THE ASSEMBLY OF A FIELD IDEOLOGY: AN IDEA-CENTRIC PERSPECTIVE ON SYSTEMIC POWER IN IMPACT INVESTING

LISA HEHENBERGER
Universitat Ramon Llull, ESADE

JOHANNA MAIR
Hertie School and Stanford University

ASHLEY METZ
Tilburg University

We advance a novel idea-centric perspective to study power-laden aspects of institutional life in fields. Our study includes data from the field of impact investing in Europe from 2006–2018, collected *from the inside* and analyzed collaboratively by inside and outside researchers. We develop an analytical tool based on dichotomies to detect latent forms of conflict that easily remain unnoticed and to *see* how some ideas become dominant while others are abandoned or sidelined. We display the assembly of a *field ideology*—a coherent system of ideas that shapes thinking, reasoning and acting in a field. Furthermore, we specify *suppression* as a mechanism that gives rise to and perpetuates systemic power in fields, restricting options and shaping what is valued. Our study provides insights into the dynamic nature of institutional life in fields, including alternative paths not taken and possible futures.

The term "impact investing" was coined in 2007 at a meeting hosted by the Rockefeller Foundation[1], establishing a vocabulary to discuss new ways of supporting social purpose initiatives and organizations. The meeting marked an important shift toward more explicit efforts to strengthen and expand impacting investing as a field. A diverse set of ideas brought in from related and adjacent fields, such as philanthropy, venture capital, government, and banking, marked the negotiation about the ambition, focus, and principles of the field during the ensuing years. At the time of this study, impact investing has been defined and commonly understood as "investing with the intention to generate positive, measurable social and environmental impact alongside a financial return."[2] The field's ambition for standardization and solutions; an investment focus on self-sufficient, scalable social businesses; and the reliance on data, tools, and measurement as anchors for decision making have been widely accepted and shared among those who practice impact investing, as well as those seeking funding from impact investors. As of 2019, the field of impact investing has grown to include $208 billion in assets under management by impact investing and venture philanthropy funds, pension funds, philanthropic foundations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), hedge funds, and banks—and this figure is expected to grow to $307 billion by 2020.[3]

[1] https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-work/initiatives/innovative-finance/

[2] https://thegiin.org/impact-investing/need-to-know/#what-is-impact-investing

[3] The Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN) Annual Survey: https://thegiin.org/research/publication/annualsurvey2018

The field has grown in size and appeal and has been determined to unleash an "impact revolution," altering the investment paradigm by adding measurable impact as a third defining pillar alongside risk and return.[4] However, few traces point to the broader set of ideas and beliefs that were contemplated and promoted only a few years ago. Earlier discussions centered on ideas such as attention to diverse and local needs, rather than standardized solutions, and on ideas of placing beneficiaries at the center of decision making. Had they been pursued and enacted, these ideas could have altered the trajectory of the field.

The covert struggles over ideas in fields are easily missed, as they are less visible than overt battles among actors with clearly defined interests, agendas, and resources. We ask, *How do some ideas become dominant and form part of what shapes thinking, reasoning, and acting in a field?* This question is at the core of the new way of seeing that we develop in this paper.

How shared belief systems define legitimate action in fields remains a central concern in institutional research on organizations and fields (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991); however, relatively little analytical and theoretical attention has been dedicated to the process of assembly of ideas into a coherent belief system. In this paper, we propose and conduct an idea-centric analysis of conflict and contestation to understand how ideas become patterned in a nonrandom way. We introduce the term "field ideology" to refer to the coherent system of ideas and beliefs that shifts the empirical and theoretical attention to seemingly invisible conflict and covert forms of systemic power.[5] Although the focus on overt conflict among actors and the analytical attention to their interests, positions, and resources has been helpful in understanding field dynamics and change

as a result of visible power struggles between incumbents and challengers (Fligstein & McAdam 2012), we still lack the micro-level foundations to understand how systemic forms of power emerge.

To enable new theoretical ways of seeing dynamics in fields, and to make visible the power-laden aspects of these dynamics, we apply a unique methodological approach. First, we apply an *inside-out* research approach to study the institutional life in a field and with a team consisting of a researcher who served as an organizational actor in the field for over six years and outsider researchers who collaborated with the insider during the entire duration of the research project. This approach allowed us to gather data and capture dynamics that are difficult to access by means of action research or ethnography—two related approaches whereby the researchers are typically invited guests or temporary visitors. In our case, *getting and being* inside was critical to observing negotiations over ideas *in situ* and in real time, before ideas consolidated into a widely shared belief system recognizable from the outside. The interaction and collaboration between insider and outsider members of the research team (Bartunek & Louis, 1996; Van de Ven, 2007) at all steps of the knowledge-generation process was essential to identifying relevant questions, removing bias in the data collection and analysis, validating emerging findings instantly, and developing theory in close connection to the phenomena studied. Second, we develop an analytical toolkit based on dichotomies that exposes opposing ideas. To build the coding scheme, we drew from the adjacent literature of gender studies, which has paid explicit attention to systemic power (Martin, 2004) and has applied dichotomies to analyze idealized masculine and feminine natures in opposition (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). This analytical approach helped us bring conflict and contestation to the surface at the level of ideas, and later probe into the power-laden mechanisms at play.

Our findings reveal how some ideas become dominant and portray suppression as an interactional achievement and distinct mechanism. Exposing suppression allows us to see and understand power-laden aspects inherent in the assembly of a field ideology while making unintended or undesirable consequences of suppression more palpable. The insights from our findings, the idea-centric perspective we introduce, and the unique methodological approach we adopt advance institutional research on fields in several ways. We specify the nature of a field ideology as a field ordering

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[4] "Impact revolution" is a term used by Sir Ronald Cohen (2018), one of the pioneers of impact investing, in his online book *On impact: A guide to the impact revolution.*

[5] Organizational scholars have distinguished between two forms of power: *episodic* power—direct, overt influence and force—and *systemic* power—covert forms of influence entrenched in institutional structures (Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Lawrence, 2008). Episodic forms are relatively easy to identify. In field settings they are openly resisted and debated, and can be traced backward from a conflict to the events that precipitated it. Systemic forms, such as domination, work more subtly to shape and restrict what is considered important, and the normalization of domination is a process that creates and reinforces hierarchical relations (Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Lukes, 2005).

mechanism, and its role in shaping what is valued, considered appropriate, and eventually taken for granted in a field. As enduring, yet amendable, the concept of field ideology helps to unpack power-laden dynamics of institutional life and order in fields, and to recognize their ideational foundation. This enables us to see fields as dynamic and living, rather than bound to an irrevocable destiny. Our study showcases how a belief system becomes dominant without ignoring ideas that may get lost, abandoned, or sidelined along the path. It therefore provides a new way of seeing systemic forms of power, and at the same time enables us to see what could constitute an alternative order.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we situate our study in existing work on conflict and contestation in institutional theory of organizations, substantiate the need for an idea-centric perspective in institutional research on fields, and introduce field ideology as a theoretically interesting and analytically useful concept for understanding power-laden dynamics in fields. Second, we introduce our empirical context and explain how we sourced, collected, and analyzed data. Third, we present our findings centered on the assembly of a field ideology and on exposing suppression as a mechanism that gives rise to systemic power in the field of impact investing. In the discussion, we elaborate on how our idea-centric study advances a more dynamic perspective on institutional life and enables *seeing* systemic power in fields. We also clarify the contours of the inside-out research methodology we adopt, elaborate on how it compares to ethnographic and action research, and discuss limitations of this study. We conclude with an epilogue on how our study informs the broader debate on the financialization of economy and society.

THEORETICAL MOTIVATION AND BACKGROUND

Fields have become central to the institutional analysis of organizations. Recent reviews have been contributed by Zietsma, Groenewegen, Logue, and Hinings (2017) and Leibel, Hallett, and Bechky (2018). In this study we build on Wooten and Hoffmann (2008) and view fields as relational spaces where different groups and organizations and their members interact with one another "in an effort to develop collective understandings regarding matters that are consequential for organizational and field level activities" (Wooten & Hoffmann, 2008: 138). We are interested in fields as "a locale in which

organizations relate to or involve themselves with one another" (Wooten & Hoffmann, 2008: 138) for studying the emergence of a system of ideas and beliefs implicating some degree of collective rationality. We follow an interactionist tradition that portrays social, moral, and political order in fields as the outcome of negotiations and interactions among field participants.[6]

Once structured and equipped with order, fields become "recognized areas of institutional life" (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983: 148), with a recognizable set of legitimate options for action and decision making (Scott, 1995). Although the shared, widely accepted and taken-for-granted nature of belief systems has been core to theorizing institutional life in fields, scholars have dedicated less attention to the assembly of, and the relationship between, ideas that form such belief systems. Our study addresses this gap. We examine this process of assembly and explain how some ideas and not others become dominant elements in such a system.[7]

Over the past several years, scholars have increasingly turned to early stages of fields in order to understand processes of how fields form and emerge (Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011). At this stage, fields resemble projects rather than agreed-upon realities, and interactions among field participants typically center on defining expectations; testing ideas; and formalizing ambitions, practices, identities, and rules and norms (Grodal, 2018). A more explicit analytical focus on the thoughts formulated and expressed in interactions among field participants at this stage of field formation might help to explain how ideas enter the "ordered" repertoire shaping institutional life in fields and mark field trajectories (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Additionally, attention on this early stage creates an opportunity to understand ideas, actors, and organizations as endogenous to field formation processes, which allows us to bring power as a mechanism to the fore (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

The recent emphasis on conflict and contestation in fields (Willmott, 2015; Wry et al., 2011) has helped to reignite interest in the role of power in[6] institutional life. Nevertheless, studies that have

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[6] See Barley, 2017 for an excellent review of this tradition originating in the Chicago School of microsociology.

[7] In this paper, an idea refers to an opinion or belief. Ideas can be seen as conceptions generated from mental understanding, awareness, or activity. In line with the tradition in institutional theory on organizations, we use the terms *idea* and *belief* interchangeably.

located and examined power at the level of ideas are rare (for an exception, see Hallett, Stapleton, & Sauder, 2019), especially as they require making ideas and the relationship between ideas explicit and visible.

Next, we revisit current institutional literature in organizational theory on conflict and contestation to highlight theoretical opportunities and to expose analytical challenges inherent in locating and analyzing conflict and contestation at the level of ideas. We then introduce field ideology as a theoretically interesting and analytically useful concept to develop an idea-centric perspective on institutional life in fields imbued with conflict and contestation.

Conflict and Contestation in Institutional Theory of Organizations

Our review of the literature on organizations and institutions suggests that researchers focusing on conflict and contestation have adopted either a logic-centric or an actor-centric perspective to understand power-laden aspects and dynamics of institutional life in fields.

A *logic-centric perspective* applied to studying fields locates conflict and contestation among a set of ideal-type institutional orders, referred to as institutional logics. Treated as a unitary concept—for example, a charity logic or a development logic—an institutional logic has nevertheless become an all-encompassing analytical construct referring to a set of material practices and assumptions, values, and beliefs that provides meaning and shapes activity within fields (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). Pairing earlier theoretical insights on institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991) with this broader, but more analytical, focus (Thornton, 2002), logic-centric studies have been helpful in explaining field-level outcomes, such as the triumph of one logic over others, persistent conflict among logics, or the co-existence of multiple logics in fields (Dunn & Jones, 2010; Lounsbury, 2002; Mair & Hehenberger, 2014). The focus on conflict and contestation among logics has helped to theorize about degrees of complexity in fields (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011), sharpen the understanding of changes in structure and order in fields (Scott, Ruef, Mendel, & Caronna, 2000; Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012), and expose the challenges of hybrid organizing in fields (Battilana, Besharov, & Mitzinneck, 2017). Researchers focusing on impact investing have juxtaposed an investment logic and a charity logic to argue how clashes among these two ideal-type logics are consequential for field activity and goals pursued (Moody, 2008; Nicholls, 2010). Interestingly, although conflict and contestation among logics are considered inevitable in studies following a logic-centric perspective, and logics may be understood to exert systemic power, power-based mechanisms, or dynamics inherent in the assembly of logics as higher-order repositories of ideas and beliefs, have received limited attention. Power might be at play, but it is concealed and implicit in logics.

Power is much more explicit in studies that have adopted an *actor-centric perspective* to examine institutional life in fields. Informed by social movement theory (Davis, McAdam, Scott, & Zald, 2005) and the theory of strategic fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), these studies have understood conflict and contestation as part of power games among well-defined groups of actors with stated interests. According to this perspective, contestation over the purpose of and ambition for the field is based on diverging and often orthogonal interests and goals of actors who have transparent agendas and are constrained by existing power relationships. The analysis of such power-laden dynamics has typically located and analyzed conflict and contestation among the well-defined roles of field participants as challengers and incumbents. These roles reflect hierarchies, and differential positions and access to resources, among actors (Granqvist & Laurila, 2011; Hiatt, Sine, & Tolbert, 2009). This perspective, however, has often overlooked the fact that—especially in early stages of field projects—the purpose, ambition, and expectations around fields are not settled. Early-stage fields resemble projects, rather than full-fledged plans following a predictable path. Agendas and relationships among field participants are still *in the making*, rather than fixed. Importantly, at this stage the question of which ideas are considered appropriate, just, and valued is open for negotiation; some ideas eventually become part of common and shared belief systems, but others do not.

Past individual and collective experiences, power positions of field participants, the resources they hold, and their exposure and adherence to belief systems in adjacent fields matter (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). For example, in the context of this study, it matters whether a field participant had a successful career in private equity or has spent decades as a field worker fighting malaria in developing countries. Similarly, it matters whether a field participant aspires to a political career or simply wants

to "do good." However, in this paper we propose to separate ideas from actors. Whereas the role of ideas and the articulation and communication of ideas have been recognized in institutionalization and structuration processes at the field level (Barley & Tolbert, 1997), existing institutional research has largely failed to study ideas in conflict and identify mechanisms that allow us to understand power-laden dynamics in fields at the level of ideas. In this study, we advocate for an idea-centric perspective on institutional life imbued with conflict in fields to *see* power-laden dynamics in new ways.

An *idea-centric perspective* allows us to pay attention to a variety of ideas—not only to those that eventually become dominant and an integral part of institutional order. These ideas might be in competition and conflict. Probing into the relationship and dynamics among them might help us to identify underappreciated, subtle, or hard-to-detect power-laden mechanisms that underpin the emergence of idea and belief systems in fields. An idea-centric perspective situates ideas in time and space in order to assess their relevance for the specific field project under study. Such a perspective also highlights the important role of social interactions as empirical windows to examine where ideas are formulated and expressed. Finally, an idea-centric perspective helps to specify which ideas are assembled and become part of an emerging belief system, and how they do so. Such a perspective complements actor-centric approaches, which give prominence to ideas typically associated with winners; and logic-centric approaches, which rely on the ideas aligned with an institutional logic prespecified by the researcher.

Field Ideology: A Central Concept for Studying Institutional Dynamics

In this paper, we propose and introduce *field ideology* as a theoretically relevant and analytically useful concept for carrying out idea-centric studies in institutional research. A field ideology as used in this study refers to a patterned set of ideas and beliefs that are linked in nonrandom ways. Constituting a relatively coherent system of ideas and beliefs, a field ideology forms the cognitive and normative underbelly of institutional order and therefore shapes what is valued, considered appropriate, and eventually taken for granted in a field. As sets of ideas and beliefs constituting a field ideology assemble and become dominant, a field ideology not only marks, but also critically determines, activities and decisions in fields.

Scholars of organizations have pointed to the importance of reviving a constructive discussion on the relationship between institutions and ideology (for a generative discussion, see Meyer, Sahlin, Ventresca, & Walgenbach, 2009). However, ideology as a concept that underpins institutional life and reinforces institutional order in fields has not received much traction. Previous research in management and on organizations has typically located ideologies at a macro-societal level and as influencing behavior and practices within and across organizations (Guillen, 1994). In recent studies, ideology has been used as an independent variable. For example, studies have tested the effect of Communist ideological imprinting on ventures in China (Marquis & Qiao, 2018), or of political and free-market ideology on belief in the business case for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Gupta, Briscoe, & Hambrick, 2017; Hafenbrädl & Waeger, 2017). In addition, building on the seminal work of Bendix (1956) and following a Marxian tradition, authors have applied a critical and negative conception of ideology to investigate how management ideologies discipline and dominate employees (Barley & Kunda, 1992). In this paper, we do not ignore or dismiss the use of macro perspectives of ideologies for understanding dynamics in fields and organizations. However, consistent with the objective of this study, we chose a perspective on ideology that is aligned with a micro-sociology tradition on ideology (for an excellent summary, see Fine & Sandstrom, 1993). According to such a micro perspective, an ideology is socially constructed through interactions. We find this perspective helpful to highlight the importance of the less-understood aspects of how a field ideology emerges as a process of assembly as some ideas become dominant. In addition, the relational perspective on ideology inherent in this micro-sociologist tradition has important implications for how to study and analyze sets of ideas and their relationships. As Fine and Sandstrom (1993: 23) summarized, such a tradition allows us to examine a wider variety of linked ideas and beliefs, and "not solely those that are considered or have been predefined as ideological" because of their connection or association to a specific political or social worldview, institutional logic, or order of worth. This allows us to avoid an "ideologization of ideology"—to borrow terminology from Geertz (1973: 196)—and instead specify the various sets of ideas and beliefs that constitute subsets of an ideology, and pay attention to conflict and contestation among and within them.

The concept of field ideology as used in this paper is consonant with, yet complementary to, research on ideology that has centered more on the societal or the organizational level of analysis. For example, aligned with Simons and Ingram (1997: 784), who view ideology as a "set of beliefs about how the social world operates, including ideas about what outcomes are desirable and how they can best be achieved," a field ideology constitutes a justificatory repertoire that defines and defends patterns of belief and value, motivates action, and strengthens commitment toward specific goals, purposes, and interests (Alvesson, 1987; Geertz, 1973). Using the words of scholars who have written on ideology, a field ideology serves "both as a clue to understanding but also as a guide to action" (Wilson, 1973: 91–92), provides "a set of first order organizing principles" (Simons & Ingram, 1997: 787), and helps to "make sense of otherwise overwhelmingly complex phenomena" (Turner & Kilian, 1972: 270). Composed of a bounded set of ideas "that belong to one another in a non-random fashion" (Gerring, 1997: 980), a field ideology is "both a cognitive map of sets of expectations and a scale of values in which standards and imperatives are proclaimed" (Wilson, 1973: 91–92). This latter aspect highlights the theoretical relevance of field ideology as a construct that bridges cognitive and normative foundations of belief systems relevant to the study of institutional life in fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Selznick, 1957).

In this paper, we view the concept of field ideology as central to examining the emergence of a system of ideas and beliefs that shapes institutional life in fields, and to understanding how ideas become dominant in this process.

RESEARCH SETTING, DATA, AND METHODS

Empirical Context

The field of impact investing in Europe. Impact investing refers to various forms of investments aimed at generating a positive and measurable social or environmental impact alongside a financial return. The origins of impact investing in Europe can be traced back to the early 2000s, when actors with diverse ideas, motives, and interests started to engage in impact investing with the objective of building a new field of practice. Philanthropic foundations saw an opportunity to experiment with innovative tools and methods regarding financing and impact assessment, and became active participants

in shaping principles, tools, practices, and the overall narrative around investing (Mair & Hehenberger, 2014).[8] Venture capitalists, investors, and bankers started to consider social enterprises as potential investees and clients, and to view impact investing as an additional investment opportunity for high-net-worth individuals. By 2013, public officials at the European Commission initiated efforts to regulate the nascent field in the form of the European Social Entrepreneurship Fund (EuSEF) legal framework.[9] During the first two decades of impact investing, discussions and negotiations in and about the field were closely interlinked and related to debates in philanthropy, public policy, investment, corporate social responsibility, and social entrepreneurship.

Previous scholarship has examined the evolution of investing for social and environmental impact in the United States (Moody, 2008), exposed the coexistence of new and old models (Mair & Hehenberger, 2014), revisited definitions and terminology of impact investing (Höchstädter & Scheck, 2015), and categorized the diversity of models according to different institutional logics (Nicholls, 2010). However, the trajectory of this field from the perspective of ideas and power-laden dynamics inherent in the negotiation over ideas has not yet received analytical and theoretical attention.

By 2018, at the end of our data collection period, the institutional order in the field of impact investing had formed but was still under negotiation. Discussions on how to invest for impact continued and reflected ideas at odds, fueled by new and old ideas promoted by different field participants. For example, the question of whether financial returns (expectation and realization) could or should exceed, meet, or be below the market rate for similar for-profit investments was far from settled. As the project to develop impact investing as a field unfolded, field participants continued to interact and negotiate the field's ambition or goals, the focus or scope of investment, and the underlying anchors of decision making. To study these negotiations, we turn to three groups that regularly convene different field participants and that have an

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[8] In Europe, pioneers in impact investing used the term *venture philanthropy* to label the field (Mair & Hehenberger, 2014). Venture philanthropy is a practice that, in Europe, largely overlaps with impact investing; it involves investing through grants, debt, and equity, as well as providing nonfinancial support to social enterprise. We use the label *venture philanthropy* in order to reflect the historical use of labels.

[9] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1477_en.htm

explicit mandate to discuss and proactively shape the field of impact investing in Europe.

Three groups as sites of interaction. We study three groups—membership associations, task forces, and expert groups—that constitute sites where we can examine how ideas are introduced, contested, and potentially consolidated in sets of ideas and beliefs becoming integral to the institutional order of the field (Furnari, 2014). The three groups chosen were: EVPA (European Venture Philanthropy Association), GECES (The European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship), and GSG (the G8 Taskforce on Social Impact Investment, renamed the Global Steering Group for Impact Investment). We also attended and participated in numerous additional meetings and convenings that did not primarily focus on impact investing but were helpful to corroborate our choice of groups as main sites.[10] In the aggregate, the groups cover the relevant spectrum of participants in the field of impact investing. Membership in these groups is fluid: New actors join by responding to either open calls for participation or to invitations, and several actors participate in multiple groups.

The three groups have different and complementary objectives that are either directly or indirectly related to impact investing, and they are organized and convened in different ways. Set up in 2004, the EVPA is a membership association focusing on growing the field, attracting new actors to the field, facilitating collaboration, and disseminating tools and practices. GECES is a consultative expert group on social entrepreneurship whose mandate is to assist the European Commission in defining policies to promote and finance social enterprise in Europe. In 2013, during the U.K. presidency of the G8, Prime Minister David Cameron announced the set-up of the G8 Taskforce on Social Impact Investment, renamed the GSG in 2015.[11] Table 1 provides an overview of the three groups, including their activities and the actors they convene.

The composition, objectives, working procedures, and different perspectives made these three groups ideal research sites for examining power-laden dynamics in early stages of field projects. Collecting data from the three different groups allowed us to avoid potential biases from focusing on one set of field participants and their ambitions, and to observe the same field participants in different social settings.

Accessing and Collecting Data

We leveraged the composition of our research team, and more specifically their roles as insider and outsiders to access and collect data (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010). The insider, *Researcher 1*, alternated between roles as a participant observer and organizational actor and collected data *in situ* and in real time, while the two outsiders, *Researcher 2* and *Researcher 3*, collected data as participant and neutral observers of the field with various touch points over time. The unique database constructed contained almost 800 hours of observations and over 3,000 pages of documentation over a time period exceeding a decade. (See Figure A1 in Appendix A for more details on the role of the researchers and the data collected.)

We started engaging with impact investing—the phenomenon under study—in 2006 when Researcher 1 and Researcher 2 launched a research project on venture philanthropy in Europe.[12] As participant observers, we gained privileged access to all EVPA's events from 2006–2010. Researcher 1 joined EVPA and acted as its research and policy director for six years from 2010–2016, and was also a member of GECES and GSG. During this phase she was an organizational actor, "experientially and existentially rooted in the organizational system...that we were acquiring knowledge about" (Evered & Louis, 1981: 387), codeveloping the discourse together with other field participants, and thus documenting the field's evolution from within. Although she took part in writing and constructing documents we later analyzed, she did so before we determined the objective, focus, and potential contribution of this study. She actively took part in the meetings convened front stage (conferences and plenary meetings) and backstage (conference calls, workshops, working groups, etc.) conducted by the three groups from 2010–2016. During this period, Researchers 1 and 2 interacted on a regular basis. Researcher 2 served on the

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[10] Other networks and groups exist, such as the GIIN, which was set up in the United States and acted globally. All three authors attended the meetings of several other groups and networks, including the Skoll World Forum, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) meetings on Social Impact Investment, Ashoka's various events, Social Capital Markets (SOCAP), Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN), and others.

[11] The GSG first included NABs in the G8 countries—subsequently the G7—composed of impact investors from that country and representatives of the national government. GSG now includes 23 countries and the EU, and focuses exclusively on impact investing and aims to expand the field beyond its current boundaries.

[12] We used different data mainly stemming from our involvement with EVPA for an article in which we examined how two distinct models of organized philanthropy can co-exist (Mair & Hehenberger, 2014).

TABLE 1
Overview of the Three Groups

	EVPA	GECES	GSG
Type of organization	A membership organization set up in 2004 with permanent staff at Brussels headquarters	A group of experts selected in 2011 and 2014 by the European Commission in Brussels	A network of organizations and organized actors set up in 2013 with a charismatic leader, and with small staff based in London from 2017
Mandate and accountability	Grow the venture philanthropy and social investment sector in Europe. Accountable toward its members, mostly foundations and social investment funds.	Support the European Commission in developing and implementing the Social Business Initiative. Accountable toward broader social economy, including the opinions and perspectives of a diverse set of actors, and aiming to achieve consensus.	Mainstream impact investing by expanding the scope of the impact investing field to include new, powerful actors, including institutional investors with significant funding capabilities. Accountable toward the impact investing community.
Modus operandi	CEO reports to Board that is approved every year by members at the general assembly. CEO hires team of staff working for the Association. Counts on volunteer time from board and members to participate in committees, and expert groups to develop reports.	Documents circulated to all for input. Working groups present to plenary; plenary feeds back. EU asks for expert input.	Each country sets up an NAB that needs to be approved by the Executive Committee. Other associations and networks act as observers.
Types of actors			
Investors	Financial institutions, grant-making foundations, impact investing funds, venture philanthropy organizations	Representatives of impact investing funds and venture philanthropy organizations	Institutional investors (financial institutions, pension funds, asset managers, very large grant-making foundations), impact investing funds
Consultants	Specialized impact consultants	A few specialized consultants as experts	Big four consultancy firms—often hired to implement work
Academics	Academic members—some participating in research	Some individual academic experts	Individual academics participating in plenary meetings and working groups
Associations or networks	European Foundation Centre (EFC), European Venture Capital Association (EVCA), Asian Venture Philanthropy Network (AVPN), and others.	Individual representatives of main European associations and networks	Other associations and networks as observers
Policy makers	EU as funder of EVPA	European Commission convening GECES, representatives of EU Member States attending	National-level policy makers in NABs, EU representation in GSG led by the European Investment Fund
Social purpose organizations	Social enterprises and nonprofit organizations present at the annual conferences	Representatives of social economy actors including cooperatives, religious groups, different types of social and charitable organizations	*Not present*

Advisory Committee of EVPA's Knowledge Centre, which meant that on average they spoke two hours per month. During this period, Researcher 2 encouraged Researcher 1 to take field notes without centering on a specific question but with the intention to help contextualize and inform potential future studies. Researcher 1's immersion in and exposure to the field, and the interaction with Researcher 2, were critical to refining and sharpening the focus of this study. Researcher 3 joined the research project in 2015. She attended selected events. Data analysis for this study started in 2016, after

Researcher 1 left her position at EVPA and became an active participant observer of the field.[13] She continued to attend meetings of all three groups.

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[13] For other field participants this change of role was not disturbing or particularly notable as Researcher 1 was the research head of EVPA. Put differently, from the perspective of other field participants this change was not perceived as a breach of moral contract. Quite the opposite, Researcher 1 (and to some extent Researcher 2) had been associated with generating knowledge *for* but also *on* the field.

Scholars who have sought to study ideologies have suggested looking for them in narratives (Maclean, Harvey, Sillince, & Golant, 2014), in discourse (Gee, 1990), and "on members' own turf and in their own terms" (Beyer, Dunbar, & Meyer, 1988: 485). Based on our access from the inside, we were able to obtain and document both *public* and *hidden transcripts* (Scott, 1990), where *public transcripts* included official meeting minutes, presentations, speech texts, newsletters, policy briefs, and publications; and *hidden transcripts* included field notes and observations (at and in between meetings), emails, conference call transcripts, interview transcripts, and internal strategy documents. This insider access allowed us to collect unique and hard-to-get data. At plenary meetings and conferences of the three groups, the official minutes were important sources of data as participants often presented prepared opinions regarding topics of relevance to the field, whereas transcripts and field notes from discussions backstage allowed us to keep a record of the main tensions regarding how to define norms and rules guiding the field. Being part of working groups with a mandate to develop white papers describing and defining impact investing allowed us to observe the negotiations over ideas and beliefs and capture discussions and potential conflicts that would not have been traceable if we were just analyzing the final documents.

Analyzing Data

In what follows, we explain how we analyzed the data in two main steps and how we enhanced validity and reduced potential biases by assuming different and complementary analytical roles in our research team.

Step 1: Surfacing ideas in opposition through dichotomies. To build our analytical toolkit, we turned to gender studies that have focused on uncovering systemic power and its "invisible dynamics" (Martin, 2004: 1259). As a relational construct, gender portrays what is masculine as partly constructed by what it is not: feminine. We specifically built on work that has conceptualized gender as a system (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1987) that is constructed and reinforced on a day-to-day basis through interactions. Gender as a system consists of idealized masculine and feminine "natures" that can be conceptualized as dichotomies, or idealized and stylized analytical categories that represent opposites (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Such dichotomies can be leveraged analytically to understand conflict and contestation between opposites in general (Martin, 1990). For example, Ely and Meyerson (2000) developed *public–private*, *individualism–collectivism*, and *male identity–female identity* as dichotomies in their work. Their approach provided the inspiration for developing our coding system.

In our data analysis, we selected and coded dichotomies from the data that were clearly opposite ideas and appeared repeatedly. We detected some dichotomies that closely resonated with those found in prior work (Ely & Meyerson, 2000, such as *dependency* versus *self-sufficiency*; whereas other ideas in opposition, such as *measuring impact* versus *telling stories*, were specific to the emerging field of impact investing. To avoid potential insider bias and to decouple ideas from actors, Researcher 3, as a neutral observer, coded the data. We divided roles for validity, and all three researchers worked together to contrast the coding, and validate and theorize the findings. Table 2 shows the codes we

TABLE 2
Dichotomies Found in the Field of Impact Investing

XY codes	XX codes
Standardized: Offer generalizable solutions to global problems	**Customized:** Tailor solutions to a local environment
Big, audacious goals: Aim big, wanting to change the world	**Small fountain of hope:** Have smaller-scale achievement goals
Top-down, heroic leader: Field led through a structured, top-down approach	**Participatory, community:** Field actors bring diverse voices, bottom-up
Self-sufficiency: Organizations should be financially independent and sustainable on their own	**Dependency:** Organizations rely on donations or continuous support
Pick the winners: Support the winners, the innovative ones that succeed	**Nurture the eco-system:** Diverse approaches working in concert required
Scaling: Focus on growing businesses and solutions	**Going native:** Work closely with beneficiaries, be involved in the social cause
Head: Rational, basing decision on what is efficient	**Heart:** Focus on social cause close to one's heart
Measuring impact: Measure social impact of investments	**Telling stories:** Relate narratives, assess satisfaction of beneficiaries
Tool first: Apply set toolbox to social problems	**Need first:** Identify complex social challenges that require change

Note: Our coding system depicts opposing ideas found in the impact investing field of practice.

detected and short descriptions of how the ideas they represent played out in the field of study. (See Table A1 in Appendix A for a complete set of quotes illustrating each dichotomy.)

Dichotomies allowed us to locate and expose areas of contestation at the level of ideas that are subtle and typically overlooked, but that are critical to explain what becomes dominant. In the first section of the findings we develop a historical narrative that embeds the trajectory and assembly of dominant sets of ideas within the timeline of main actors entering and events taking place in the field. The dichotomies we identified were prevalent in all three groups. However, when dichotomies appeared and how they affected the interaction varied across groups. We relied on three themes to organize sets of ideas and to describe how they affected institutional order and life in the field of impact investing in Europe: the *ambition*—the collective and shared goals for the field, the *focus*—the scope or target of impact investment, and the *anchor*—the judgment or rationale for making an investment decision. These three themes emerged from discussions and various iterations of analyzing data related to the three groups we studied. We corroborated whether these themes also appeared in a prominent way in discussions and discourse outside of the three groups. The themes helped us identify the sets of ideas constituting the building blocks of an emerging field ideology. They also helped us to pay analytical attention to those ideas that did not become part of the field ideology. The latter was important to probe for counterfactuals and possible alternative orders in the field of impact investing.

Step 2: Identifying power-laden dynamics. In Step 2, we went back to the dichotomies developed in Step 1 to more diligently examine contestation and conflict among ideas as a means to uncover underlying power-based mechanisms.

We analyzed each text segment coded as dichotomies in Step 1 to examine how some ideas became dominant relative to others. We discussed these codes and started to interpret them with the objective of detecting potential modes that could explain how and why certain ideas became dominant. By analyzing dichotomous pairs such as *measuring impact* versus *telling stories*, we uncovered many instances where measuring impact was portrayed and slowly accepted as worthier than telling stories in order to form judgments and serve as a basis for decision making. Measuring impact was considered as what "we" in the field of impact investing ought to do and what slowly became a taken-for-

granted element of the institutional order. We agreed on the second-order construct and labeled this mode as *devaluing*.

We iterated in our analysis between the coded data, theory, and insider knowledge of and access to the phenomenon (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). Considering our theoretical interest in systemic power, we narrowed down the scope of the data analysis to the modes that acted without force and in covert ways. To help validate emerging second-order constructs, Researcher 1 leveraged her insider field access to "test out" our interpretations on field participants and reported back to the team for further discussions. In one feedback round, in which she asked field participants about their perceptions of important ideas in the field and how they had evolved over time, she reported:

> One of the most experienced impact investors noted that impact investing is converging on sets of ideas similar to what we were finding. Unprompted, she said that it is interesting how certain voices are suppressed [sic!], especially from front line interventions, although impact investors are convinced that they are really inclusive and taking into consideration the social sector. (Field notes after informal interview with impact investor at GECES meeting)

We identified three second-order constructs that we labeled as covert modes of suppression. (See Figure A2 in Appendix A for an overview of how we arrived at these constructs.) We theorized these modes as constitutive of suppression.

Once we had identified modes constituting the mechanism of suppression, we probed further into the potential consequences of each mode. The hidden transcripts collected by the insider in the forms of anecdotes and observations were particularly useful for this part of the analysis. For example, it was often in notes and comments on drafts of publications that field actors expressed concerns regarding the risks of enacting certain ideas in the field. Such ideas relating to what was at stake were not often publicly expressed.

FINDINGS

The impact investing field involves participants from adjacent fields, such as philanthropy, financial markets, social economy, and policy. These actors carry with them a range of ideas. We show how these ideas relate to each other and how this relationship evolves over time as actors expose and contrast meanings and understandings particular to the field

of impact investing. Figure 1 provides a timeline that illustrates when ideas entered the field and when tensions between ideas portrayed as dichotomies surfaced. In addition, Figure 1 situates ideas in time and context: It shows when the groups were set up, when policies and regulations that affected the field came into force, and when different types of actors entered the field more broadly.

Next, we present the results of our analysis: We expose the trajectory of the field and point to ideas that had the potential to shape the eventual field ideology in a different way. These ideas constitute the bits and pieces of paths not taken.

A Trajectory of Contestation in the Field of Impact Investing
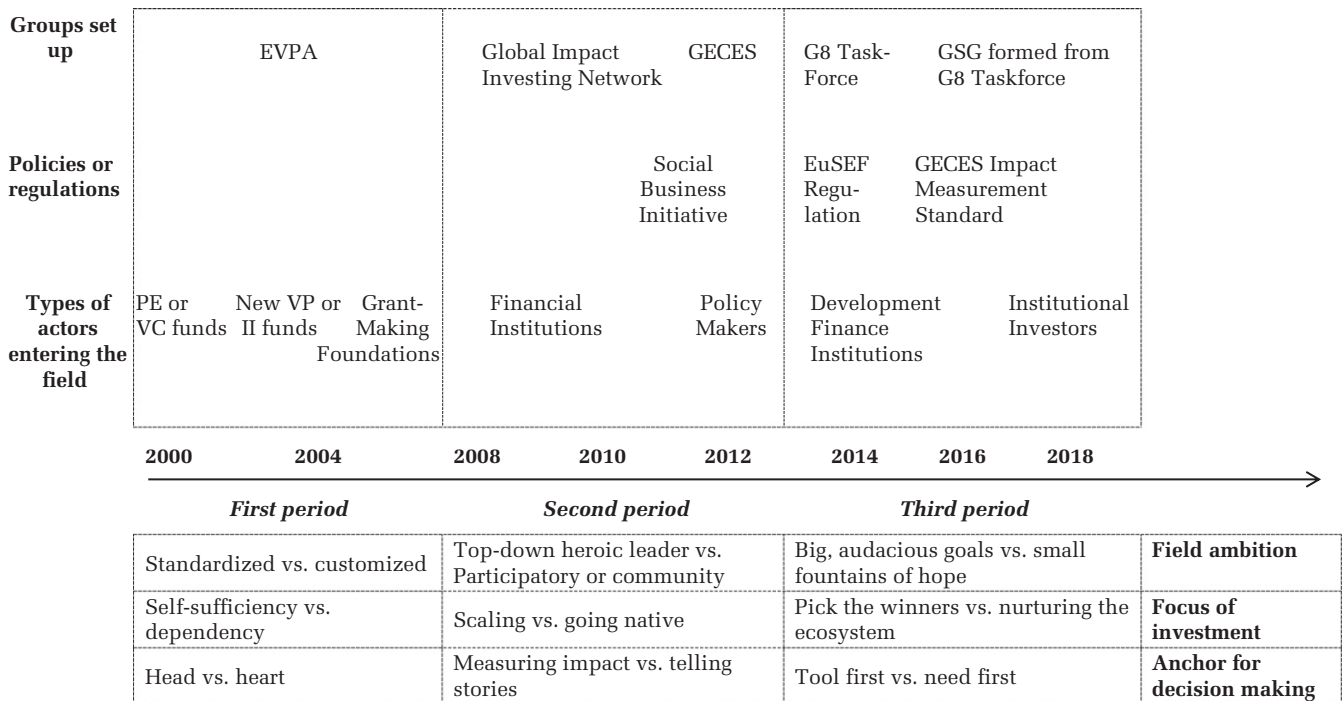
First period: Supporting social purpose organizations in new ways. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw innovations in organizational approaches to social and environmental issues, including the rise of social entrepreneurship. As part of this trend, American venture capitalists saw an opportunity to apply a venture capital approach to fund social enterprises and nonprofits. Around 2004, European

venture capitalists introduced the concept of venture philanthropy in Europe and began investing in social purpose organizations with hands-on grants and experimenting with different types of financing, including loans. There was also increasing interest in long-term engagements that gave investors the opportunity to support social management teams with capacity building, networking, and other forms of nonfinancial support. These new ideas brought together actors from diverse backgrounds, including philanthropy, finance, policy, and civil society, to discuss best practices and compare and contrast approaches.

At the beginning of the period of study, in the early 2000s, the ambition of the field was marked by conflict of *customized* versus *standardized* approaches. Ideas about *customized* approaches involved tailoring programs to specific circumstances and contexts. These ideas were at odds with those about finding *standardized* solutions and transforming larger systems. The conflict was visible among early impact investors:

> First, we tried to have a customized approach. Now we focus on the project where we can bring maximum value, and where we can measure value relatively

FIGURE 1
Timeline of the European Field of Impact Investing

Groups set up	EVPA		Global Impact Investing Network		GECES	G8 Task-Force	GSG formed from G8 Taskforce	
Policies or regulations					Social Business Initiative	EuSEF Regulation	GECES Impact Measurement Standard	
Types of actors entering the field	PE or VC funds	New VP or II funds	Grant-Making Foundations	Financial Institutions		Policy Makers	Development Finance Institutions	Institutional Investors

| | 2000 | 2004 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 |

First period	*Second period*	*Third period*	
Standardized vs. customized	Top-down heroic leader vs. Participatory or community	Big, audacious goals vs. small fountains of hope	**Field ambition**
Self-sufficiency vs. dependency	Scaling vs. going native	Pick the winners vs. nurturing the ecosystem	**Focus of investment**
Head vs. heart	Measuring impact vs. telling stories	Tool first vs. need first	**Anchor for decision making**

Notes: PE: private equity, VC: venture capital, II: impact investing.

easily. We first focused on French Africa because it was close to one of our partners. We are also thinking about doing the same for South America, focusing on locations where the for-profit investment fund has offices. (Comments by participant at EVPA workshop, 2008)

According to this exposed idea, solutions that needed to be customized to a local community were less interesting than standardized solutions that could be replicated at a global scale. The ambition was to provide a greater social return on investment and it was deemed more interesting to support organizations that provided standardized solutions that could fit multiple contexts.

However, this ambition was not clear to all participants in the early days of impact investing. Funders debated ideas around standardized solutions and suggested that there was a risk in that standardization could go wrong.

A key issue in VP (venture philanthropy) is that when money is becoming more active, charities working with VP are changing as a consequence. This is a good change because it leads to charities being improved. But there is also a risk in how the money is managed. Problems arise if there is a clumsy VP, when not listening enough to the investee, and sometimes through a board position. (Comments by participant in EVPA CEO meeting, 2007)

Other investors discussed how they tried to ensure customized solutions even when they had pressure from their financiers.

We only engage volunteers based on the needs of the investees—sometimes donors want to get engaged, but their skills may not be suitable. (Comments by participant at EVPA workshop, 2008)

In the early years of impact investing, actors frequently debated over the ideas, values, and practices without a clear consensus. Some foundations embraced the idea of *self-sufficiency* as opposed to that of *dependency*.

The downside or, yes, the counter-side of grant making is that you make people dependent and also that the projects you support, they run into trouble when you stop funding them. (Interview with impact investor, 2007)

Related to the idea of dependency, the DOB Foundation in the Netherlands questioned how foundations had been providing a large number of small grants to multiple projects with low prospects

of developing into sustainable organizations, and tried to innovate with new, blended practices:

In 2005 the foundation was involved in approx. 120 projects in 26 countries. These projects, although sometimes linked to business and actually having social effects, had no reliable financial sustainability. The foundation gradually grew frustrated with this approach and did not feel that grants provided entrepreneurs and management with the right motivation to grow and scale their businesses. Grantees repeatedly called needing more funding—as Theo explains, "every time you leave a project, they call to say that they are out of money!" (Reflections by Theo Tobé, DOB Foundation, in EVPA publication [Metz Cummings & Hehenberger, 2010: 39])

The dichotomy between the ideas of dependency and self-sufficiency is reflected in how practices in the impact investing field developed, including a move away from grant funding to employ other financing instruments:

If you give grants, you produce "beggars," but if you provide loans, you gain "customers"! (Comments by participant at EVPA workshop, 2007)

However, not all investees were comfortable with the self-sufficiency required when paying back a loan.

We are doing a mix of funding instruments. However, some investees are concerned that if you are first perceived as a philanthropist, then charging interest, they feel confused. Branding of philanthropy and loan together doesn't seem to work well. (Comments by participant at EVPA workshop, 2008)

The idea of self-sufficiency also helped to drive interest in the type of organizations funded, as nonprofit organizations were deemed less likely to become financially sustainable.

Another conflict in this phase was that of *head* versus *heart*. Many philanthropic organizations are set up with a mission to solve a social problem that is somehow personally important to the founder. One of the early impact investors had made the *heart*-based decision to set up a foundation to help children with Down syndrome because his daughter had the condition. However, he felt the conflict between these opposing ideas and adopted a more *head*-focused, seemingly objective rationale. He explained in an early private EVPA meeting that he would rather pool money together with other funders in a large vehicle to contribute to solving a larger world problem, such as AIDS, than support a

number of small, "inefficient" foundations or NGOs.

The idea of using one's *head* involved focusing on organizations that are most efficient and that have the highest potential to produce impact.

> While charitable funding is currently often allocated according to personal beliefs and emotional connections, money is not always given to the most pressing problems or spent on the most effective solutions. (Statement by impact investor in EVPA newsletter, October 2011)

The dichotomy between the ideas of head and heart exposed conflict and contestation when impact investors had to decide how to invest their money, as their philanthropic interest did not always coincide with rational criteria.

Second period: Attracting policy makers and financial institutions. The dynamic discussion about impact investing attracted attention from policy makers who were interested in enabling new approaches to social and environmental issues. In 2011 the European Commission launched the Social Business Initiative (SBI), which recognized the existence of impact investors and their role in financing social enterprises:

> Increasing numbers of investors are seeking to combine social or environmental results with their legitimate concern of obtaining a financial return on the investment, while pursuing long-term objectives in the general interest. (European Commission's SBI Communication, 2011: 6)

The SBI marked the beginning of policy makers' increased involvement in the field of impact investing. GECES was set up during this time period to provide advice to the European Commission on policies related to social entrepreneurship. At the same time, major financial institutions—including UBS, JP Morgan, and BlackRock—were attracted to the field by the increased focus on using financing instruments other than grants, and investing in social enterprises rather than nonprofit organizations.

During this phase, we detected conflict between ideas related to *scaling* and *going native*. Ideas about scaling emphasized the need to get "bigger," "larger," and "double in size":

> And then they'll say, "okay, in order to really double in size we want all these charities to double in size in three years; in order for them to double in size in three years, these are the skills and the resources that they need." (Interview with impact investor, 2008)

In contrast, the idea of *going native* (an idea borrowed from anthropology) implied a strong interest in staying close to beneficiaries and putting the social cause first. Discussions around investing in and supporting organizations that could have a strong social impact although they would not necessarily grow in size exposed the conflict between the ideas of *scaling* and *going native*.

> Sometimes, you have to realize that not all initiatives can be scaled up. If the social entrepreneurs think it would not work then we should not push the social entrepreneur or organisation in that direction, because they will just be unsuccessful and eventually burn out. (Comments by participant at EVPA workshop, April 2012)

For policy makers, a major conflict in developing policies to support the growing impact investing field was between ideas related to providing *top-down* regulation (e.g., to protect vulnerable retail investors) and *participatory* innovation (necessary to avoid stifling sector growth). The European Commission often iterated the need to involve all stakeholders in decision making based on *participatory* ideas.

> The Commission has emphasised that identification of priorities and design of operational programmes for the period ahead should be undertaken in partnership with the key stakeholders at national and regional levels. (Comments by the European Commission at GECES meeting, 2012)

However, others were concerned about creating a *top-down*, unified message that leading countries of the G8 could convey from the top.

> It is important for the GSG to dedicate time and money to communications on impact investment. Identifying narratives in two of the largest markets [United Kingdom and United States] will allow other NABs [National Advisory Boards] to draw on the results and work out whether narrative diagnostics are needed in their own countries. (Minutes from GSG conference call, 2013)

Field participants with a variety of backgrounds also expressed the aspiration to measure the social return on each investment, and debated over ideas related to social impact. GECES developed a European Standard on Impact Measurement[14] to be applied across the European member countries with the idea of fostering and aligning efforts around

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[14] https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0c0b5d38-4ac8-43d1-a7af-32f7b6fcf1cc

the social economy.[15] In 2014, the European Commission published the Standard and it served as a voluntary policy, providing guidelines to impact investors and social enterprises on how to measure impact. During this second period the dichotomy between the idea of *measuring impact*, whereby the impact of an investment should be measured numerically, and *telling stories,* including more qualitative principles of relating a narrative, was prominent.

> The method should seek a balance between qualitative and quantitative data, realising that the "story" is central to measuring success. (European Economic and Social Committee [EESC], 2013: 2)

Discussions in EVPA meetings often recognized that not everything can be measured. They acknowledged the importance of qualitative storytelling and how stories can influence many actors:

> We assumed that rational decision making would occur, but it is not enough to show that a model works—that is not necessarily influencing government. People are not always influenced by data. Many are influenced by stories! (Comments by participant at EVPA CEO meeting, 2010)

> Some things cannot be measured! (Comments by participant at EVPA CEO meeting, 2012)

At the end of the second period, in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, the European Commission prepared one of the first regulations to affect the field: the EuSEF regulation, which provided a legal framework to register impact investing funds through national financial authorities.[16] It came into force in 2013 and aimed to protect retail investors from losing money in risky investments. Before the stronger focus on financial returns and the entry of financial institutions into impact investing, policy makers had not deemed necessary the regulation of the market, as most of the investors were philanthropic or high-net-worth individuals.

Third period: Calling out a revolution. As policy makers and large financial institutions entered the

field, impact investing started to attract the attention of public figures. The year 2013 marked the launch of the G8 Taskforce on Social Impact Investment (renamed GSG in 2015). The aim was to "catalyse the development of the social impact investment market."[17] Sir Ronald Cohen, one of the most visible figures in venture capital and founder of Bridges Ventures, one of the first impact investing funds in the United Kingdom, was appointed chair and acted as the main promotor of the Taskforce. GSG mobilized and attracted new investors and larger investments from institutional investors, and development finance institutions and large foundations, while fueling the introduction of new conflict and contestation between ideas in the field.

An interesting conflict in the field was the dichotomy of *nurturing the ecosystem* versus *picking the winners.* Some ideas in debate involved an interest in picking the winners, a perspective about identifying and investing in highly innovative organizations with a potential to grow rapidly and produce significant impact and financial returns. Picking and supporting potential winners could also allow the sector to grow by attracting greater resources thanks to success stories.

> We need success stories—concretely, we need a successful social enterprise that is as successful as Facebook, Google… to attract massive investment. How? (Comment by participant at EVPA CEO meeting, 2014)

Such discussions became more frequent in the sector in this third time period as impact investors realized that they needed additional capital from institutional investors and governments and therefore needed to mainstream the message. In order to mobilize resources and build a marketing campaign for impact investing, it was important to sell a successful solution.

At the same time, mainly in GECES, we saw evidence of a more holistic view of needing to *nurture the ecosystem*, evident from a document from the EESC in their Opinion on Social Impact Investment:

> Supporting the social economy and social enterprises requires a holistic view of where great ideas come from, who drives them, and how they grow. … Besides access to finance, other key components are required to create an enabling environment for the social enterprise sector in Europe. (European Economic and Social Committee, 2014: 8)

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[15] In the European Union, the term social economy comes from the French *économie sociale,* which traditionally encompasses cooperatives, associations, *mutuelles*, foundations, and, more recently, also social enterprises. Their objective is to contribute to society, and their governance structure normally adheres to the principles of solidarity and democracy. http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy_en

[16] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1477_en.htm

[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/social-impact-investment-taskforce

During this third period we also detected the dichotomy of *need first*—implying that complex social challenges require diverse approaches that focus on achieving social change—versus *tool first*—specifically leveraging the finance toolbox as an effective solution to social problems. The following quote from a faculty convening on impact investing illustrates the idea of focusing on tools from the finance world:

Students enter the field with a romantic notion of impact investing. But, there is a spreadsheet that underpins the romance. (Mainstream investor discussing business school impact investing education, 2017)

In EVPA meetings, some actors had raised the importance of the idea of first understanding what the social enterprises needed and then designing financing instruments to cater to those needs.

Don't start with financial instruments—start with innovators. Turn the market upside down. (Comments by participant at EVPA CEO meeting, 2013)

We also noted how GECES participants discussed ideas about understanding the problem at hand, and stakeholder needs, and then finding an appropriate tool.

One participant stressed the primary importance of identifying the outcomes we are looking for, i.e. better access to financial or banking services, after which point the legislative instrument necessary to achieve that goal can be considered. (Minutes from GECES meeting, 2012)

We found evidence of field actors distilling the idea of social complexity down to one that could be solved via the implementation of new tools.

Social investment offers a way forward, ensuring that each and every pound we spend has a demonstrable purpose—transforming the lives of people now and the chances of future generations. (Comments by participant at GSG conference, 2015)

The conflict between ideas related to growth was implicit in the dichotomy of *big, audacious goals* versus *small fountains of hope,* which we detected at the level of field ambition. Impact investors even referred to a "revolution" when discussing the ambition of the field of practice.

Like venture capital and private equity before it, impact investment is financing a revolution, becoming a significant part of investment portfolios in the process. (Comments by participant at GSG conference, 2014)

The VP community felt threatened by the ideas expressed at the GSG.

Is VP becoming marginalised by Impact investing and Mission Related Investment? We need to be mindful about impact investing and how it is executed, and watch out for a bubble. ... Grants will always be needed. (Comments by participant at EVPA CEO meeting, 2013)

At EVPA meetings, participants discussed the idea of actors collaborating in a broader ecosystem, and some actors raised concerns about the risks and questioned the need for growing:

Do we want to see VP systemically grow? What is the price we have to pay for that? Is there a danger of watering it down? (Comments by participant at EVPA CEO meeting, 2013)

Toward the end of the period of study, we noted that the field participants were embracing the idea that impact investing was a forceful, yet simple, solution to solve our biggest problems:

There is no longer a trade-off between "doing good" and "doing well." Impact investing brings together private and public capital with social entrepreneurship and not-for-profit organizations to drive huge social change to benefit the people and the planet, while delivering financial returns. It is summed up in a simple formula: Purpose + Investment = Impact. (GSG description of impact investing on website, 2017[18])

Figure 1 (introduced at the start of our Findings section) depicts the evolution of impact investing. Taking into consideration when sets of ideas entered the field at different periods in time, with conflict between ideas evidenced through the dichotomies identified, allowed us to provide a unique and original narrative of the field trajectory.

Seeing an emerging field ideology and its consequences. Over time, we started seeing how some ideas became more prominent and dominant. These ideas had been negotiated during the period of study, as evident from the account of the field trajectory, but we started to detect patterns. We organized the ideas according to three themes related to field ambition, focus of investment, and anchor for decision making that emerged as important foci of discussion and negotiation, as illustrated in Figure 2.

At the end of our study, we observed that organizations practicing impact investing shared the

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[18] http://gsgii.org.

FIGURE 2
A Field Ideology Emerging

Field ambition	Focus of investment	Anchor for decision making
Standardized	Self-sufficiency	Head
Top-down, heroic leader	Scaling	Measuring impact
Big, audacious goals	Pick the winners	Tool first

Customized

Dependency

Heart

Going native

Telling stories

Participatory, community

Nurture the ecosystem

Small fountain of hope

Need first

Alternative ideas
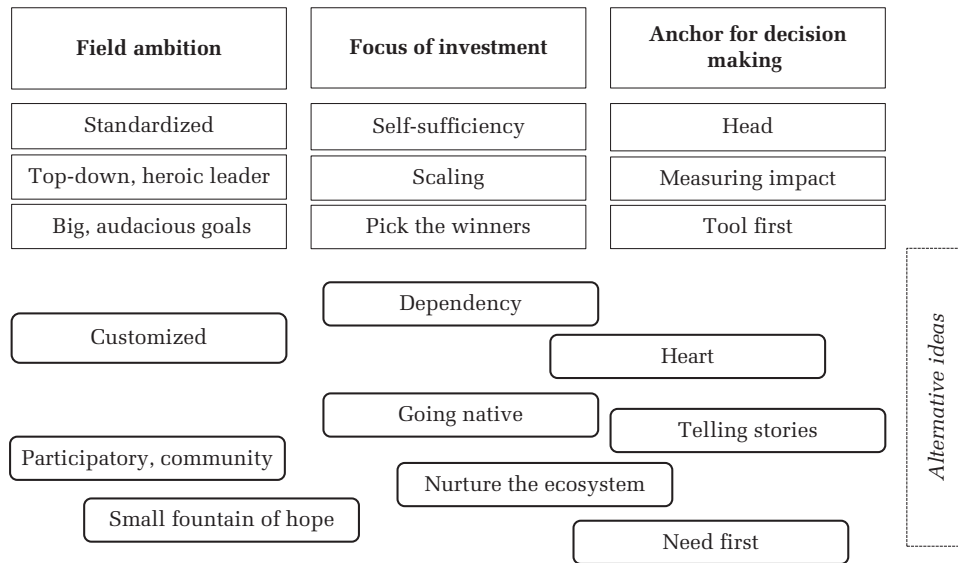
ambition of mainstreaming the idea of investing for impact across all types of investments and achieving impact on a global scale. This ambition is illustrated in one of Sir Ronald Cohen's recent statements

> The impact economy will produce impact unicorns that are worth 1billion dollars and improve 1 billion lives (Speech by Sir Ronald Cohen at meeting organized by Spanish impact investors, 2019).

In terms of the investment focus, impact investors shared a belief that by investing in social enterprises with the potential to become financially self-sustainable and scale up substantially, they could[18] achieve impact. Lastly, the idea of using data, tools, and measurement to determine what was valued became widely accepted and increasingly a defining characteristic of practicing impact investing. As these sets of ideas became dominant, they also started to become integral to the emerging field ideology in impact investing, and went on to solidify it. We could *see* and trace this field ideology in publicly available and widely shared documents issued by the groups we studied. For example:

> Real impact is measurable, drives change at scale, adds up for everyone. (GSG website[19], 2019)

As a membership organization, EVPA's code of conduct sets the tone for behavior and values in the field. It includes "impact measurement and management" as one of three core principles that funds should apply to themselves and their investees, and it urges its members to work toward efficiency and sustainability, including "external audits of both financial performance and where possible societal impact" (EVPA, 2018: 6).

Our observations and analysis of data beyond the three groups we studied revealed that these sets of dominant ideas—the emerging field ideology—started to shape institutional life and order in important ways. For example, they were visible and present in the material used to train and educate students and executives in courses touching on impact investing. In a Harvard Business School case study about an impact investor (Acumen Fund)[19] taught across the world, financial independence and scaling impact were mentioned as the key criteria for deciding whether to invest in two proposed social businesses (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2011). When ideas are codified in educational materials, they reflect what is considered appropriate in the field and are likely to appear taken for granted to students. Ideas in the field ideology have the power to influence practices and behaviors through education and training.

We also identified the sets of ideas that made up the field ideology in the EuSEF regulation that includes reporting requirements for the registered funds, including strict guidance regarding

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[19] https://gsgii.org/about-us.

impact measurement and the fact that the investment focus should be social enterprises that operate in the market economy (i.e., that aim to be self-sufficient).[20] Impact investing funds registered as EuSEF can fundraise across Europe and are considered for investment by the European Investment Fund.

As we have shown, the field of impact investing had not yet fully settled at the end of 2018, when our period of analysis concluded. However, by that time sets of dominant ideas that had taken root and given rise to the emerging field ideology were consequential for education and training, regulations, and governance mechanisms.

On paths not taken, and possible futures. Alternative ideas to those that became an integral part of the field ideology were at play and promoted by different field actors throughout the duration of our research project. These ideas (see bottom of Figure 2) still linger in the field and are critical to understanding the *paths not taken*—counterfactuals for how the field ideology could have developed. They also constitute seeds for speculating about *possible alternative futures* of and within the field of impact investing.

A different ideology could have incorporated ideas related to customization and tailoring solutions.

> When developing new investment instruments, the specificities of social enterprises must be considered, this to ensure access to high-quality services and continuity of services. (European Economic and Social Committee, 2014: 3)

If such ideas prevailed, the ambition of the field might have been to enable an ecosystem of many small organizations across sectors working in collaboration to solve complex or interrelated problems. In such a field, workshops would cover topics such as understanding the nuances of context, including regional cultures, languages, and values, and investors would incorporate local variations into their investment strategy.

Some field participants had ideas about how to ensure a participatory approach that embraced diversity.

> From our experience, core principles will need to include the embracing of diversity and to create a genuinely pluralistic global narrative if this is to succeed. The European experiences offer much

learning and should be celebrated and even showcased for their potential in shaping this agenda globally. (Comments by participant at GECES meeting, 2014)

Including beneficiaries in decision-making processes made it more difficult to apply standardized indicators. If ideas related to participation and democracy had become dominant, impact investing could have used beneficiary and stakeholder voices to determine what was valued in the field.

> I am advocating for the establishment of effective mechanisms to empower "beneficiaries" to be actively involved in the planning, execution, governance, and ownership of enterprises, and in the flows of capital connected with them. (Morgan Simon, cofounder of TONIIC, an impact investing network, 2016)

We can imagine a different field ideology in which the social needs of beneficiaries are at the center of decision making and beneficiaries are empowered more broadly. In such an alternative order, guidelines and protocols would ensure that beneficiaries had a voice in planning and deciding on investments made.

By identifying ideas that are not elements of the current field ideology, we can also speculate about and even describe possible futures. Recently, one of the pioneers of impact investing gave a keynote speech at the EVPA conference that seemed to openly contest the field ideology we specified:

> Investing should be a means not an end; we need to measure what matters! (Speech by Jacqueline Novogratz at EVPA annual conference, 2018)

Alternative ideas indicate how the field could have developed, and still could develop, differently. If other sets of ideas had prevailed, we would have seen a different field ideology at the time of this study—one that included a different composition of ideas—or potentially even two distinct or opposing ideologies instead of one.

Next, we interrogate how these alternative ideas get left out of the field ideology. We probe into the mechanisms that explain how some ideas became dominant while others were sidelined, ignored, or abandoned.

Suppression: Driving Systemic Power in Fields

Looking in more detail at how ideas become dominant, we identify and specify suppression as a

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[20] Regulation EU No 346/2013 of the European Parliament and of the council of April 17, 2013 on European social entrepreneurship funds, regulation part of the SBI.

power-laden mechanism that explains how systemic power in fields arises and perseveres. We found three interrelated modes: *devaluing*—downplaying the contribution of ideas introduced and promoted by certain actors, sectors, and fields; *prioritizing means over ends*—inverting the order of priorities so that that tools and approaches are privileged over goals; and *simplifying*—fitting a problem to an implicit subset of reality, or an implicit template that makes the problem easier to address. In what follows, we introduce these modes, specify how they suppress, and illustrate their potential negative consequences or what may get lost in the process of suppression.

Devaluing. The first mode of suppression we found is devaluing, or downplaying the contribution of ideas introduced and promoted by certain actors, sectors, and fields. By devaluing certain contributions, partial blame was assigned to others for the continued existence of society's problems. One target of devaluing was the contribution of traditional philanthropic organizations and the nonprofit sector. For example, in an industry workshop a participant said:

> Philanthropic organizations should be able to admit failures, learn from them, and adjust their strategies accordingly. This is difficult because the "nonprofit sector" seldom allows failures, at least publicly! (Comments by participant at EVPA workshop, 2011)

Devaluing suppresses as it repositions what is considered worthy, potentially leading to a reduction in options to consider. In this example, ideas and beliefs of a group of actors and their principles and practices are seen as less worthy. In another example, Sir Ronald Cohen spoke about the struggle to address social issues and the insufficient capital and resources available to traditional charitable social service providers:

> I have come to realize why we face this predicament. The primary reason is that traditional philanthropy has focused on the act of charitable giving rather than on achieving social outcomes. (Speech by Sir Ronald Cohen, at GSG meeting, 2014)

And

> Lack of scale plagues philanthropic service providers. (Speech by Sir Ronald Cohen, at GSG meeting, 2014)

The beliefs and rationales for supporting social causes as practiced by traditional philanthropic actors were devalued and reaffirmed as inferior. At the same time, ideas connected to scaling, growth, and investing in winning organizations were gaining traction, although the inherent difficulties were stated.

> Scaling social businesses is the holy grail of venture philanthropy and social impact investment—and *as of today no organisation has really cracked the code for successful scaling.* (Comments by participant at EVPA CEO workshop, 2016; emphasis added)

The ideas that are devalued may be seen as lesser and ignored. The risk is that after repeated instances, devaluing can eliminate diverse approaches and ideas from discussions, or shape perceptions that extend to entire contributions from devalued ideas, thus failing to leverage extensive knowledge and experience. For example, by focusing on the perceived negative aspects of traditional philanthropy, such as the close relationship of dependency between grant makers and grantees, impact investors may end up not leveraging or even ignoring the knowledge generated in philanthropy that could help them better understand specific social problems. Another risk of devaluing could be the loss of important assumptions, values, or theories underlying the devalued contribution, leading to a less nuanced analysis and vision of complex problems. This risk was expressed by a foundation in an EVPA meeting:

> There was an anxiety that the values of the non-profit sector and the time required to bring about social change might be ignored. There was a related fear that the impact investing might result in over-simplification and the application of ready-made recipes. (Field notes from EVPA workshop, 2010)

Devaluing constitutes a critical mechanism to understand how a field ideology emerges and takes shape—in our case, of how a specific ideology evolved in the field of impact investing in Europe. Devaluing helps create segregation between ideas that are accepted and, over time, perceived as legitimate, and those that are not.

Prioritizing means over ends. The second mode of suppression was that of prioritizing means over ends, or inverting the order of priorities so that that tools and approaches are privileged over goals. By prioritizing new tools, practices, or the use of a certain methodology that become the hallmark of the field, ideas and beliefs centered on the nature and complexity of societal issues get bypassed or deemphasized.

Prioritizing means over ends is apparent in the implementation of the social impact bond (SIB), one

of the most celebrated financial vehicles used by impact investors. SIBs operate on the "payment by results" principle, with private investors making the upfront investment, and the public entity paying a financial return if the social impact objective is reached. The social impact is measured in a pre-defined way using a control group that was not exposed to the social innovation. Although SIBs may have a clear social goal, such as reducing recidivism among former prisoners, the potential consequences of such an instrument could be "cherry picking" of social issues that are relatively easy to measure, or that are "quick wins"—thus avoiding projects that are more risky but potentially more innovative. When new NABs of the GSG are being set up, they all place developing SIBs at the top of the list of priorities. An example comes from the Portuguese NAB, where the field participants commented that they were concerned about launching an SIB as soon as possible to show that Portugal was taking impact investing seriously by demonstrating that they had the tool. They then decided to focus on education as a social issue as this choice enabled them to raise money and implement the SIB quickly.

Prioritizing means over ends is evident in the promotion of certain practices and tools, such as the SIB and impact measurement, but also in privileging impact investing itself as a tool to be applied, making it even more important than the social problems themselves. As noted in a communication document from the GSG:

> Through impact investment, we can tackle many issues including climate change, education and healthcare, making the better world we imagine more viable. (GSG Communication internal strategy document, 2016)

In a related example, ideas about practices are further elevated:

> Now, the challenge remains for government to scale up social investment—harnessing it in the design, commissioning, and delivery of many more of our social services. In doing so, the first step is to build an evidence base—creating certainty around the return for investors. (Speech by U.K. Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Duncan Smith, 2015)

In these examples, ideas about the specific practices of impact investment are placed and promoted as central to debates and discussions among field participants. *Prioritizing means over ends* suppresses and leads to domination by reordering the hierarchy of priorities so that privileging practices

and tools appears normal and their use is justified as rational.

By making approaches, including associated practices, a goal in its own right, rather than a means to an end, this mode of suppression shifts the attention away from understanding social problems to innovating and improving solutions, which may lead to the creation of sophisticated tools and artifacts that do not address the core problem. An example is when an impact investor explained that he had invested in a company producing sophisticated eyeglasses that enabled users to regulate their vision themselves. However, he later explained that they had not been successful as there was no market for them; "they were so ugly that not even the poor wanted to wear them!" Prioritizing means over ends may create and perpetuate a mismatch between the interests of those with resources and tools and those who implement them. This risk was highlighted by a concerned observer during the development of GSG's report on impact measurement:

> The measurement of the impact of an intervention, and thence the measurement of the achievement of its funding, originates in the front line of service delivery. Yet the report seems to suggest that it is something imposed by investors, perhaps even drifting into implying that the investee is unable to develop a satisfactory measurement for itself. (Feedback on GSG "Measuring impact" report, Social Impact Investment Taskforce 2014)

Policy makers were alerted to the importance of keeping in mind the objective of impact measurement so as not to stifle innovation.

> Any measurement method must be developed from the core outcomes of the social enterprise, be supportive of its activities, proportionate and not stifle social innovation. (European Economic and Social Committee, 2013)

The theories and values behind certain tools, as evidenced in the case of impact investing, may be difficult to detect, but could have wider consequences. Indeed, another negative consequence of prioritizing means over ends—evident in our case in the privileging ideas and beliefs that center on practices and tools—could be that fewer resources are channeled to riskier, but potentially more highly innovative, solutions to social issues.

Simplifying. The third mode of suppression was simplifying, which we define as fitting a problem to an implicit subset of reality, or implicit template that makes it easier to address. In impact investing, the

focus on ideas and beliefs centering on scaling and growth and thinking big could be seen as a reflection of simplifying because, in order to scale a solution, you need a standardized approach that is replicable.

> Even within the countries engaged in the Taskforce there are significant differences in relevant laws, practice and culture, and in the relative roles of the state, business and social sector organisations in dealing with society's problems. ... Our recommendations take these differences into account, mostly by setting out principles that can be applied everywhere and so help to catalyse a truly global market for impact investment. (Social Impact Investment Taskforce, 2014)

In this example, a standardized approach is suggested as a pragmatic and helpful way of addressing complex social issues. However, it implies a loss of fidelity as approaches are stretched to address the global market. *Simplifying* suppresses as it refocuses the attention to a subset of ideas, neatly trimming and distilling some ideas away.

A potential negative consequence of simplifying is that it narrows the focus to tasks that are easier to deal with, and may leave important issues inadequately addressed. In impact investing, an example of simplifying is when impact investors choose to invest in social enterprises that focus on social challenges that are relatively easy to solve, with faster impact that is measurable and can generate a financial return.

> Social impact investors fall into two categories: those who need to raise funds themselves, opting to support sectors that demonstrate more tangible impact, and those who prefer to tackle more entrenched and complex problems with less concrete outcomes. The key risk is that there may be too few funders of the latter category and that many new and innovative interventions, as well as harder-to-solve problems, will not be considered fundable. (OECD, 2015)

An implication of simplifying in impact investing is that investors may pay less attention to thematic areas where impact is not easily measured, such as long-term or preventative interventions where the causal link between intervention and outcome is less clear and it takes longer for results to materialize. There is a risk that impact investors focus on too narrow a range of problems, and perhaps not the most urgent or necessary ones. This risk is also inherent in ideas related to impact measurement, when there is a strong focus on quantitative measures (to the detriment of qualitative approaches),

incentivizing a focus on short-term results. The issue was raised in preparatory documents during the process of developing the EU impact measurement standard.

> Measurement that focuses only on quantitative measures ignoring qualitative might incentivize actors to work only on short-term, easily measurable results, at the detriment of long-term issues [that also require attention]. (Concern raised by GECES member in questionnaire when developing European standard on impact measurement, 2013)

Another example of simplifying in impact investing occurs when impact investors quickly assign standardized indicators to measure a complex problem.

> Given this context, Investisseurs & Partenaires (I&P) takes a top-down approach on impact measurement, and the definition of the objectives is done mostly from I&P's side. I&P also proposes indicators to investees, instead of co-developing them with the investees once the objectives have been set. The advantage of such a top-down approach is that I&P has the opportunity to set portfolio-wide impact objectives, and thus to have a real portfolio approach. The downside is a lack of flexibility in adapting the objectives to the specific needs of each investee. (Extract from EVPA publication, Boiardi, Hehenberger & Gianoncelli, 2016)

Those indicators then become the objectives that social enterprises use to measure their success, which might restrict and affect their work in unintended and undesirable ways. A consequence may be that the investee ends up reporting on data that is irrelevant to its operations and seen as another level of bureaucracy, rather than a tool to help the investee increase its social impact. Several field participants commented on the risks involved in trying to simplify by implementing a universal "data bar."

> [Two expert group members] both comment on the mention of a "data bar" in the current state, highlighting their discomfort in stating there might be a universal or single "data bar" given the different relevance of outputs, outcomes and impact to various stakeholders. (Feedback on GSG "Measuring impact" report, Social Impact Investment Taskforce, 2014)

An additional consequence is that impact investors may end up collecting the wrong data and measuring irrelevant information (See Figure A3 in Appendix A for additional quotes).

Conceptual Model: Assembly of a Field Ideology and Suppression as a Mechanism

The conceptual model offered in Figure 3 summarizes our findings across both analytical steps.

We analyzed how ideas are brought into a field from adjacent fields. The dichotomous tool allowed us to see sets of opposing ideas and uncover conflict and contestation at the level of ideas. We studied the evolution of the field of impact investing over three time periods and observed the assembly of dominant ideas into an emerging field ideology. Ideas that were abandoned and did not form part of the field ideology continued to exist and provided us with windows into alternative paths that the field ideology could have taken.
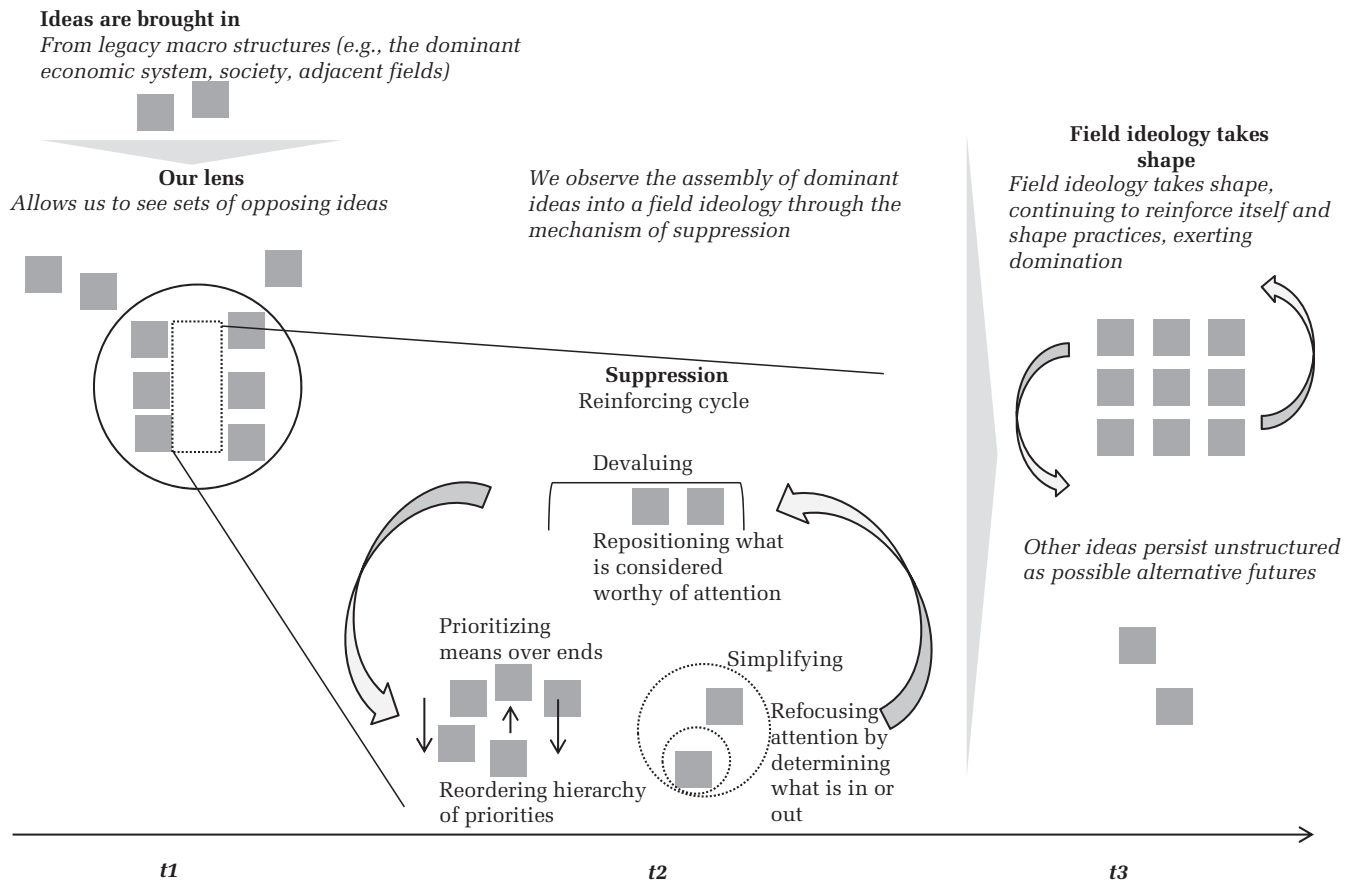
To explain how ideas become dominant, we identify suppression as a mechanism consisting of three modes: devaluing, prioritizing means over ends, and simplifying. These modes shape and reify the emerging field ideology and further suppress other ideas. Subtly, some ideas are suppressed and repositioned through these modes. The modes are not mutually exclusive, nor do they operate in isolation. On the contrary, our data suggest that they reinforce each other as the emerging field ideology starts to take shape. For example, *devaluing* the importance of certain ideas may lead to a reduction in the diversity of options that in turn amplifies the *simplifying* mode of suppression. *Prioritizing means over ends* reorders the hierarchy of priorities so that privileging of practices and tools appears normal and may result in a subsequent *devaluing* of ideas related to understanding the problem before developing a solution. Our findings suggest that the interlinked, reinforcing cycle amplified the suppression of dissenting and alternative ideas.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examine the trajectory of impact investing in Europe and develop a new way of seeing

FIGURE 3
The Mechanism of Suppression and the Assembly of a Field Ideology

Ideas are brought in
From legacy macro structures (e.g., the dominant economic system, society, adjacent fields)

Our lens
Allows us to see sets of opposing ideas

We observe the assembly of dominant ideas into a field ideology through the mechanism of suppression

Field ideology takes shape
Field ideology takes shape, continuing to reinforce itself and shape practices, exerting domination

Suppression
Reinforcing cycle

Devaluing

Repositioning what is considered worthy of attention

Other ideas persist unstructured as possible alternative futures

Prioritizing means over ends

Simplifying

Reordering hierarchy of priorities

Refocusing attention by determining what is in or out

t1 *t2* *t3*

how ideas become dominant as a new field takes shape and consolidates as a recognized area of institutional life.

Theoretical Contributions

Our study advances institutional research in organizational theory in two important ways. The idea-centric perspective we put forward in this paper allows us to see dynamics in field trajectories in new ways, and to uncover hard-to-detect power-laden aspects of institutional life in fields. The concept of field ideology is central to this perspective. Understood as a coherent system of ideas and beliefs that are linked in a nonrandom way, a field ideology constitutes a field-ordering mechanism. The concept of field ideology partly overlaps with other concepts used to analyze institutional life in fields, such as field frames. Both field frames and field ideologies help to study and understand institutional order. Yet while field ideologies can function as field frames, not all field frames are field ideologies (Oliver & Johnston, 2000). Field frames can be considered as devices that help actors to reduce complexity and to transmit ideas in a marketing-like way (Kaplan, 2008; Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003). Instead, a field ideology affects what is valued, considered appropriate, and simply taken for granted in a specific field. Our study shows how the assembly of a field ideology involves negotiations over a variety of conflicting and competing ideas and beliefs. Situating these negotiations—the interaction and contestation over ideas—in time and place was critical to enable a more dynamic portrayal of how fields evolve and to understand systemic power as an interactional achievement.

Seeing institutional dynamics in fields in new ways. Our study contributes to research on institutional life and fields in three interrelated ways. First, it reconciles the attention to durability and transformation in research on institutions and field trajectories. Conceiving field ideologies as enduring and yet amendable, we acknowledge the importance of dominant ideas as institutional forces that preserve order and the status quo in fields aligned with a neo-institutional tradition in organization theory (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). At the same time, we recognize the transformative potential of a varied set of ideas promoted by a spectrum of field participants that can lead to alternative orders, and potentially alter or even revoke existing order in fields as advocated by literature on social movements and strategic fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). For example, our

study and the idea-centric perspective we introduce helps illustrate how ideas can be "redeployed to support new experiments, theorization, mobilization for change and even the consolidation of entirely new paths within existing systems" (Schneiberg, 2007: 48), and therefore recognize the transformational potential of new, but also old or dormant, ideas. At the same time, seeing and paying attention to those ideas that become dominant allows for new ways to see and understand the micro-foundations of institutional persistence and durability (Powell & Colyvas, 2008).

Second, our study offers a new way of seeing linkages between past, present, and possible futures in fields as mediated by ideas. In this paper, we mainly captured the early stages of a field. We showed how ideas and beliefs are introduced, combined, and patterned and how a field ideology—a coherent system of ideas and beliefs that underpins social and moral order at the field level—emerges. The attention to a broad range of ideas that were introduced in negotiations relevant for the field trajectory allows for a more fine-grained analysis of what lies on the path of fields, which ideas get abandoned and which institutional projects and experiments fail or are only partially realized (Schneiberg, 2007). In our case, ideas promoting democracy, inclusiveness, and cooperative approaches to addressing societal challenges were formulated and expressed in meetings we attended, but these ideas were suppressed. Although they were sidelined and, to a large extent, ignored, they remain elements on the path and might eventually become the seeds of alternative, possible futures. We identified suppression as the critical mechanism at play in the assembly of a field ideology. Our study therefore helps to develop a more dynamic perspective of how fields evolve as it allows us to locate ideas in time and speculate in new ways about alternative pasts that might have been, or possible futures that may yet come to be (Beckert, 2016; Mische, 2014).

Third, our study informs research on institutional change and especially a tradition of research that has studied conflict and contestation to explain developmental or transformational change in institutional fields (for a review, see Micelotta, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, 2017). An idea-centric perspective helps to detect latent forms of conflict that easily remain unnoticed, especially in studies that empirically assess institutional change retrospectively. Such latent forms of conflict can precede overt forms of contestation that have often been described and theorized as critical jolts (Meyer, 1982).

Moreover, recognizing that some ideas might only be "temporarily out of order" helps to understand the role of critical events and field-configuring events (Lampel & Meyer, 2008; Schüssler, Rüling, & Wittneben, 2014) in field projects in new ways. What appears as a revolution or uproar at first sight might be a renaissance of ideas that have resurfaced and broken free from suppression. More generally, this study contributes to an ongoing and generative debate on how existing analytical toolkits in institutional analysis determine what we see (see also Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006; Zilber, Amis, & Mair, 2019).

Seeing systemic power in fields. Our study contributes to current discussions in institutional research on organizations on how to bring power back in (e.g., Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Wry, Cobb, & Aldrich, 2013). More specifically, our approach and findings contribute to efforts to empirically and theoretically understand *systemic* power. Organizational scholars have distinguished between *episodic* power—direct and overt forms of influence and force—and *systemic* power—covert forms of influence entrenched in institutional structures (Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Lawrence, 2008). Overt forms are relatively easy to identify in field settings as they are openly resisted and debated, and can be traced backward from a conflict to the events that precipitated it. Covert forms are difficult to detect and study empirically as they operate in subtle ways (Fleming & Spicer, 2007). However, systemic power defines institutional life in important ways as it naturalizes order, restricts what is considered important, and shapes what is worthy of attention and effort (Jakob Sadeh & Zilber, 2018; Lukes, 2005).

Previous research has discussed how systemic power manifests in and becomes reified through dominant routine practices and patterns of interactions (Amis, Munir, & Mair, 2017; Mair, Wolf, & Seelos, 2016). Our study extends this line of scholarship by bringing ideas to the fore. The idea-centric perspective and the concept of field ideology allowed us to examine how systemic power arises. We identified suppression as the critical mechanism at play in the assembly of a field ideology. We specified suppression as composed of three modes that work in concert and reinforce each other: devaluing, prioritizing ends over means, and simplifying. These three modes allow us to understand and make visible power-laden dynamics in fields as they evolve—dynamics that are often otherwise overlooked as we tend to prioritize studying phenomena related to external shocks or critical events.

Our early but indicative findings on the consequences of the emerging field ideology in impact investing also help to explain how systemic power is sustained without explicit force, and the fact that it can be potentially revoked as a field evolves. The modes of suppression we uncovered help to identify how systemic power comes about and operates empirically. They support conceptual claims in the literature on systemic power as they determine what is ruled in or out (Oakes, Townley, & Cooper, 1998), shape "what is considered worthy of political attention and effort... serving to 'naturalize' an extant social order" (Fleming & Spicer, 2014: 244), and rearrange structures to appear normal (Lukes, 2005).

Finally, our findings on suppression as driving systemic power in fields enable conversations with scholarship in neighboring disciplines and reinforce the call for strengthening interactional perspectives in organizational theory (Barley, 2017; Soderstrom & Weber, 2019). For example, in a book on the Cuban missile crisis sociologist David Gibson (2012) identified suppression as a deliberative process of not raising objections in conversations, and underscored the role of suppression in limiting alternatives in decision-making processes. Gibson's study focused on a specific (though consequential) decision and was based on the analysis of a specific situation confined in time and place. Our study, in contrast, focuses on repeated social interactions among actors in three groups that are widely recognized as important for shaping the field we study. This was particularly helpful to understanding suppression as an interactional but not necessarily deliberative achievement, and to seeing how systemic forms of power arise and are perpetuated.

New Ways of Seeing Through Inside-Out Research

In this study, we borrowed from an adjacent scholarly domain to develop an analytical tool to trace the assembly of an emerging field ideology and surface power-based mechanisms. In addition, we applied a methodological approach we label inside-out research to embed our study deeply in the phenomenon of impact investing without compromising on objectivity necessary to advance theory. Inside-out research shaped the research process of this study in important ways. First, we developed relevant research questions, ensured privileged access to gated sources of data, and contextualized emerging findings by *getting and being inside*. And second, we analyzed our data, and generated and theorized emerging findings through *insider–outsider*

collaboration (Evered & Louis, 1981). In what follows, we clarify the contours of this inside-out approach to research and situate it in a broader spectrum of methodological approaches that study phenomena in real time and *in situ*, namely ethnographic and action research.

An important feature of the approach we apply in this study—and that is equally important in ethnographic and action research—is deep engagement with the phenomenon under study through getting and being inside. Whereas in the case of ethnographic research the inside researcher is a temporary visitor, and in the case of action research the invited researcher typically remains a guest (Cunliffe, 2011; Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015), the insider in our study got in without a mandate to carry out research. As an organizational actor, the inside researcher was not constrained *ex ante* by a theoretical lens (Evered & Louis, 1981), nor bound by a specific question, as in the case of action research (for a review, see Coghlan, 2011). She was able to see the field of study through the eyes of stakeholders who partake of the phenomenon. An organizational actor as the inside researcher is useful to access unique data, such as seemingly mundane data related to the insider's daily work or data covering both front stage and backstage interaction in meetings. Participating in the field from the inside, in real time and over time, and accessing hidden transcripts allowed us to capture ideas before they became public or before they were abandoned, muted, or vanished. In this study we complemented and compared the data generated and collected by the insider with observations by the outsider researchers and data collected from external sources.

The collaboration between insider and outsider researchers is a critical feature of inside-out research. Outsider researchers complement and, if necessary, correct the insider perspective by adding multiple angles from which to look at the data, reducing bias in data analysis, and elevating emerging conclusions from the specific context (Evered & Louis, 1981). Ethnographic studies have also increasingly recognized these benefits and included research teams composed of both insiders and outsiders (see, e.g., de Rond & Lok, 2016; Farny, Kibler, & Down, 2019). The interaction between insider and outsider researchers enables a continuous process of interpretation, which entails "strong potential benefits for theory" (Louis & Bartunek, 1992: 103). In ethnographic research this interaction typically starts after the completion of data collection. In our study the interaction spanned from data collection to theorizing, which opened up opportunities for continuous iteration between data and literature, enhanced validity and grounded emerging findings more firmly in the phenomenon of study. Table 3 provides a stylized comparison between our inside-out approach and the more traditional approaches to ethnography and action research.

Finally, inside-out research as portrayed in this study also encourages debate about what constitutes *relevant* research in management and organization studies. Some have argued that the relevance of academic research hinges on the ability to translate research results into lay terms (Bartunek, 2007; Kieser et al., 2015). Others, namely proponents of action research, have proposed involving practitioners directly in the design of research studies and in the formulation of research questions to ensure

TABLE 3
The Role of Researchers in Inside-out Research, Ethnography, and Action Research

		Inside-out research	Ethnography	Action research
Getting and being inside	**Reason for getting inside**	To work in the field	To advance scholarly knowledge	To solve a managerial challenge
	Scope of data collection	Enabled and informed by insider's exposure	Contingent on the emerging relationship with the community studied	Limited to project scope and duration
	Insider's role	Insider as organizational actor	Insider a temporary visitor	Invited guest rather than insider
Relationship insider–outsider	**Interaction between insider and outsiders**	Continuous interaction	Possible interaction between ethnographer and outside researcher after field exposure	Invited researcher works with people inside
	Roles in analyzing and theorizing	Outsider analyzes data to remove bias, insider and outsider co-develop theory	Insider (and potentially outsider) analyzes and theorizes	Invited researcher analyzes and (sometimes) theorizes

relevance (Coghlan, 2011). Our approach does not necessarily provide practical solutions for how to conduct impact investing; however, our deep engagement with the phenomenon and with those who inhabit the field enabled us to reveal power-based mechanisms and portray the emergence of a field ideology in a way that is difficult to capture with quantitative data or by simply relying on an outsider perspective. The mechanism-based understandings enabled by inside-out research provide practitioners and policy makers with an opportunity to reflect on what they do and say and how this affects the field in intended, but also unintended, ways.

Limitations, Alternative Theoretical Lenses, and Scope Conditions

The broader intellectual agenda we hope to inform with this paper is the development of an idea-centric perspective on institutional life in fields. Here, we focus on *how* questions. We examine the assembly of a field ideology and investigate how ideas become dominant. Our approach does not allow us to predict when or why some ideas are suppressed. As mentioned earlier on, we do not ignore the important roles played by individual field participants. Rather, we encourage future research to probe into how insights from actor-centric traditions of analyzing fields can be combined with the approach and insights put forward here. This will be particularly helpful in linking the modes of suppression to the tactical and strategic toolkit of field participants; it will also provide much needed insights to further specify the conditions under which these modes affect systemic power in fields.

We do recognize the opportunity costs for the theoretical roads we have chosen not to travel. For example, studies following a neo-institutional perspective interested in understanding isomorphism and collective rationality in fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) might have asked how ideas are disseminated and how meaning making occurs as a result of dominant ideas. Scholars adopting strategic field theory (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012) might have foregrounded the role of resources and positional sources of power to specify who wins and who loses. And finally, scholars of social networks who understand purposive action as embedded in specifiable systems of social relations (Granovetter, 1985) might have asked how ideas become dominant as a result of strong or weak ties. However, we see these theoretical inroads as complementary rather than competing. Future research can and should give priority to these questions while retaining aspects of our idea-centric approach and the insights we generated from the new ways of seeing we introduced.

This study is based on in-depth analysis of one field. In line with our argument that field ideologies need to be assessed in context, we have prioritized questions on the process of assembly and how some ideas become dominant. Our findings are affected by the specificities of the field we study. Impact investing is an area with higher levels of uncertainty than other fields. More specifically, the causal link between an intervention or a program funded by impact investing and the social impact it generates is difficult—in fact, almost impossible—to establish. Future work in a more diverse set of fields will be beneficial to clarify how specific features of a field affect the assembly of a field ideology and the power-laden dynamics at the level of ideas in fields.

CONCLUSION

Our study centered on the field of impact investing. As a practice, impacting investing leverages financial tools and capital to tackle social problems and societal challenges. Although not the primary objective, our paper informs and complements important debates on the financialization of society (for an excellent review, see Davis & Kim, 2015). The increasing and seemingly irrevocable role of financial motives, instruments, and markets as intermediating how value is created and captured in our society has been well documented (Epstein, 2005; Krippner, 2005; Yan, Ferraro, & Almandoz, 2019). Studies have shown that financialization shapes patterns of inequality at the societal and individual level (Fligstein & Goldstein, 2015). Macro-level explanations for financialization include exogenous factors such as macro-economic conditions, regulatory frameworks, and technological changes. Micro-level explanations include advances in mathematical tools, IT-enabled changes in valuation practices, and practices such as securitization that reverse value-creating logics. Our study helps to advance the explanatory apparatus at the meso level. More specifically, our analysis situated at the field level helps to unpack endogenous and field-specific processes that can help to further explain the pervasiveness of financialization across societal domains and that bring aspects of power back into this conversation in new ways.

The new way of seeing we introduced in this paper also furthers a generative and positive discussion on the financialization of society. Fred Block, among

others, has emphasized the potential of finance to create an alternative order, for example by devising and enacting employee stock ownership (Block, 2014). The approach we advance in this paper allows us to analytically capture, but potentially promote, alternative or future orders in fields by taking seriously ideas that constituted bits and pieces of paths not taken (Schneiberg, 2007). Similarly to Schneiberg and Lounsbury (2017), who have made this argument for movements, we argue that paying attention to the sequence, combinations, and patterns of ideas at play, and understanding these as an ongoing process, allows us to understand how change in society and the economy is endogenously produced, and how imagined futures are and can be negotiated. To conclude, the new way of seeing we propose in this paper joins a programmatic effort in organizational theory to study initiatives that aim at tackling social problems. In this paper, we focused on how well-intended organized efforts such as impact investing consolidate into a recognized area of institutional life and become guarded and guided by a coherent and nonrandom set of ideas and beliefs we label as field ideology. Our approach allowed us to see unintended consequences of such efforts in new ways, but also to recognize that an emerging order is not inevitable or permanent, but is constantly negotiated and reified—and thus potentially interrupted or altered.

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Lisa Hehenberger (lisa.hehenberger@esade.edu) is a lecturer in the Strategy and General Management department at ESADE Business School, Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona. She obtained her PhD in management from IESE Business School and then worked as the research and policy director of the European Venture Philanthropy Association. Her research focuses on the investment in organizations that aim to solve societal challenges.

Johanna Mair (mair@hertie-school.org) is a Professor of Organization, Strategy and Leadership at the Hertie School in Berlin. She also co-directs the Global Innovation for Impact Lab at the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society. Her research examines how organizations tackle societal challenges and alter institutional contexts. She received her PhD in management from INSEAD.

Ashley Metz (a.e.metz@tilburguniversity.edu) is an assistant professor at Tilburg University. She defended her PhD at the Hertie School of Governance and received an MBA from IESE Business School. She is interested in the institutional processes involved in how organizations work to create nonfinancial value, and in possible unintended consequences and alternative futures.

APPENDIX A

The following figures and tables have been added to further clarify our methodological approach and to include additional quotes.

FIGURE A1
Role of Researchers vis-à-vis Data Collected and Analyzed
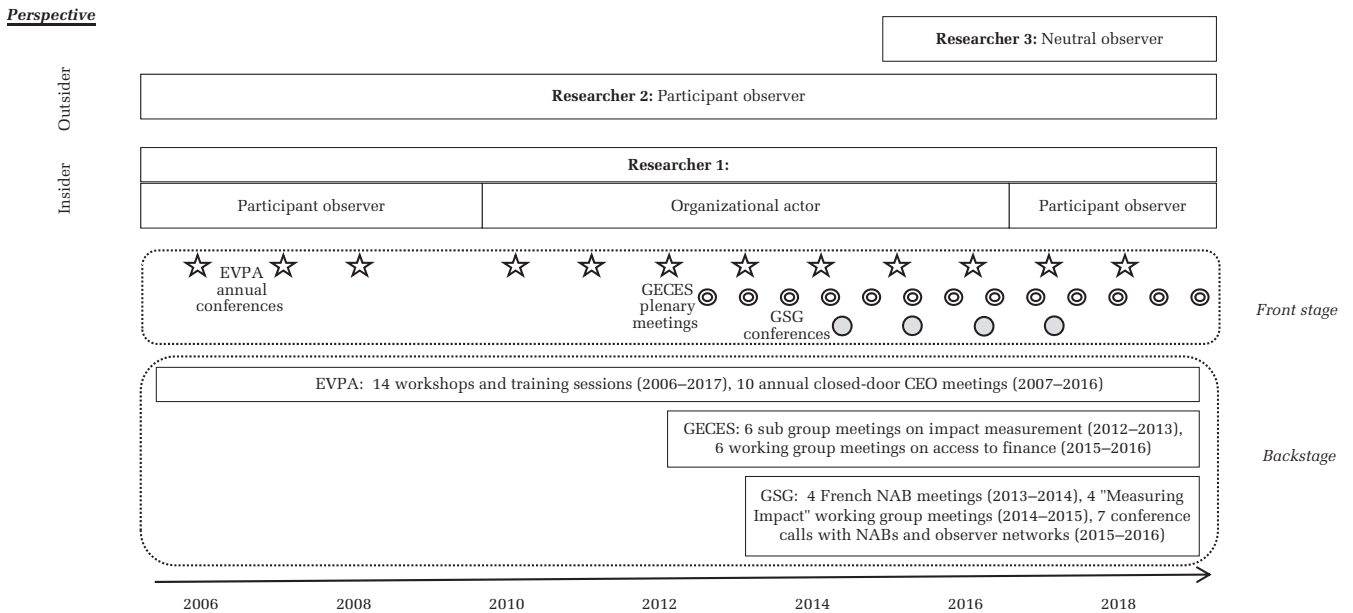
Data count	EVPA	GECES	GSG	Total
Hours of observation	416	200	149	**765**
Pages of documentation	1674	831	670	**3175**

FIGURE A2
Development of Coding Structure

Dichotomies coded from data	Illustrative quote	First-order code	Second-order construct
Measuring impact vs. (telling stories)	"[…] have compiled a number of donor portraits introducing a new breed of philanthropist who applies business principles and does not leave the impact of his engagement to chance-he subjects it to efficiency criteria." (Comments by participant at EVPA workshop, February 2011)	Other ideas about how to address social issues were irresponsible	Devaluing
(Small fountain of hope) vs. big, audacious goal	"Impact investment is a transformative force, through which private capital stimulates breakthrough, at-scale solutions that can improve lives, boost human opportunity and support economic growth." (Extract from internal document compiled by Weber & Shandwick for GSG, 2016)	Impact investing is *the* solution and the place to focus our attention	Prioritizing means over ends
Measuring impact vs. (telling stories)	"Measurable impact is embraced as a deliberative driver in every investment and business decision affecting people and the planet." (Extract from internal document compiled by Weber & Shandwick for GSG, 2016)	Similarities across all investments in people and the planet	Simplifying

FIGURE A3
Modes of Suppression in the Field of Impact Investing

Mode description	Mechanism	Illustrative quote	Potential negative consequences
Devaluing: Downplaying the importance of certain ideas introduced and promoted by certain actors, sectors, and fields	*Repositioning* what is considered worthy of attention	"Although there are outstanding examples of big, impactful social service organizations, too many struggle to make the large scale impact that the success of their methods deserves. Impact investment, with its emphasis on scaling up activities that achieve measurable social outcomes, can transform how social sector organizations are financed, and in doing so make it likelier that they will succeed in achieving their mission at significant scale." (Social Impact Investment Taskforce, 2014)	Reduction in diversity of options
Prioritizing means over ends: Positioning practices as more important than outcomes	*Reordering* hierarchy of priorities	"It is too early to tell which social issue or which social group will put impact investment firmly on the map.Will it be 'children', 'unemployed youth', 'the elderly poor', 'reoffenders', 'health' or 'International Development'?" (Comment made by Sir Ronald Cohen at GSG meeting, 2014)	Mismatch between the interests of those with resources and tools and those who implement them
Simplifying: Fitting a problem to an implicit subset of reality, or implicit template, that makes it easier to address	*Refocusing* attention by determining what is in or out	"The Chair noted that the ecosystem presentations had highlighted the varied cultural, historical and structural factors in the various countries and the value of completing the ecosystem map for all the G8 nations so that the Taskforce can arrive at policy recommendations appropriate across countries." (GSG email exchange, 2014)	Focus on overly narrow, or incorrect problem

TABLE A1
Dichotomies Detected in the Impact Investing Field

XY codes	XX codes
Standardized	**Customized**
The idea behind EVPA is to promote a global movement promoting a more professional way to tackle social and collective needs. (Comment by participant at EVPA meeting, 2011)	The social economy has played a key buffer role during the economic crisis mainly thanks to rules governing social economy entities relating to profit distribution and ownership, which make social economy actors more grounded locally and their long-term approach less vulnerable to short term financial difficulties. (European Parliament, 2016)
Scaling	**Going native**
Impact investing is already starting to make an important difference. But it needs to grow fast if we are to meet the challenges now facing the world. (Social Impact Investment Taskforce, 2014)	Charities with a close relationship with beneficiaries get nervous about scaling up, growing too big so that they lose relationship with beneficiaries. (Comments by participant at EVPA CEO meeting, 2009)
Big audacious goal	**Small fountain of hope**
The venture philanthropy approach has a "turbo charging" effect, enabling more young people to be supported and aims to help charities to maximize their efficiency, reach and collaboration and ultimately work toward financial sustainability. (EVPA newsletter April 2012)	Community philanthropy and community foundations, far from being marginal, are now emerging as key building blocks in the broader field of international development. (EVPA newsletter, October 2010)
Self-sufficiency	**Dependency**
High engagement and capacity building efforts in order to ensure ventures are sustainable after involvement. (EVPA newsletter February 2011)	Social economy enterprises are closely connected to the civil society sector. Recognizing and safeguarding the work in this sector as well as the specific models within the social economy are crucial to create the much needed trusting and innovative partnerships between sectors. (European Economic and Social Commission, 2014: 2)
Top-down, heroic leader	**Participatory, community**
The world is on the brink of a revolution in how we solve society's toughest problems. The force capable of driving this revolution is "social impact investing," which harnesses entrepreneurship, innovation and capital to power social improvement. (Social Impact Investment Taskforce, 2014)	As expressed by Commissioner Bieńkowska at the European Parliament on 14 April 2015, the Commission wishes now to adopt a more bottom-up approach, fostering the co-creation of further SBI-related work with other European Institutions, Member States and stakeholders. (Comments by the European Commission at GECES meeting, 2015)
Pick winners	**Nurture the ecosystem**
How to identify heroes in each country—social entrepreneurs and social investors? (Comment by participant at EVPA CEO meeting, 2013)	It is equally important that all types of investors—public, private and civil society—should be considered, while taking into account their individual motives and expectations to ensure the best partnerships and results. But most importantly, the construction of an impact investment infrastructure has to influence positively welfare models in Europe. Policy should be carefully shaped within the national context with the aim of having social enterprises and the public sector mutually strengthen welfare systems while ensuring universal access to quality and affordable services. (European Economic and Social Committee, 2014: 6)
Head	**Heart**
How can we connect them to the capital markets? How can we harness the most powerful forces of capitalism: entrepreneurship, innovation and capital to tackle social issues more effectively? (Social Impact Investment Taskforce, 2014)	Jacqueline Novogratz, chief executive of the Acumen Fund, spoke of the need for "patient capital in an impatient world," which Acumen aims to supply. (EVPA newsletter, December 2010)
Measuring social impact	**Telling stories**
Its defining characteristic is the setting of clear impact objectives from the start and the continuous measurement of their achievement. (Comments made by Sir Ronald Cohen at GSG meeting, 2014)	The social economy must safeguard its specificities. The objective should be to develop a more qualitative measurement method which would respond to relevant criteria which correspond to the missions of social economy enterprises. With this aim in mind, social economy enterprises are supportive of a process which assesses social utility. (European Economic and Social Committee, 2015)
Tool first	**Need first**
Goals for marketing to millennials/social entrepreneurs (Unleash their catalytic power to develop innovative and effective ways of addressing social issues; create demand for investment capital) and to the public (Endorse the concept of impact investing to drive bottom up demand for policies and investments). (Internal document with Communication strategy of GSG, 2015)	Today's high unemployment, in particular among young people, demands that we explore every avenue leading to job creation, growth and social innovation. Social enterprises have potential for creating jobs that is still not fully exploited and can notably be very effective in integrating into the labor market underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. (Comments by participant at GECES meeting, 2012)