitarian aid, governance, democracy, and law;
- 6) suggesting that liberal democratic societies are more peaceful and prosperous than non-liberal/non-democratic ones.

The Achilles Heel of INGOs' Post-Conflict Entrepreneurship Public Policy

In most post-conflict countries, the public policies installed by international organization have had an Achilles effect:



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- **Heavy International Organizations' Direct Implication:** International organizations are directly involved with their staff, expertise, funding, etc. They are managing the formulation as well as the execution of public policies related to entrepreneurship. Such entities are heavily investing, incubating, accelerating, and supporting projects (i.e. external consultants, etc.).
- **Once International Organizations are Out:** However, once organizations decide to do an exit strategy, most startups are not properly developed to the point of being independent. In other words, such local micro-businesses have such a bad business model, where they are heavily reliant on the assistance of international entities and cannot continue their development if funding, expertise, etc. are suddenly cut-off. On another note, public entities, cannot fulfill this task, as they do not have either the expertise, facilities, etc. to do the international organizations past activities.

Hence, we understand that a small development through public policies is possible, however – it is conditioned by the presence and direct involvement of international entities. This means that in case of an exit strategy, there is the possibility that the injected entrepreneurial eco-system be systematically dismantled – which can lead to unstable events in an already unpredictable post-conflict setting, thus jeopardizing the very objective of “Business for Peace”.

CONCLUSION

The paper bridges the gap between public policy, entrepreneurship and post-conflict countries – while highlighting the concept of “Liberal Peace”. With modern-day conflicts now more complex and longer lasting, academic research on the interaction between entrepreneurship and peace will continue to increase as scholars explore durable solutions for sustainable peace. The study has sought to make the broad field of post-conflict studies more inclusive by extending its existing pillars: the economic pillar, the public management pillar, and the entrepreneurship pillar. These extensions open the door for further contributions to the interplay of entrepreneurial business and peace while also helping to theoretically advance post-conflict public policy.

Based on the results of our study, we suggest that future research should develop more holistic solutions for post-conflict entrepreneurship in in post-conflict countries. Such research should be based on "practice" made possible by the partnership between academia, INGOs, local associative entities and the private sector to leverage the expertise and drive forward the knowledge in this field of study. Moreover, future research should improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public policy and entrepreneurial initiatives to ensure sustainable socio-economic conditions and lasting peace.

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