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Homogenization processes in entrepreneurship education: the case of Junior Achievement

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship Education (EE) programmes world-wide serve a highly standardized menu of activities for student consumption, such as pitching exercises, competitions and mini-companies. This situation has been called the McDonaldization of EE, where standard activities are adopted globally. In this paper we study the influence of Junior Achievement (JA) – the ‘original burger’ – to draw attention to the institutionalizing pressure it exerts on EE. We use data from JA organizational websites in England, Sweden and Denmark to describe JA as a global institution exerting homogenizing pressures on the field of EE. Five common dynamics are identified to explain in more detail how JA contributes to the homogenization of EE through: neutralizing ideology; propagating the mini-company template; evidencing strategically; facilitating communion and mythologizing success. New research avenues studying the influence of JA as a powerful institution and potential counter-actions to de-institutionalize EE are proposed. Junior Achievement has been studied before, but most investigations consider the impact of JA on individuals, in terms of effects on students’ knowledge and skills. The contribution of this study is in how it focuses on the homogenizing influence of JA as an institution on the system of EE.

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1. Introduction

Over the last 40 years, Entrepreneurship Education (EE) initiatives have not only grown globally (Katz 2003, Byrne, Fayolle, and Toutain 2014), but have transformed in fundamental ways. From only a few but diverse initiatives, driven by enthusiastic teachers (Jamieson 1984, Gibb 1987), the field now appears vast (Fayolle 2013) and homogenized (Hytti 2018, Fletcher 2018), with EE programmes run in a similar fashion, which like other forms of fashion travel all over the world (Czarniawska 2005). An indistinguishable menu of approaches, comprising canvas drafting, pitching exercises, competitions and mini-companies, are replicated on programmes and venture creation courses globally with little questioning (Hytti, 2018). This pushes educators into a role of passive followers (Czarniawska 2005) and leaves many EE programmes disconnected from local circumstances as well as from future needs of society (Fletcher 2018). This situation has been described as the McDonaldization of EE (Hytti 2018), a one-size-fits-all approach with highly standardized and limited activities being served up for student consumption. Such activities may be time efficient as they are well known and therefore easily reproduced, and, as a result, can be

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offered efficiently to more students. However, greater quantity of such activities does not ensure greater quality, inclusion and equality. The strong focus on venture creation and competitions and obliviousness to questions of gender, class and ethnicity may contribute to EE becoming more elite, not less (Hytti 2018, Berglund and Verduijn 2018, Berglund, Lindgren, and Packendorff 2017).

According to Hytti (2018), courses and activities carried out in a similar fashion across the globe are often adopted from Junior Achievement models. Junior Achievement is one of the first and oldest EE organizations, with its Company Programme (student start up model) exported across the world (Junior Achievement Worldwide n.d.a.). This points to a role Junior Achievement (JA) has played in the formation of EE as we now know it. Alvarez (1993) has observed how JA materials were broadly adopted by schools and universities in Mexico with little adaptation to local context, contributing to the institutionalization of ideas about entrepreneurship. Considering institutional forces has been identified as an important but neglected element of EE research. Kyrö (2015) argues that as EE is policy related and as policy is society's medium for manifesting its ideas, more attention should be paid to educational institutions and institutional practices which shape values and norms.

A few authors *inside* EE (Alvarez 1993, Hytti 2018) have credited JA as having significant influence on EE, yet little attention has been paid to JA as an institution, and the pressures it may have exerted on the field. This paper takes on that challenge, making use of concepts from institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, Scott 2014) to consider the consequences of this most long-standing institution – the original burger restaurant in the McDonaldization metaphor – on the system of EE itself.

In this paper we also follow the example of authors *outside* of EE, who have taken on the endeavour of studying the wider, cultural effects of JA (Sukarieh and Tannock 2009, Oldham 2018), and other examples where authors have been interested in exploring the influence of a powerful organization (Sukarieh and Tannock 2008, Zhao 2020). These studies make use of archive material and policy documents to provide an alternative perspective to illuminate how a powerful organization influences its environment and actors. This approach has been used to study the historical development of JA and its influence on school commercialization (Sukarieh and Tannock 2009) and to explore the influence of New Zealand's JA franchise on neo-liberal enterprise culture (Oldham 2017, 2018).

We take inspiration from this body of work and contribute with an empirically, as well as theoretically, informed creative description of JA's institutional power and how this may influence the homogenization of EE. Our aim with this is to challenge prevailing understandings of JA as a phenomenon, adopting a 'studying-up' approach (Nader, 1972) which redirects the gaze upwards to offer an alternative and critically informed perspective on this Nobel Peace Prize nominated global phenomenon. Our resulting (re)description represents new answers to our main research question: how may JA have contributed to homogenizing the field of EE? To attend to this overall research question, the paper progresses as follows. First, we briefly review extant literature on critical EE research, on JA and on institutional theory in EE. This is followed by an outline of our research approach leaning on abductive re-description, that is, creatively showing how a phenomenon might be seen in new light by re-describing it in ways not done before (Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson 2002, 88–95). Through the lens of institutional theory we re-describe JA as a global institution that exerts homogenizing pressures on a national level. From this re-description and from JA national websites we abstract and exemplify five common dynamics for how JA may have contributed to the homogenized field of EE. Given the limited extant work on investigating the dominance of Junior Achievement, this paper seeks to critique as well as explain, aiming to engage in non-trivial theorizing (Gioia and Pitre, 1990, Weick, 1989) which might awaken doubts about current understandings of JA. We conclude with questions and challenges that unsettle and reframe taken-for-granted views of JA.

2. Literature review

In the following sections we review three streams of literature supporting our endeavour to explore how JA may have contributed to homogenizing the field of EE. First, we position our work within the stream of Critical EE research and relate it to discussions of McDonaldisation. Second, as JA is the subject matter we study, and as JA has already been studied in EE, we introduce it and position our approach within extant research as studying the impact of JA on the system of EE, rather than the typical study of the impact of JA on individuals. Finally, as we lean on institutional theory in our re-descriptions, we briefly review some earlier work in EE to apply an institutional theory lens.

2.1 Critical entrepreneurship education research

Critical inquiry takes different forms, for example either *working within* or *aiming to disrupt* research practices, structuring of knowledge and ideologies in a field (Fletcher and Seldon, 2016). Adopting a critical perspective can be a tactic to unveil hidden or taken for granted assumptions, offering ways out of oppressive social structures and modes of domination (Verduijn et al. 2014). An early critical perspective was provided by Allan Gibb, proposing that an ‘enterprise education’ approach could escape a narrow venture and economic focus (Gibb 1987). A more recent attempt to unsettle ‘taken-for-granted’ views among EE scholars has been labelled Critical Entrepreneurship Education (CEE) (e.g. Berglund and Verduijn 2018). A main theme has been how the learning-by-doing and practice-orientation of EE foster individuals with traits that are profitable in the global market, but instal EE as part of a neo-liberal restructuring process (Holmgren et al 2005). In this way neo-liberal ideologies of marketization and self-sufficient enterprising individuals covertly enter the school system through EE (Komulainen et al. 2011, Berglund 2013). Another key theme has been how homogenized approaches to EE fail to consider or remedy class, race, and gender inequalities (Berglund and Verduijn 2018), instead requiring participants to adapt to a flawed image of the successful heroic white male entrepreneur (Ogbor 2000, Jones 2018).

In addition, the compounding nature of these effects generates the potential for EE to obstruct democracy as it celebrates ideologies based on ‘individualisation and competition at the expense of civic responsibility’ (Leffler, Svedberg & Botha 2010). Other angles which develop a critical understanding of EE include having cult-like qualities (Farny et al. 2016), EE contributing to corporate ideological colonization (Williams and Mills 2018), and the competitive focus of EE being ubiquitous but unexplored (Brentnall 2020).

Outside of EE, in sociology and education research, Junior Achievement and its problematic influence are specifically discussed (McCafferty 2010, Ball and Junemann 2011, Sukarieh and Tannock 2009, Oldham 2017, 2018). Within CEE, however, there is a lack of critical studies investigating JA. An exception is Hytti’s (2018) implication of JA in the McDonaldisation of EE. Writing about the ‘McEducation’ of EE, Hytti identifies that concerns for context, reflexivity and the bigger picture require that academics resist dominant ways in which EE is introduced and understood. Drawing on Ritzer’s (1998) metaphor of the McDonaldisation of Higher Education, Hytti discusses how EE can be characterized as another experience of ‘educational consumption’ with ‘students as consumers’ (Hytti 2018, 229). Efficient consumption is key to Ritzer’s (1998) McDonaldisation metaphor, where a standardized, calculable, controlled and predictable process of sameness is replicated across franchises with the goal of getting the fast-food customer from being hungry to full in the most rationalized way possible, disregarding whether it is healthy or potentially harmful.

The McDonaldisation metaphor may express both an outcome and a process view. Hytti expresses the *outcome* perspective when she states *where we are* in EE – analogous to a fast-food restaurant ‘dispensing hamburgers and similar highly standardised foods’, which have been adopted from ‘Junior Achievement models’ (Hytti 2018, 230). The standardized menu includes a focus on profit-oriented start-ups, venture creation, pitching exercises and competitions, leading to a loss of individuality, diversity and pedagogical variety in EE. As a result, Hytti argues

that EE risks being characterized less as a tool for human emancipation and more as a mechanism for capital reproduction. To complement and extend this idea, we develop the *process* perspective of the McDonaldization metaphor, as we explore *how we got here*, and specifically attempt to illuminate the dynamics of JA's influence on EE. This paper contributes to critical EE literature in the way it (re)directs the research gaze upwards, and unsettles established views about a powerful global EE institution. Having positioned our study in relation to CEE literature, we continue the literature review with an overview of JA and how the organization has typically been studied.

2.2 Junior Achievement (JA)

JA started as a regional organization under the name 'Boys' and Girls' Bureau of the Eastern States League" in 1919 in Springfield, Massachusetts (Junior Achievement USA – About JA, n.d.a.). It was part of efforts to bring Business Education to children (Katz, 2003), and to modernize agriculture through rural youth programs (Langton, 1956). In the following decades the organization developed first into a national organization and later into an international organization (Junior Achievement Records 1916–2016).

A backdrop for forming the organization was the movement of rural people to the growing cities of America and the desire for a well-trained workforce (Francomano 1988). The organization was formed from donations from influential industrialists and business leaders. Activities aimed to show the benefit of hard work and self-reliance to form habits of 'thrift and economy' (Francomano 1988, 5). To achieve this, JA formed 'Company Programs' as after-school activities for 8–12-year-olds that operated like miniature businesses where students would form and run companies in their communities (Junior Achievement Records 1916–2016). In the 1940s these activities were transformed into formal after-school programs. In this process JA developed texts and manuals tailored to teach youth about business (Junior Achievement Records 1916–2016). JA transformed into a national organization, expanding 22-fold between 1945 and 1970 to gain representation in 50 states (Sukarieh and Tannock 2009). During this period, JA began to launch international franchises. Young Enterprise was launched in England in 1962, and sister organizations started to develop across Europe. Today JA works in over 100 countries across the globe and its flagship Junior Achievement 'Company Programme', designed in an in-curricular way that reaches many students, sits at the heart of its world-wide provision (JA Worldwide n.d.a).

2.3 Junior achievement in literature

Early writings about JA are seen in American journals. Willard (1927, 186–188) provides a glowing piece about the rationale of the new organization. Attention is drawn to the changing world of work from child labour to buying goods from stores, and its programmes helping to 'take up the slack in the lives of young people' by furnishing them with employment-like activities in their leisure time. JA is described as an 'instrument in self-help', providing training for the personal development of the young individual.

Over the next years, the programme is in literature related to youth development. For example, it is used as an illustration of how children were educated through putting on an Operetta (Potts 1929), as character-building akin to The Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Red Cross (Heaton 1934), and as a self-help opportunity for youth who couldn't access work experience (Granger 1940). Those involved in the organization, such as advisers (Calfo 1945), judges (Carey 1950) or founders (Langton 1956), extol its positive impact on young people. Some writings acknowledge the potential of JA to influence culture more widely. Carey (1949, 188) asks: 'What better way could there be to repulse attacks on the free-enterprise system than to teach the youth of the country how the system works and why it is productive?'. Jones (1960) identifies that JA enables youngsters to learn about the free enterprise system and repel communist ideology.

From the 1960s until today, there is a shift towards researchers trying to capture the impact of JA on individuals. Authors in this wave are concerned with whether JA impacts students' economic understanding (Wilson 1969), attitudes towards business and industry (Specht 1979), career awareness (Parker 1981), entrepreneurial competencies and intentions (Oosterbeek, van Praag and Ijsselstein 2010), enterprise potential (Athayde 2009 entrepreneurial activity and performance (Johansen 2010, Elert, Andersson and Wennberg 2015)), start-up intentions (Johansen and Clausen 2011), attitudes towards entrepreneurs (Johansen, Schanke and Clausen 2012) and grades (Johansen and Somby 2016).

In summary, recent attention is focussed on the impact of JA and its programmes *on the individual*, rather than *on the system* of EE itself. Thus, despite JA's potential to influence the foundations of EE, existing research on JA does not explore its sources of power or its institutionalizing influence. This pattern of research has been called 'studying down', that is, focussing downwards on individuals, families and labour processes, rather than 'studying up' to understand the role and processes of elite power and institutions (Nader, 1972). Therefore, (re)considering JA as an institution can develop insights into its influence on the McDonaldization of EE. To pursue this, we review institutional theory in relation to EE research.

2.4 Institutional theory in EE

Institutional theory can help explain why a particular form of educational practice (e.g. entrepreneurship course, program or extra-curricular support system) is selected, and whose interests might best be served by that particular arrangement and who may be disadvantaged (Meyer and Rowan 2006, 4). Power is a ubiquitous fact in education, as actors are motivated not only by self-interest, but by values and cultural beliefs. An institutional perspective may thus illuminate the influence of educational 'power centres' and how they constrain or direct educational development (Meyer and Rowan 2006).

Institutions and institutional forces are said to be important but overlooked areas in the process of the formation of EE (Kyrö 2015, Fayolle et al. 2016a). As most other fields, EE has institutionalized particular ideas and established taken for granted and unconscious practices (Alvarez 1993, Fayolle 2013, Berglund and Verduijn 2018, Fletcher, 2018). Such homogenization can be thought of as an outcome of institutionalization, which, left unaddressed, results in scholarship and practice becoming calcified with myths and assumptions, so that ideas and practice are hollow but hard to change (Fayolle et al, 2016a). In the homogenization of EE, Junior Achievement is implicated, as its standard activities have been replicated across the globe (Hytti, 2018). If homogenization is the current state of EE and JA is implicated in this process, re-describing Junior Achievement as a global institution (cf. Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson 2002), and illuminating its related power, can help develop an understanding of how JA may have contributed to homogenizing the field of EE.

3. Research approach

This research adopts the overall strategy of 'studying-up' (Nader, 1972), an approach which intentionally looks at how power is exerted by elites and institutions. Elites are interested parties seeking to manipulate their own representation and protect their structurally privileged position in society (Souleles, 2021). Studying up therefore requires a revised research ethics, where responsibility to reveal elites' social power over public life is prioritized over traditional notions of doing no harm and asking for informed consent (Alvesalo-Kuusi and Whyte 2018).

In our attempt to study-up we lean on a mode of inference identified by explanatory social scientists (Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson 2002), who describe the possibility of re-interpreting empirical material by drawing on theory and concepts which unsettle what is known around a subject. This approach is called abductive reasoning or abduction and is characterized by a continuous interplay between theory and empirical observations (Dubois and Gadde, 2002,

Davidson and Højlund 2022). In this paper we make use of frameworks and concepts from institutional theory, a field committed to understanding how power operates through institutions (Scott, 2014). Abductive research does not result in absolute truths, but rather contributes with new meanings, creative hypotheses and deeper understandings around established phenomena (Peirce, 1903, Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson 2002).

A common abductive approach is to provide a re-description of a well-known phenomenon, providing 'new meaning to already known phenomena' allowing us to 'understand and explain already known occurrences in a novel way' (Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson 2002, 91). Famous examples, *sans comparison*, include Marx's description of society from a materialist perspective, Darwin's description of biological evolution as natural selection, and Freud's description of dreams as expressions of the unconscious (Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson 2002). Such re-descriptions can elicit novel accounts of structures, underlying processes and relations that challenge, deepen, or transform established knowledge or taken for granted assumptions. It helps us 'break away from a descriptive discourse and provide a possibility to see "something" as "something else"' (Uggla, 1994, 400, cited in Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson 2002, 94).

3.1 Re-describing JA

In this paper we use the archival opportunity that exists on JA organizational websites, sourcing publicly available content from JA Global, JA Europe and three country level websites: Young Enterprise; Ung Företagsamhet Sverige and the Fonden for Entreprenörskab. Promotional materials by institutions, such as those found on JA websites, can be assumed to have been carefully, not casually constructed, and are thus not neutral (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings 2002, Souleles, 2021). Therefore, websites provide important insight into how powerful institutions want to be seen and how they influence. A first stage of abductive reasoning described by Danermark et al (2002) is to develop descriptions of a phenomenon in everyday language. Thus, to illustrate JA as a powerful global institution, we provide a description of its scale, structure and activities (cf. Miller, 2019), using empirical material from its own websites.

Next, we re-describe the influence of JA by using frameworks and concepts from institutional theory. Initially, our abductive theorizing is informed by DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) framework of homogenizing pressures (coercive, mimetic and normative). We connect empirical material from three country-level websites with these homogenizing pressures to illuminate dimensions of how environmental shaping is done. We focus on England, Sweden and Denmark, because our background knowledge of the EE field in our home countries supported us to access, understand and interpret the contextual information, and to connect material from national websites to the broader field of EE, policy and regional reports, PR stories and blogs. The process and experience of moving between empirical data on country level websites and theory on homogenization processes lead us to theorize commonalities in how JA contributes to the homogenization of EE.

3.2 Theorising around common dynamics

Five dynamics common across the three country cases were theorized through a process that started with a write-up of extensive case descriptions of JA as a global institution and three country-level empirical accounts. This working material is available upon request to the corresponding author. These descriptions were used as multiple cases (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007) from which we compared, identified and abductively theorized five dynamics common across all three cases. This enabled us to move from the specific empirical accounts of homogenization of EE in three countries, to dynamics common in all three countries. Common dynamics were identified through a combination of: (1) writing and editing the national case descriptions across authors, enabling us to notice patterns in the accounts of JA-worldwide and the national franchises in England, Sweden and Denmark, (2) reading and revisiting wider institutional literature to find concepts that gave

meaning to the empirical material, and (3) engaging with and synthesizing extant literature on JA and EE to connect the emerging dynamics to existing critical theorizing.

The theorization involved a cyclical consideration of argument and evidence (Gioia and Pitre 1990) that required describing, interpreting, re-describing and re-thinking the empirical cases from the perspective of an emerging framework. Informant-centric terms and labels were transformed into a more researcher-centric '2nd-order theoretical level of themes' (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013, 20). The purpose was to better understand and explain the dynamics of JA's influence, with the ambition that such an analysis would contribute to an understanding of how JA may have homogenized the field of EE.

4. Re-describing JA as a global institution homogenizing EE

According to institutional theory, organizations are considered institutions if they have achieved a level of transgenerational endurance and gravity that is not fully captured in the word 'organization'. They have then become institutionalized, that is, they have a special taken for granted character, distinctive in forms and processes, reproducing themselves to become enduring features of social life (Selznick 1957, 1996, Turner, 1997). Drawing on this, the present section should help the reader 'see' JA as a global institution, with a scale, structure and activities (cf. Miller, 2019) that have culturally been shaping their context (cf. Swidler 1986, Phillips and Malhotra, 2017), thus contributing to the homogenization of EE. We first illuminate JA as a global institution, followed by examples of homogenizing pressures exerted by JA on a national level in England, Sweden and Denmark.

4.1 Junior achievement – a global institution in terms of scale, activities and structure

The *scale* of JA is global, with a presence spanning more than 100 countries through six regional operating centres in Africa, the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and the United States. JA Worldwide describes itself as a youth-serving NGO and has been ranked as the fifth most impactful Social Good Organisation in the world (thedotgood, 2023). Its 3,300 staff provide 10.5 million student experiences yearly, and the organization relies upon 278,000 teachers, 100,000 schools, 312,000 volunteers and 100 million alumni to achieve its delivery capacity. Thus, not only is JA one of the first EE organizations in the world, it is also the largest, demonstrating its status as an institution able to reproduce itself globally and over long time (cf. Turner, 1997).

In terms of *activities*, JA Worldwide is in an influential position, taking on the role of a meta-institution (Scott, 2014), that is, an institution which organizes other institutions such as business institutions, education institutions and policy institutions. These other actors typically take on roles related to funding, partnering, mentoring, educating, implementing and evaluating EE activities, while JA itself typically organizes funding, enables the development and launch of new JA locations, and provides backing for programmes and innovation. The coordination of these many activities happens through a complex network where individuals and organizations take on roles of funders, mentors, partners and participants, and are mobilized through networks of alumni, supporters and partners. Collectively, this network brings to life projects and educational activities from JA's perspective and culture, for example, that of entrepreneurship being viewed as competing, winning and making money.

JA has a distinctive partnership *structure* which is reproduced at all levels: global, regional and national. This structure is tripartite, with businesses, policy and education institutions collectively creating the capacity and resources to steer and deliver activities. Business institutions are represented in JA's Board of Governors who are typically a mix of retired Regional Heads of JA or middle to high level managers in large international corporations. The same companies contribute with volunteers serving as mentors, judges in competitions and members of different boards. They also appear as gold partners at the regional level. Policy institutions team with up with JA on policy formulation. These include government agencies, policy makers, foundations and highly invested

corporations, and activities span formulation and funding of projects, research, evaluation and advocacy. The final partner in the tripartite structure are educational institutions. These partners provide the practical context for JA activities and projects, and the teaching competencies for activities to be implemented. This includes universities, colleges, schools and their teachers who implement JA activities through study programs, projects, courses and extracurricular activities.

Seeing JA as a global institution, which has endured over generations, reproduced distinctive partnership arrangements and activities and spread over the globe to operate in more than 100 countries is the starting point for a fuller understanding of how its taken for granted character may have contributed to the homogenization of EE. We will now investigate such homogenization in more detail in three of these countries.

4.2 Homogenising pressures on a national level

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) seminal work on institutionalization, 'The Iron Cage', identified three kinds of pressure – coercive, mimetic and normative – which make organizations more similar, without necessarily making them more efficient. All three pressures have been identified on national level of JA franchises in England, Sweden and Denmark. Table 1 gives an overview of example pressures identified in the three country cases.

Coercive pressures are exerted on organizations formally and informally, and may be felt as force, persuasion or invitation to join collusion. Organizations may have to adapt to standards, structures, methods and frameworks developed by larger organizations. They may be faced with formal requirements that constrain behaviour, or with more subtle pressures such as ritualized controls of credentials, performance criteria, centralization of capital or group solidarity which drives the adoption of certain structures, methods and philosophies (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983, 150).

Table 1 illustrates how coercive pressures are present in all three countries through JA leveraging inspections, issuing quality marks, impacting curriculum documents and staging supplier dependencies and funding schemes that restrict other EE actors. While different in form in England, Sweden and Denmark respectively, due to circumstances in each country, these examples nevertheless share a distinctly coercive nature. A circular example of coercive pressures is JA Sweden, which claims to have successfully impacted national steering documents (Smålandsposten, 2013) which were later used by Swedish National Agency of Education to motivate significant yearly funds allocated exclusively to JA (Svensk Författningssamling, 2011).

Mimetic pressures force organizations to copy or emulate other organizations' activities, systems, or structures. The organization which is being modelled may be unaware of being copied, it simply serves as a convenient source of practice. Uncertainty encourages imitation, that is, if organizational technologies are poorly understood and goals are ambiguous, copying others yields solutions with little effort or expense. Adopting activities also has a ritual aspect, in terms of demonstrating legitimacy by being like a larger, more successful organization. Models may be unintentionally diffused through employee transfer or explicitly diffused through consulting and association (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 150–151).

Table 1 exemplifies how JA spreads its preferred competitive and mini-company focussed practices through recommended models, best practice sharing and government-funded knowledge transfers. Consultancy, affiliation or systematic exchange of carefully selected practices help reduce uncertainty among other actors in EE around what 'works', and how to do it. An example of mimetic pressure is how JA England features in guidance provided to English schools and colleges by the government-funded organization The Careers and Enterprise Company (Hanson, Hooley and Cox, 2017). JA England is described as a strategic partner and a delivery organization. Its programmes are used as best practice case studies and its evaluation reports justify activity prescriptions.

Normative pressures work through the softer forms of norms, culture and socialization. They are conveyed through recruitment, training and education of staff, through networks, ritual celebration and other kinds of cultural socialization of people in the field. Normative pressures stem from the

Table 1. Examples of homogenizing pressures identified at JA in Sweden, Denmark and England. Since links degrade, only top-level links and section names are provided. Full links are available upon request to the corresponding author.

Pressure type	Examples identified in the three cases	Case	Empirical source(s) of example. Translations our own. Sources available upon request.
Coercive pressure (Organizations forced to behave in certain ways through mandates, guidance, standards, frameworks, sole supplier dependencies, credentialing, coalitions, funding criteria, etc.)	JA support offered to meet school inspector requirements	EN	In Company Programme Delivery and Impact Report (Young Enterprise 2019a), available on JA England website, www.young-enterprise.org.uk , they describe how the programme supports school inspection framework success.
	Quality marks issued by JA for other organizations	EN	In their annual report (Young Enterprise 2020), JA England describe their quality marks for financial education, and in brochure for providers (Young Enterprise 2019b) they say the scheme is supported and recommended by the Department for Education.
	JA being a dominant supplier of EE and supported by government	EN	JA England website claims that they reach 46% of secondary schools and 39% of colleges. It has a dedicated 'Policy Hub' website section and a section on the All Party Parliamentary Group it runs on financial education.
	JA crowding out other approaches resulting in near monopoly	SE	Berglund and Holmgren (2007), p.32: "JA has become synonymous with entrepreneurship in high school". JA Sweden also claiming on their website www.ungforetagsamhet.se , CEO section, a yearly reach of 50,000 primary school students.
	JA being the dominant provider of EE teaching materials	SE	Inferred from data in annual reports by publishing firm UF Support AB owned by JA Sweden.
	JA lobbying to secure that its values are being built into society	SE	JA Sweden claiming on 15/3 in Smålandsposten (2013) that they successfully lobbied to make 'curriculum documents for entrepreneurship written to suit the JA mini-company approach'.
	JA channelling funds into other organizations	DK	Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (2010) set JA Denmark as a fund allocating EE resources to organizations
	JA evaluating and documenting others' activities in EE	DK	Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (2010) make JA Denmark responsible for documenting results of EE
	JA deciding which universities, teachers are deemed entrepreneurial	DK	JA Denmark every year nominates the 'Danish Entrepreneurial Educational Institution' and 'the Entrepreneurial Educator of the year', see JA Denmark website www.ffefonden.dk , section on Prizes.
	JA being assigned Denmark's main knowledge and expert centre	DK	Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (2010) assigns JA Denmark as national knowledge centre and expert centre for EE with research, documentation, teacher training.

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Pressure type	Examples identified in the three cases	Case	Empirical source(s) of example. Translations our own. Sources available upon request.
Mimetic pressure (Organisations forced to copy or emulate others through models, practice sharing, employee and knowledge transfer, consultation, etc.)	Mini-company centric advice on 'what works' in EE by public actors	EN	In <i>Careers and Enterprise Company guidance</i> (Hanson et al. 2017) on what works in EE, JA England mini-company programme is provided as an example of best practice.
	JA reports that justify competitions and a mini-company approach	EN	In JA England's No Time Like the Future report (Young Enterprise 2019c), company programme and other challenges are showcased as transformative and vital.
	Public actors spending most of their funding on JA	SE	A tendering process since 2016 channels most funding for EE from Sweden's Agency of Education to JA. Specifications were written so that only JA Sweden could win.
	JA-friendly policy and curriculum documents	SE	In regulation 2011:192 about public financial support to EE, and in national curriculum document GY11, EE is well aligned with JA's narrow and heroic definition of entrepreneurship; run a company and learn from existing entrepreneurs.
	Intensive JA lobbying to become national consolidated EE actor	DK	Lauth and Laustsen (2019) describe the lobbying process in their book describing the history of JA Denmark.
	JA appointed national consolidated funder, operator and evaluator	DK	Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (2010) gives JA Denmark a range of tasks: knowledge centre, channelling funds, teacher training, materials, networks, competitions, assess effects.
	Danish JA being emulated from Swedish JA	DK	Lauth and Laustsen (2019) describe JA Denmark's inspiration from Sweden in their book on the history of JA Denmark.
	JA networking events where winners are celebrated	EN	A simple image Google search of 'company programme finalists' yields many pages of celebratory results from JA England events, published by themselves and by media.
	JA marketing activities that convey stories of powerful alumni	EN	See JA England website, sections Our Stories and Impact Reports.
	JA training activities for partners, teachers, students and parents	EN	See JA England website, sections Teachers Hub, Get Involved and Parent Toolkit.
Normative pressure (Norms conveyed through education, socialization, training, culture, networks, recruitment, certification, etc.)	Recruitment of previous winners enculturated into JA norms	SE	On JA Sweden's website, section on history, two employees with history as winners in JA competitions are highlighted; the CEO and an employee in Stockholm.
	JA being supported and legitimized by a Swedish Prince	SE	JA Sweden website, section on board composition.
	JA partners lobbying for further growth and funding	SE	Website of Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, www.svensktnaringsliv.se , section on Örebro.
	JA partnering with ministries to enact Danish government vision	DK	Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (2010) is a central document institutionalizing JA Denmark's partenering with four ministries.
	Large JA award ceremonies that celebrate the JA approach to EE	DK	JA Denmark has many yearly awards and celebration cermenonies. See JA Denmark website section on News, or their social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.
	JA running a national knowledge and evaluation centre	DK	JA Denmark has established a bank of knowledge and themselves as a national reaserch centre on EE. See JA Denmark website, section on Knowledge.
	JA being supported and legitimized by a Danish Prince	DK	His Royal Highness The Danish Crownprince visits and endorses JA Denmark activities every year. See the The Royal House website, and much Danish national media.

collective struggle of members of a field to define the conditions of their work and establish a cognitive base and legitimation for what they do. Formal education, professional networks and the filtering and promotion of staff play a central role in establishing this normative base. In an institutionalized field, people at the top of organizations tend to view problems in the same way, make similar decisions and see certain structures, procedures and policies as normal. On-the-job socialization, training, networking and formal structuring through grant making, contracting and ceremonies influence homogenization (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 151–152).

Table 1 exemplifies how JA employs numerous techniques to convey its particular approach to entrepreneurship and to EE. Celebration events, training programmes and collusive lobbying in public, private and royal elite networks are widely used in all three countries studied. Denmark is the most extreme example of enculturation. JA has been exclusively tasked to enact the Danish government's strategy for publicly funded EE activities on all levels of education, 'from ABC to PhD' as JA Denmark writes on their website. This is a powerful example of what DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 152–153) label the normative struggle 'to define the conditions and (...) establish a cognitive base and legitimation' in a field.

5. Theorising around five common dynamics of homogenization

Having illuminated the homogenizing pressures exerted by JA through its activities at a global and national level, in the second step we abstracted five dynamics common across the three country level cases of JA. These five common dynamics, shown in overview in Figure 1, represent common homogenizing pressures which we can discern in the material gathered from JA websites. We choose the word *dynamic* purposefully to distinguish our contribution from terms such as *pressures* or *processes*, used by institutional theorists cited in this paper. Dynamics is a widely used term in institutional theory where authors are aiming to indicate how institutions influence the rules of the game or the effects institutions have in shaping the environment (Fusarelli, 2003, Koning, 2016). We define a dynamic as an underlying process which is a source of institutional patterns, the identification of which are a critical goal of institutional analysis (Scott, 2014, Powell, 1991). In terms of how we draw on institutional literature, Scott (2014, 262) cautions that there are no general or monolithic institutional theories. He rather advises that the institutional *perspective* and associated concepts are used imaginatively to explain the empirical situation one is confronted with. Thus, our findings offer an empirically based, yet theoretically informed, re-description of how JA contributes to a homogenized system of EE.

5.1 Neutralising ideology

Institutionalists argue that for practices to become adopted they must be well theorized (Strang and Meyer 1993, Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings 2002, Scott 2014). Theorization is the process where problems are specified, solutions are justified and both simplified for wider adoption (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings 2002). We recognize this in the logic which underpins the prescription of JA activity on national websites, with the problem specified as uncertain futures for young people, combined with a skills gap which holds back their progress and causes concern for employers. The solution is learning by creating mini-companies and developing entrepreneurial mindsets and employability skills. Within JA's theorizing, a re-interpreting takes place (Zilber 2008), where economic and political matters are neutralized through deploying the language of youth empowerment and social mobility. This is seen on the country level websites, with missions, goals and objectives relating to youth skill transformation and empowering change making.

In Sweden, neutralization of ideology is illustrated by objectives around JA mini-company creation activities in secondary school aiming to develop youth creativity, innovation and employability. In Denmark, it is illustrated by the formation of a single national actor tasked to empower youth to make a difference in the world through their innovative abilities. In England, it is illustrated by key

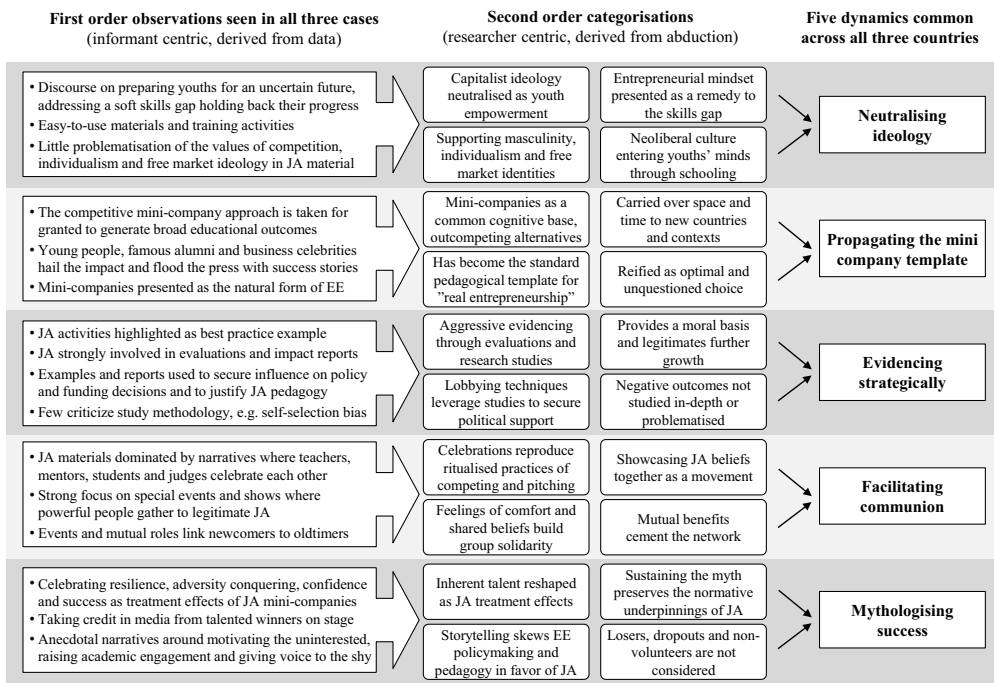


Figure 1. Theorising five common dynamics from the three cases. A framework that connects the development of five common dynamics from empirical material and abductive theorising.

aims of JA such as closing disadvantage gaps, countering inequality, boosting inclusion and unlocking talent. Taken together, the observed focus on youth empowerment through unproblematised 'free market' materials creates homogenizing pressure that in subtle ways contributes to a neutralization of ideology, thus infusing a 'narrow interpretation of entrepreneurship' – a 'functionalist pervasive ideology' – into EE (cf. Hytti 2018, 229–230).

This neutralization strategy creates a motivating professional ideology (Scott 2014) that obscures business and political interests. A much needed clouding, as JA activities have been discussed as: encouraging the unacceptable face of capitalism (Jamieson 1984, Johannisson 2010); contributing to corporate ideology in schools (Sukarieh and Tannock 2009); helping forge neo-liberal pedagogy (McCafferty 2010); supporting masculinity, individualism and free market focussed identities (Lindster-Norberg 2016, Holmgren 2018), promoting consumerism (Smålandsposten 2013); being a conduit for neo-liberal culture (Oldham 2018, Lackéus 2017), and forcing students to express a liberalized market view (Carlborg 2020).

JA became a global force in education despite such concerns because of its discourse on skills development and life preparation (Leffler 2009), and through the careful construction of materials and activities, which do not impose a free-market orientation, but de-stabilize critical opposition (Sukarieh and Tannock 2009), making private enterprise and marketization desirable and ideologically neutral (Oldham 2020). JA may thus be described as contributing to a ubiquitous corporate ideology entering, through schools, into the common-sense ways of thinking about the world, neutralizing ideological and political matters in its theorizing.

5.2 Propagating the mini company template

Institutionalists identify that routines help to diffuse ideas (Scott 2014, Tolbert and Zucker 1996). Habitualised action, underpinned by unconscious, taken for granted assumptions, is a hallmark of institutionalization (Scott 2014, Powell and Colyvas 2008). We recognize this in the spread of the mini-company format, one of the oldest forms of EE, which is promoted on each of the country level websites as a flagship intervention which has involved thousands of students over decades. It influences the wider system of EE by offering a common cognitive base and educational practice as a pedagogical template. The template is business focussed and competitive, carried over space and time to new contexts and new countries through local, regional, national and international competitions. The mini-company practice is 'objectified' (Tolbert and Zucker 1996), as it has been 'tested', championed and promoted globally. The more widespread it becomes the more it appears as the obvious choice. As shown on country level websites, young people, famous alumni, celebrities and businesspeople hail the impact and the press is flooded with success stories of Company Programme businesses.

Propagation of the mini-company template is a key theme in all three country-level case descriptions. They all have the mini-company template as their main offering to schools. In Denmark, it is the only nation-wide government-funded entity that offers the mini-company template as an essential part of their menu for teachers. In England, the competitive and business focussed Company Programme format is also offered to teachers as the way to meet school inspectors' quality criteria. In Sweden, the mini-company template has become an integrated part of government directives and initiatives, contributing to JA now being the dominant supplier of pedagogical material to secondary schools working with entrepreneurship. Taken together, the observed focus on competitive mini-companies as the natural and unquestioned EE form, hailed by business people and celebrities, creates homogenizing pressure that in subtle ways contributes to the propagation of a mini-company template, thus infusing "pitching exercises and competitions" and a "strong focus on profit-oriented start-ups" into EE (cf. Hytti 2018, 230).

Even if the mini-company format represents a narrow view of EE, focused on financial, self-oriented and market driven value creation (Blenker et al. 2011, Lackéus and Sävetun 2016, Holmgren 2007), the approach is so taken for granted that it is rarely discussed or questioned (Brentnall 2020). The competitive mini-company format has another characteristic of institutionalized practice – it is carried out, regardless of its efficiency (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The contradictory results of some JA programme evaluations (Oosterbeek, Van Praag and Ijsselstein 2010, Heilbrunn and Almor 2014), point to inefficiencies and inequality generation (Brentnall, Rodríguez, and Culkin 2018). But these results have not impeded its growth because in institutions, beliefs underpin action (Scott 2014), and the conviction exists that activities generate broad and inclusive educational outcomes.

The propagation of the mini-company template influences the system of EE by making it appear as if the mini-company is the 'natural' form of EE, and by giving other approaches a systematic disadvantage, since the template propagated by JA gives many teachers no reason to engage in alternatives (Johannisson 2016). In achieving what Scott (2014) calls *recognizability* and *transferability*, the mini-company template out-competes alternatives.

5.3 Evidencing strategically

Institutionalists identify the importance of advocacy and educating as part of maintaining institutions (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings 2002). Advocacy involves the mobilization of political support through deliberate techniques of influence (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings 2002). It may include influencing political actors, lobbying for resources, promoting agendas, proposing new legislation or attacking alternative arrangements (Galvin 2002). On country level websites we

recognize advocacy in the work JA do to influence political decisions on education policy, taking part in or coordinating political processes or managing government resources.

A common strategy in all three countries is aggressive evidencing through impact reports, evaluations and research studies used to justify and legitimate the expansion and funding of programmes. JA activities are highlighted as best practice, providing underpinning for policy and financing decisions and justifying JA pedagogic templates. In England, impact statistics are scattered throughout programme introductions. In Sweden, an impact study commonly used was funded by Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (Wennberg and Elert, 2012). In Denmark, the government has assigned JA to be the formal evaluator of Danish EE activities. Taken together, the observed control over evaluations, impact reports and best practice examples, combined with aggressive evidence-based lobbying, creates homogenizing pressure that in subtle ways contributes to JA's strategic evidencing, thus infusing a view of 'satisfied [...] students (consumers)' as evidence of effectiveness into EE (cf. Hytti 2018, 230).

Evidencing provides a moral basis for legitimacy (Scott 2014), indicating the proof and appropriateness of activities. Some in the field of EE will be inspired by the results and want to emulate the JA activities or feel coerced towards certain activities. Few criticize their robustness or underlying biases (Liñán 2004), especially if their funding is dependent on JA's goodwill.

5.4 Facilitating communion

Institutionalists stress the importance of networks and social relationships as vital processes which regulate thoughts, beliefs and actions (Scott 2014). People act as a social movement, constructing a normative network which produces an enduring institution (Scott 2014). We connect this to JA conferences and training activities, but especially to the public competitions, where participants, teachers, JA staff, business mentors and judges involved in the JA network join in and reproduce ritualized practices of pitching and judging. This defining moment is evident and celebrated in photography and text across newspapers, social media and JA country level websites: the JA competitors pitching with microphone; the jubilant winners; the award-winning teachers; the judges with the teams and their trophies.

In England, JA finals and special events are hosted at The House of Lords and other posh locations. In Sweden, JA finals are held in presence of prominent alumni, corporate partners and celebrities, including the liberal conservative newspaper Svenska Dagbladet as JA's media partner and the Swedish HRH Prince Daniel. In Denmark, the main JA events are the yearly Danish Entrepreneurship Festivals in Fredericia and Copenhagen where celebrities guide the thousands of participants through the program of speeches, celebrations and many competitions. Also JA's yearly selection and announcement of the Danish Entrepreneurial Educational Institution of the Year serves as a place of celebration and communion. Taken together, the observed co-celebration and solidarity building at ritualized events and competitions creates homogenizing pressure that in subtle ways facilitates communion, thus infusing 'unreflexively normative ideas of entrepreneurship' into EE (cf. Hytti 2018, 232).

These activities produce group solidarity and smooth social integration (Barnard 1968, Ouchi 1980). Such groups can be considered clan-like (Ouchi 1980, Farny et al. 2016), they offer the subtle incentive of satisfying the 'need for communion', that is, the feeling of comfort, social relations, shared goals and beliefs (Ouchi 1980, 93). Reciprocity is important in clan-like organizations and is seen in the mutual roles and benefits for stakeholders involved in these events, cementing links between old-timers and newcomers.

Educating is another element of institutional work, where actors are socialized to support the institution (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings 2002). This can be seen in the conferences, training and resources provided for educators and promoted on country level websites, diffusing JA practice and socializing other stakeholders into its philosophy.

5.5 Mythologising success

One of the ways institutions persist is valorizing certain types of behaviour and mythologizing the values of the institution (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings 2002). Valourizing involves publishing positive examples that celebrate the institution's normative foundations. Mythologizing helps preserve the normative underpinnings of an institution by sustaining the myths of its history (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings 2002, Angus 1993, Scott 2014). We saw this on country level websites in the way programme participants' individual resilience, adversity conquering, confidence, success, and talent are celebrated. Stories and case studies capture a range of outcomes: motivating the uninterested; facilitating young people to work in their community; raising academic engagement; giving voice to the nervous and shy; smoothing transitions by providing the golden nugget for the CV; planting the seed for future start-ups. JA programmes are presented as the cause of transformation into talented winners, creating a myth about the transformative effect of JA by celebrity alumni.

In England, reports such as *No Time Like the Future* (2019) capture the stories of media celebrities, founders, entrepreneurs and high-level management in accountancy and banking firms who link their success back to participation in Young Enterprise. In Sweden, JA proudly announces that their current CEO won the European competition in 1992, and that many successful companies were founded by JA alumni, including the largest sandwich fast-food company in the world. In Denmark, the famous successful investors from Danish Radio's *Lion's Den* shows are continuously used to endorse JA activities. Taken together, the observed anecdotal narratives and celebrations reshape talent as a JA treatment effect, which creates homogenizing pressure that in subtle ways contributes to mythologizing success, thus infusing a focus on 'heroic stories' into EE (cf. Fletcher 2018, xxii).

JA takes the credit for these heroic journeys, mythologizing JA programmes as causing outcomes, instead of attributing success to some pre-existing qualities of participants themselves, or more fundamental support provided on an everyday basis by teachers, schools or families. These stories and related impact discourse skew pedagogic recommendations, policy changes and funding in favour of JA. The losers, drop-outs, non-volunteers and those who might be discouraged or resist a self-celebrating masculine JA culture are out of sight. The anecdotal evidence of benefits to individuals makes arguing against the programme uncomfortable and professionally risky, likely to be conducted by those *outside* of EE. Inside EE, mythologizing success implicitly regulates compliance (Scott 2014), such stories become part of the accepted idea about how change happens and depress critical questioning of the JA approach to EE.

6. Synthesis and ways forward

Whereas we in the previous section analytically differentiated the homogenization process into the five common dynamics, this section will integrate or synthesize these insights. We do this, first by relating the insights to the McDonaldization discourse and institutionalization framework that initiated the paper; second, by discussing the need for attention towards JA's power among EE stakeholders and by suggesting potential actions for these stakeholders.

6.1 Synthesis

The purpose of this paper was to creatively illuminate the forms of institutionalization JA may have exerted in the McDonaldization of EE. We see several McDonaldization characteristics of the EE field as connected to the five common dynamics. The neoliberal neglect of gender, class and ethnicity in the field of EE (Berglund and Verduijn 2018), the narrow interpretation of entrepreneurship and the

individual responsabilising of employability (Fletcher 2018, Hytti 2018) are all related to JA’s capacity to neutralize capitalist ideology. The excessive focus on profit-oriented venture creation and pitching competitions (Hytti 2018, Fletcher 2018) is strongly related to the worldwide dominance of JA’s mini-company template. The adoption of ‘stock in trade’ pedagogical approaches (Fletcher 2018) despite negative consequences (Oosterbeek, Van Praag and Ijsselstein 2010) can be explained by JA’s continuous and strategic evidencing. The over-reliance on competitive approaches in EE (Brentnall 2020, Leffler, Svedberg & Botha 2010) can be explained by JA’s strong communion through competitions, where winners’ talent is mythologized and celebrated as treatment effects. Figure 2 summarizes this and suggests how JA as a meta-institution, integrating other institutions, through processes of funding, partnering, mentoring, educating, implementing and evaluation, may exercise different forms of homogenizing pressure on the EE system. It connects these key activities and homogenizing mechanisms to examples from extant literature of McDonaldization in EE (Hytti 2018, Fletcher 2018) through the five common dynamics.

Bringing all five common dynamics together at the same time may well – when scaled nationally and globally in more than 100 countries over 100 years – provide a more general explanation of how JA can generate homogenizing pressures that restrict the field of EE in several undesirable ways. Easy-to-use teaching materials and approaches can help get teachers started, but if allowed to dominate, they could restrict, oversimplify and dumb down education (Komulainen et al. 2011). The mini-company approach can motivate some teachers and students, but if turned into a ubiquitous standard it could represent a normative approach that silences alternatives (Hytti 2018). Scientific evidence of effects in education is highly needed and necessary, but if produced simply to justify one approach to education and cement an organization’s growth and dominance it could risk not to enlighten, but lead to undesired and covert ideological influence on policy (Oldham 2017). Celebration events may help bring attention to and engage a wider audience in EE, but could also – when it is the most visible part of EE – transform EE into an unhealthy self-referencing and self-evaluating cult, where critique, counter-arguments and non-believers are dismissed and marginalized (Farny et al. 2016). Role models and success stories of winners are useful as signposts, guidance and inspirations for others, but may also perpetuate and normalize an uncritical neo-liberal, competitive enterprise culture, and form too heroic expectations of start-up ventures (Oldham 2020, Fletcher 2018).

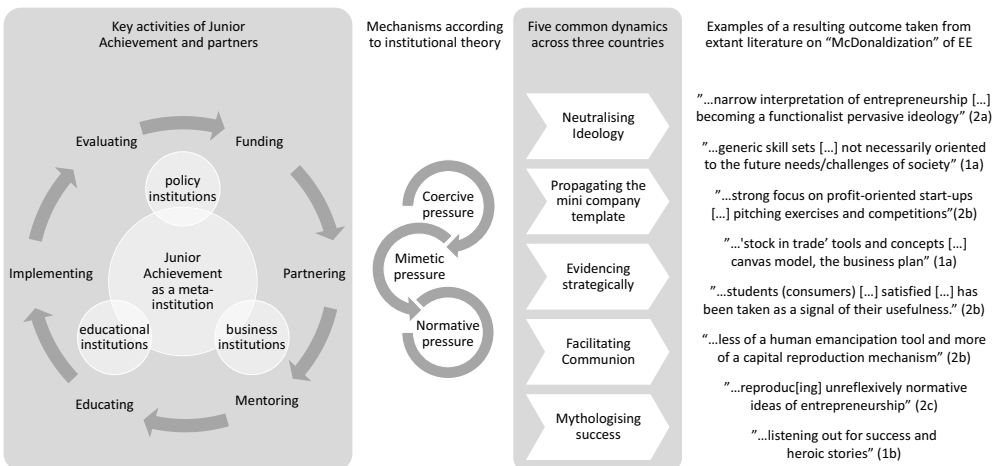


Figure 2. A creative re-description of how JA may have contributed to a homogenised state of EE. Notes: (1a) (Fletcher, 2018), p. xviii (1b) (Fletcher, 2018), p.Xxii (2a) (Hytti, 2018), p.229 and 231 (2b) (Hytti, 2018), p.230 (2c) (Hytti, 2018), p.232

This paper illuminates how JA has been significantly under-theorized in EE literature, not just in relation to the homogenizing pressures it exerts on EE, but in regard to its uniqueness as a vastly resourced, enduring EE institution which has reproduced itself across the globe. Further explanation of JA's coercive role in the McDonaldization of EE can be found in terms of hidden relationships between activities and consequential invisible power relations, which thus far have not been paid enough attention. When a particular world view and routines become attached to concrete power centres it becomes an ideology (Scott, 2014). The structure, scale and generational nature of JA over generations mark it out as a 'power centre' (Meyer and Rowan 2006) in the field of EE, which can constrain alternative routes for educational development. Robust institutionalization involves multiple, overlapping processes which reinforce each other (Scott, 2014); we recognize this in how the five common dynamics somewhat blur into each other, a quality which supports maintenance and reproduction.

In considering the dominant practices institutionalized by JA, it is important to consider who benefits from, or is disadvantaged from particular arrangements. Through exploring JA websites, we note that certain elements – programmes, case studies and festivals – are public, explicit and very visible, whereas other elements such as funding, economic power and organizational structures are much less transparent. A noticeable dynamic of JA is how central actors take on more than one role. Global corporations and businesses deliver funding so activities can be conducted, but they also perform as mentors and judges. Students participate in programmes but are also engaged as heroic advocates marketing the organization. Schools conduct work on the ground, but also engage in more prestigious activities such as writing teacher manuals. It illustrates a cult (Farny et al. 2016) or clan-like reciprocity (Ouchi 1980) where mutual benefits and values bind stakeholders together in a non-transparent meta-institution. This explains other elements of coercive homogenization, where JA represents a source of power that influences and brings benefits to those involved and part of the culture, but disadvantages people, perspectives, practices and organizations not aligned with the JA values of free enterprise, making money and winning competitions (Oldham 2020).

6.2 Ways forward

Since this paper presents a critical view on the institutionalizing influence of JA, an obvious question arises about whether de-institutionalization is possible. De-institutionalization can happen intentionally, from within, or via external resistance (Scott, 2014).

With regards to change from within, inspiration for new directions can be found in trying to reverse the five common dynamics identified in this paper. JA could initiate discussions around what to do about the ideological challenges around heroic individualism, capitalism, neoliberalism and consumerism. It could increase the diversity in pedagogical approaches, thus disrupting the mini-company template as the dominant model for EE. It could replace aggressive evidencing with a role as a responsible and self-reflective leader in our scholarly EE community. It could initiate contemplation around detrimental side-effects of its competition-oriented, clan-like community. It could explore new ways to tell stories that do not take credit from winners or mythologize its impact. If JA can get help from its powerful partner network to revitalize itself accordingly, we might in JA get a global institution that actively helps develop the EE community in relation to a broad variety of contexts, cultures, outcomes and values. Such a JA might be championing novel cooperative or employee-owned enterprise models that address inequality and facilitate democratic decision making, together with partners that epitomize the transformative, regenerative and ecologically responsible business leadership the world needs.

For those outside the organization who want to resist institutionalization, we pose questions that could trigger actions to disrupt the homogenization of EE. For the policy makers, we ask whether an institutionalized EE is an appropriate model considering the social and ecological challenges the world faces, and if not, what can policy makers do to secure heterogeneity in EE activities? For the many governmental, civic and non-corporate funders of EE activities we ask if their aim is to promote

self-interest, competition and winning, or if money can be used to encourage genuine participation, cooperation and inclusiveness? For the researchers, sometimes engaged in strategic proving of JA inspired EE activities, we ask if they can adopt more context aware evaluation approaches which illuminate negative as well as positive outcomes of programmes? For educators, looking for approaches to inspire their students to become more entrepreneurial, we ask if they have considered the wider social, ideological and ecological implications of programmes? Or, in relation to the McDonaldization metaphor, is Junior Achievement a responsible nutrition or are there healthier options? Hytti has summarized it as follows: it's easy and our students love it, but would we give our own kids burgers every day? (Hytti 2019).

7. Conclusions and further research

This paper represents an initial, critical investigation of the power of JA, and we acknowledge its many limitations. Our aim has been to creatively re-describe JA through common institutionalizing dynamics seen across our three home countries. We cannot yet claim that our findings generalize beyond this scope. We single out JA for study as it is, to us, the best known of EE institutions, an enduring and global phenomenon.

The lack of critical attention JA has received within EE is testament to its power, influence, and the naturalness of the values it promotes; it has twice been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. The critique offered here is not directed at any particular individuals, be they participants, educators or programme facilitators. The purpose of studying-up rather aims to illuminate how power is exerted by an institution. In addition, whilst we recognize that students involved in JA create value which is not only economic, through business activity which has a social or environmental dimension, it is also important to recognize that at the heart of JA is the idea of a company. A company is a private entity which has profit related obligations to boards and shareholders and subordinates the rights of workers and citizens (Ferreras, 2023). Whilst a company programme might have been appropriate in the 1920s when the aim was to inspire an economic shift from rural agriculture to buying good in stores, the social and economic context has changed. Global social inequality, climate change and environmental breakdown require a broader variety of ideas and practices in EE (Loi et al, 2021). As others have pointed out inside (Hytti 2018) and outside EE (Raworth 2017, Hickel 2020), a focus on new venture creation risks becoming a mechanism for inequality, ecological harm and capital reproduction. The scholarly field of EE has changed significantly in the past 100 years, progressing ahead of the incumbent JA organization sticking to its century-old pedagogical recipe. A broad variety of modern and effective pedagogical approaches can be explored at leading EE conferences such as 3E, IEEC and USASBE (Landström et al. 2022).

This paper opens a new avenue for EE research which poses questions that relate to JA's role as an institutionalizing force in EE. Some research questions are broad: what other patterns can be identified regarding how JA influences EE? How has the support from multi-national corporations enabled and shaped JA's influence? Other questions are narrower, studying specific elements of JA's role in EE. What is the essence of the didactics and pedagogies of JA's approach to EE, and how does this relate to existing educational paradigms within EE? What patterns in JA's spread can be discerned? Does it leap from schools to universities on a geographic basis, or as staff move between educational institutions? Considering the analysis in this paper, what more can be said about the effects of JA on individuals, their ideas and their world views? How is the journey of participants, from ABC to PhD, and what non-intentional effects does JA create, not only for those students who win or lose, but also on dropouts, non-volunteers and on values of the EE system itself?

Our paper has offered conceptual explanations to empirical observations, but further research is needed to determine whether JA can be established as a main cause of the widespread McDonaldization in EE. Ideally, this would involve studies of funding, resource allocation, governance, and the double roles in the organizational structure, information that is not publicly available. However, JA websites do offer a rich and public data source from which

to (re)consider this global NGO. Future papers might focus only on studying news sections, or impact reports, or funders and partners, or competitions, to develop deeper knowledge about each dimension. Beyond this, much insight could be produced by interviewing school staff and students around programmes, as well as observing practices that illustrate the lived experiences of different JA stakeholders. In addition, interviewing current and former staff, mentors and judges of JA could illuminate the type, strength and persistence of institutional beliefs. A crucial issue relates to the consequences of a homogenized menu at a time when EE is said to stand at a crossroads (Loi et al. 2021), existing in a multi-crisis environment, where poverty, inequality, fossil fuel dependence and climate crisis require a multitude of ways to enact EE (Dodd et al, 2022).

In regard to 'studying-up', there are many other organizations and corporations whose influence on EE could be investigated. We acknowledge that in modern neo-liberal society where many students are immersed in self-interest and competition, JA is not alone in reproducing this. Yet, its scale, its corporate backing and its often in-curricular delivery mode make it imperative to study how it impacts EE as a field and society more broadly. We do not claim to provide a final answer to how JA influences its environment. We rather encourage further interest in EE towards such considerations, and in other parts of the world. We believe it can complement recent historical approaches to studying JA (cf. Pittaway et al. 2023a, Pittaway et al. 2023b). In addition, it may facilitate more self-aware and reflexive knowledge about why certain educational practices get adopted consciously or instinctively by teachers (Kyrö 2015, Farny et al. 2016, Fayolle, Verzat and Wapshott 2016b, Berglund and Verduijn 2018), and help us understand how institutional context makes particular educational practices dominant and taken for granted, even when they are contrary to research insight.

Disclosure statement

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

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