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**Citation:** Granados, M. L., Rosli, A. & Gotsi, M. (2022). Staying poor: Unpacking the process of barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 37(3), 106204. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusvent.2022.106204

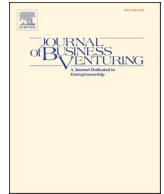
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**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2022.106204>

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## Staying poor: Unpacking the process of barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Barefoot institutional entrepreneurship  
Failure  
Power mechanisms  
Market inclusion  
Paradox of inclusion  
Process

### ABSTRACT

Research on barefoot entrepreneurship is growing, yet we still know little about the potential limits of institutional entrepreneurship in the context of extreme poverty. Challenging institutional entrepreneurship theory's agency-centric assumptions, we seek to understand how barefoot institutional entrepreneurship efforts fail amidst resistance from powerful actors in the institutional context. Our qualitative study of marginalized waste pickers in Colombia sheds light on the role of power in barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure. We unpack a paradox of inclusion: the more marginalized barefoot entrepreneurs push for and gain regulatory legitimacy for their market inclusion, the more this accentuates overt and covert power mechanisms that work to suppress the diffusion of institutional change, aggravating barefoot entrepreneurs' market exclusion. Our study shows that while regulatory change is necessary to enhance barefoot entrepreneurs' market inclusion, on its own it is not sufficient, without normative and cognitive support from powerful actors in the institutional field.

*"The problem is that our whole lives have led us to expectations, illusions that we know are not going to be fulfilled; they hit us down, they always come back and hit us"*

(Waste picker 2)

*"Magistrate, I want you to see all the stakeholders that are moving here... hold a public hearing, let the waste pickers speak about the money laundering, the drug trafficking, the multinationals that come here, who is behind government organizations, listen to them... You bring the information, the letter and show the evidence, and they do not want to see... We have been seeing the problem for 15 years and nobody hears us, this is very frustrating"*

(NGO Director, Interview 2)

### Executive summary

Entrepreneurship has been suggested as a way out of poverty. Yet, despite widespread entrepreneurial activities among the

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extremely poor in developing contexts, poverty seems to prevail. Barefoot entrepreneurs' social and market exclusion lie at the heart of this problem. Institutional entrepreneurship – the process through which institutions can be transformed when actors with sufficient resources see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly – has been proposed as the key to enhancing their inclusion. Yet, existing agency-centric assumptions of institutional entrepreneurship theory whereby heroic actors leverage resources to foster institutional change, do not fit well the marginalized, powerless barefoot entrepreneurs. Extant barefoot entrepreneurship literature has started to capture the creativity that they employ to overcome barriers posed by their marginality, as well as the importance of supportive institutional levers and coalitions with NGOs and other high-status actors. Yet, the role of power in suppressing barefoot institutional entrepreneurship remains under-theorized and very few cases of failure have been empirically documented in the literature. This is problematic, as understanding failure can provide novel insights into necessary conditions for their market inclusion to be achieved.

In response, our study unpacks how barefoot institutional entrepreneurship efforts fail amidst resistance from powerful actors in the institutional context. To allow the voices of barefoot entrepreneurs to speak about their market inclusion struggles, we conducted a qualitative study of waste pickers in the city of Cali, Colombia. The marginalized waste pickers in our study, along with an NGO who acted as their valued partner, worked on legitimizing their market inclusion (through practices like framing, coalition building, employing ingenuity, bargaining, and even begging for compliance) and organizing themselves for collective action (by mobilizing a collective identity, and collective organizing). Despite achieving regulatory change that endorsed their market inclusion, their institutional change efforts were met with immense resistance from various powerful actors in the field (local authorities, private companies, the media, and the Court). To suppress normative and cognitive support for their efforts, powerful actors mobilized overt power mechanisms such as de-legitimizing (through mythologizing and demonizing) and deterring (by barring access to waste). They also employed covert power mechanisms, such as manipulating (through empty promising, dividing and conquering, reinterpreting the law, enabling, and silencing) and abstaining (neglecting and omitting the duty to protect, turning a blind eye, not complying and remaining silent). Our findings reveal a process where regulatory change, which endorsed waste pickers' market inclusion, exacerbated these power mechanisms, aggravating waste pickers' market exclusion. We call this the paradox of inclusion in barefoot institutional entrepreneurship. Our theoretical model captures how supportive regulatory change for the market inclusion of barefoot entrepreneurs aggravates power mechanisms that suppress normative and cognitive support for the diffusion of institutional change, exacerbating barefoot entrepreneurs' market exclusion. Our study brings important nuance to the understanding of the limits of entrepreneurship in the context of extreme poverty that should guide policy, by demonstrating the oppressive, hegemonic role of power. We expand the conceptualization of barefoot institutional entrepreneurship not only as an emancipatory force that holds immense potential to transform societies and alleviate poverty, but also rife with social and market inclusion challenges stemming from marginalization, power differentials and lack of normative and cognitive support for institutional change.

## 1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been suggested as a way out of the grand challenge of poverty (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Bruton et al., 2013; George et al., 2016; Powell, 2008; Sutter et al., 2019; Trehan et al., 2020). Entrepreneurial opportunities can empower the extremely poor<sup>2</sup> to positively influence their economic and non-economic welfare (Alvarez and Barney, 2013; Calton et al., 2013; Chliova et al., 2015; De Clercq and Honig, 2011; McMullen, 2011). Particularly in developing contexts, entrepreneuring has emancipatory potential, enabling the extremely poor to challenge the status quo and their position in the social order in which they are embedded (Bruton et al., 2013; Rindova et al., 2009). Yet, this optimism does not reflect the lived reality of barefoot entrepreneurs<sup>3</sup> (Castellanza, 2020; Essers et al., 2017; Imas et al., 2012; Tedmanson et al., 2015; Verduyn and Essers, 2017). In developing economies, the entrepreneurial activities that the extremely poor engage in are widespread, albeit predominantly informal (i.e. not declared to the state for tax, social security or labor law purposes and survival-driven) (Imas et al., 2012; Webb et al., 2009a). Moreover, despite growing pressures and efforts to enhance their market inclusion, poverty among barefoot entrepreneurs continues to prevail (Bernier et al., 2012; Bruton et al., 2013; Galloway et al., 2016; Klein, 2014; McMullen, 2011; Slade Shantz et al., 2018; Weston and Imas, 2017). Why is this the case?

A growing number of critical entrepreneurship studies from the reform perspective argue that barefoot entrepreneurs' social exclusion lies at the heart of this problem (Mair et al., 2012; Sutter et al., 2019). Scholars in this stream suggest that the intersectionality of inequalities characterizing barefoot entrepreneurs, stemming from their social position and ethnicity (to name but a few), fuels their market exclusion (Amorós and Cristi, 2011; Martínez Dy, 2020; Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2017; Sutter et al., 2019). Institutional entrepreneurship – the process through which new or transformed institutions arise “when organized actors with sufficient resources see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly” (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14) – has been proposed as the key to enhancing their market inclusion and, ultimately, unlocking the poverty alleviation potential of entrepreneurship for barefoot entrepreneurs. However, key agency-centric assumptions of power in existing institutional entrepreneurship theory, whereby ‘heroic’ actors leverage tangible and intangible resources to mobilize change in the institutional field to their benefit despite constraints, may fail to capture the struggles of powerless barefoot institutional entrepreneurs (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Battilana et al., 2009; Khan et al., 2007; Leca and Naccache, 2006; Slade Shantz et al., 2018; Wijen and Ansari, 2007). Institutional entrepreneurship

<sup>2</sup> In economic terms, the World Bank defines the extremely poor as those living at subsistence levels, earning less than \$1.90 per day (worldbank.org).

<sup>3</sup> Barefoot entrepreneurs are marginalized, poor and socially excluded entrepreneurs (Imas et al., 2012).

research has tended to overlook disenfranchised and under-resourced institutional change agents, who lack skills, legitimacy, and bargaining power (Baron et al., 2018; Bruton et al., 2021; Martí and Mair, 2009; Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2017; Morris et al., 2020).

The scarce studies on institutional entrepreneurship in settings of poverty typically highlight the creativity that barefoot entrepreneurs employ to overcome barriers posed by their marginality, the importance of supportive institutional levers, and the value of coalitions with institutional carriers, such as NGOs and other high-status actors (Battilana and Dorado, 2007; Cull et al., 2016; Dencker et al., 2019; Martí and Mair, 2009; Tedmanson et al., 2015; Weston and Imas, 2017). A significant part of the literature thus concentrates on how barefoot entrepreneurs manage to successfully overcome difficulties in their institutional change efforts (Imas and Weston, 2011; Imas et al., 2012). Yet, there are increasing calls to challenge assumptions that the existing institutional environment will provide normative support for inclusion-oriented change instigated by barefoot entrepreneurs, as they typically operate in fields characterized by unequal relations of power, amidst coercive actors that may seek to prevent their participation and maintain the status quo (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Battilana et al., 2009; Bruton et al., 2021; Goss et al., 2011; Xiao and Klarin, 2019). Power is critical for institutional entrepreneurship among barefoot entrepreneurs but under-theorized in existing accounts; few cases of institutional change failure have been empirically documented so that we understand the role of power in the struggles of barefoot institutional entrepreneurs (Khan et al., 2007). Unpacking the barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure process is important for enhancing our understanding of why market exclusion and poverty among barefoot entrepreneurs continue to prevail and, as such, can provide novel insights into necessary conditions to help alleviate them (Battilana et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2010; Sutter et al., 2019).

In response, we join efforts at theorizing institutional entrepreneurship that challenge assumptions of agentic power and explore its potential limits in contexts of extreme poverty and marginality (Bapuji and Chrispal, 2020; Garud et al., 2007; Sutter et al., 2019). We, therefore, ask: “How do barefoot institutional entrepreneurship efforts fail amidst resistance from powerful actors in the institutional context?”. To shed light on this question, we focused on a case of failure: a qualitative case of informal waste pickers in Colombia who, despite their institutional entrepreneurship efforts and enabling regulatory change, failed to enhance their market inclusion and, ultimately, alleviate their poverty. To allow the voices of the barefoot entrepreneurs to speak to us about their lived reality of how powerful actors suppressed their efforts for market inclusion (Sutter et al., 2019), we conducted 28 interviews with waste pickers, along with 10 interviews with the founder and Director of the NGO who supported them in their struggles. We complemented these interviews with extensive longitudinal secondary data, which we used to further understand the events that took place in our case and the involvement of different actors in this process.

Our findings reveal barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure emerging from a contest between institutional change efforts for market inclusion by powerless marginalized barefoot entrepreneurs, and immense overt and covert power mechanisms for their market exclusion mobilized by powerful actors in the institutional field. Our case study demonstrates a paradox of inclusion: the more barefoot entrepreneurs strive for their market inclusion and achieve regulatory change, the more this aggravates overt and covert power mechanisms that work to suppress the diffusion of institutional change, and over time, exacerbate barefoot entrepreneurs' market exclusion. Our study, thus, brings important nuance to the understanding of the limits of institutional entrepreneurship in the context of extreme poverty, by demonstrating the oppressive, hegemonic role of power. Documenting this case of failure provides insights into what seem to be vital conditions for barefoot entrepreneurs' market inclusion to be achieved. We find that while regulatory change is necessary to enhance barefoot entrepreneurs' market inclusion, on its own it is not sufficient. Normative and cognitive support by powerful actors in the institutional field is critical, and regulators need to facilitate this by monitoring adherence to the change and sanctioning those that do not comply. More broadly, we expand the conceptualization of barefoot entrepreneurship not only as an emancipatory force that holds immense potential to transform societies and alleviate poverty, but also rife with social and market inclusion challenges stemming from marginalization, power differentials and lack of normative and cognitive support for institutional change.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Institutional entrepreneurship: agency-centric power assumptions

DiMaggio (1988) introduced the notion of institutional entrepreneurship to explain how actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements initiate and actively participate in the diffusion of institutional change. In the institutional entrepreneurship literature, power – the intentional use of tangible or intangible resources within some social context to influence others or control a situation (Cobb, 1984) – is typically anchored in an agency-centric framework (Battilana et al., 2009; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). That is, it is largely assumed that institutional entrepreneurs can mobilize resources and skills to change institutions, despite constraints (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; DiMaggio, 1988; Khan et al., 2007; Leca and Naccache, 2006; Seo and Creed, 2002; Tina Dacin et al., 2002; Wijan and Ansari, 2007).

Extant studies thus tend to focus on ‘heroic’ actors, who are sufficiently skilled and well-resourced (Battilana et al., 2009; Clegg et al., 2006; Fligstein, 1997; Greenwood et al., 2002; Greenwood and Hinings, 1996; Jones and Murtola, 2012; Khan et al., 2007; Lawrence et al., 2010; Levy and Scully, 2007; Trehan et al., 2020). These ‘heroic’ actors, also known as socially skilled ‘Modern Princes’ (Levy and Scully, 2007), set the agenda and frame their vision to legitimize the change they are promoting (Battilana et al., 2009; Greenwood et al., 2002; Pacheco et al., 2010). They can mobilize a collective identity (Beckert, 1999; Lounsbury, 2001) and get organized to promote institutional change (Lawrence and Hardy, 1999; Perkmann and Spicer, 2007). They are competent at advocating and educating other actors about the change (Lounsbury, 2001; Woywode, 2002) and pushing for rule structures that confer institutional change agents rights (Russo, 2001). They can mobilize resources, including financial resources and social capital, to

spearhead institutional change (Demil and Bensédine, 2005; Dorado, 2005; Fligstein, 1997; Garud et al., 2002; Lawrence et al., 2005; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Maguire et al., 2004; Seo and Creed, 2002; Sherer and Lee, 2002; Wijen and Ansari, 2007). They network and build coalitions (Battilana et al., 2009; Dorado, 2005; Khan et al., 2007) and engage in bargaining to diffuse change (Dorado, 2005; Pacheco et al., 2010). Not surprisingly, extant studies typically capture successful instances of institutional change through a lens of limitless human agency, while downplaying or neglecting failed institutional change efforts or unintentional consequences of institutional entrepreneurship (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Battilana et al., 2009).

## 2.2. Power differentials and institutional entrepreneurship: the missing piece of marginalized entrepreneurs

The dominant agency-centric assumptions of institutional entrepreneurship theory do not fit well when applied to marginalized actors with limited resources and little power since they pay little attention to how power differentials may impact institutional change (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Battilana et al., 2009; Martí and Mair, 2009; Mutch et al., 2006; Sánchez Piñeiro, 2017; Trehan et al., 2020; Van Bockhaven et al., 2015; Wijen and Ansari, 2007). Marginalized entrepreneurs face economic and sociocultural challenges amidst powerful actors that can produce their subordination through racial segregation, exclusionary policies, internments, forces relocation and denial of the right to property (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Clegg et al., 2006; Dau and Cuervo-Cazurra, 2014; Dill and Zambrana, 2009; Goss et al., 2011; Hoogendoorn, 2016; Knight, 2016; McBride et al., 2014; Mulinari and Selberg, 2013; Zander et al., 2010). They are the ‘underdogs’, often lacking in social capital and social status (Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2017; Van Bockhaven et al., 2015); and when competition for resources is intense, their challenges are accelerated (Collins, 2004; Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2017). When they are the protagonists, institutional change is, thus, often portrayed as emancipatory work that seeks to unsettle the status quo and the social order in which the marginalized are embedded (Mair et al., 2012; Martí and Mair, 2009; Rindova et al., 2009).

Yet, their efforts at shaping institutions rarely go uncontested (Garud et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2004; Trehan et al., 2020), as established powerful players are likely to intervene and push for institutional maintenance (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Battilana, 2006; Eberhart and Eesley, 2018; Eesley et al., 2016; Wijen and Ansari, 2007). Established players may engage in coercive, normative and reparative processes to maintain the status quo (Xiao and Klarin, 2019). Coercive work may include “enabling” (manipulating regulatory policies that benefit them), “policing” (monitoring and punishment) and “detering” (discursive or/and physical barring) processes, to dissipate institutional change (Bruton et al., 2021; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Goss et al., 2011; Leca and Naccache, 2006; Towers and Borzutzky, 2004; Xiao and Klarin, 2019). Normative work may include “valorizing and demonizing” (advocating especially positive or negative examples), “mythologizing” (focusing on the past to preserve normative underpinning) and “embedding and routinizing” (infusing the normative foundations of the institution into actors’ day to day practices) (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Goss et al., 2011; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Martí and Mair, 2009; Xiao and Klarin, 2019). Lastly, reparative work may include actions that aim to repair or restore the contradictions inherent in institutions to discourage institutional change (Sminia, 2011; Xiao and Klarin, 2019).

When power imbalance is prevalent, as in the case of marginalized institutional change agents (Mair et al., 2012, 2016), institutional entrepreneurship may, thus, be a complex “contest between those who want it and those who don’t” (Gouldner, 1954, p. 237). Power may even operate hegemonically to represent and normalize practices in ways that serve prevailing interests, with established relations of domination routinely reproduced (Griffin-EL and Olabisi, 2018; Khan et al., 2007). Yet, research on institutional entrepreneurship has been criticized for ignoring the influence of power mechanisms on institutional change efforts (Battilana et al., 2009; Leca and Naccache, 2006). Particularly when it comes to marginalized institutional entrepreneurs, the potential role of coercive power mechanisms have not yet been sufficiently unpacked (Armanios and Eesley, 2021).

## 2.3. Barefoot institutional entrepreneurship

A small but growing stream of studies has begun to explore the efforts of extremely marginalized institutional change agents: barefoot entrepreneurs in the developing world, who strive to carve out a living in order to survive (Castellanza, 2020; Sutter et al., 2019; Wacquant, 2007). They are waste scavengers and scrap traders (Gill, 2009; Navarrete-Hernandez and Navarrete-Hernandez, 2018), street vendors (Williams and Gurtoo, 2013) and pedal rickshaw drivers (Truong et al., 2020). The ‘nobodies’: low skilled entrepreneurs, who dwell at the margins of society and constantly deal with the pervading stigma and disrepute of poverty (Bapuji et al., 2019; Bapuji and Chrispal, 2020; Bruton et al., 2021; Gilbert, 2007; Imas et al., 2012; Mair et al., 2012; Mair and Seelos, 2005; Marlier and Atkinson, 2010; Wacquant, 1999). They suffer from an intersectionality of inequalities, such as class, caste, ethnicity, gender, race and ethnicity (Bruton et al., 2021; Essers and Tedmanson, 2014), exacerbating their capability deprivation and discrimination (Amorós and Cristi, 2011; Karam and Jamali, 2017; Sutter et al., 2019; Zinn and Dill, 1996). They typically engage in informal entrepreneurial activities that fall outside formal institutional boundaries (such as laws and regulations), but within informal institutional boundaries (i.e. norms, values and beliefs of large groups in society) (Sutter et al., 2019; Trehan et al., 2020; Webb et al., 2009b). Power struggles and politics suppress their market inclusion and growth potential (Marlier and Atkinson, 2010; Wacquant, 1999). Institutional change is, thus, important to create more inclusive structures and markets, and foster their poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship (George et al., 2012; Ghani et al., 2014; Mair et al., 2012; Tobias et al., 2013). But what do we know about how institutional entrepreneurship takes shape when such extremely marginalized barefoot entrepreneurs are driving it?

Scholars have started to unpack the efforts of barefoot entrepreneurs to enhance their market and social inclusion (Goel and Karri, 2020; Imas et al., 2012; Mair and Martí, 2009; Peredo, 2003; Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Tedmanson et al., 2015). Indeed, their institutional work appears distinctive from that typically captured in mainstream literature; they rely on strategies that are more

experimental and creative, full of compromises and challenge condescending ideas around marginality (Cull et al., 2016; Lawrence et al., 2010; Martí and Mair, 2009; Si et al., 2015; Tedmanson et al., 2015; Weston and Imas, 2017). To succeed in their institutional change efforts for market inclusion, barefoot entrepreneurs typically organize themselves collectively (Imas et al., 2012; Imas and Weston, 2011; Kimmitt et al., 2020; Tedmanson et al., 2015; Verduyn and Essers, 2017). Their change efforts tend to take the shape of solidarity; collective action to instigate change for the benefit of their communities (Imas and Weston, 2011; Tedmanson et al., 2015; Verduyn and Essers, 2017; Weston and Imas, 2017).

Studies have also highlighted supportive institutional levers, which can offer financial and skill-based support to barefoot entrepreneurs (Dencker et al., 2019). These have been found to play a critical role, as barefoot entrepreneurs may be excluded from accessing resources available to more powerful players in the institutional field (Ameur et al., 2017; Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Bruton et al., 2021; Dutt et al., 2015; Goel and Karri, 2020; Marquis and Raynard, 2015; Ranjan, 2019; Thoene and Turriago-Hoyos, 2017). Ameur et al. (2017) and Ranjan (2019), for instance, show that socially marginalized informal farmers in drought-prone areas in North Africa and India could not access critical groundwater resources and experienced losses, while formal entrepreneurs over-exploited groundwater, leveraging technology. Moreover, micro-finance organizations can provide small loans at low-interest rates (Battilana and Dorado, 2007; Chliova et al., 2015; Helms, 2006; Karlan and Valdivia, 2011; Morduch, 2000), while other intermediary organizations may provide skill-development (for instance, in leadership, marketing, sales and entrepreneurship) (Bruton et al., 2012, 2021; Campos et al., 2017; Dencker et al., 2019; Dutt et al., 2015; Mair et al., 2012; McKague et al., 2015; Sánchez Piñero, 2017; Teegen et al., 2004; Webb et al., 2009a). In addition, coalitions with institutional carriers, such as NGOs and other high-status actors, can offer an alternative way to access resources and skills, clarify the market relevance of the proposed change and provide much needed legitimacy to mobilize cognitive and normative support (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Battilana, 2006; Battilana et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2002).

Yet, studies increasingly highlight barefoot entrepreneurs' exploitation through discriminating institutional rules and norms, and coercion from powerful actors (Imas et al., 2012; Martínez Dy, 2020; Max-Neef, 1992; Van Bockhaven et al., 2015; Weston and Imas, 2017). They are subjected to oppressive practices, such as discursive and physical barring, resource dependency and disparate treatment (Agier and Szafarz, 2013; Alesina et al., 2013; Blanchflower et al., 2003; Cavalluzzo and Cavalluzzo, 1998; Cavalluzzo and Wolken, 2005), as well as subjectification through shaming, demonizing and humiliating (Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Goss et al., 2011; Sutter et al., 2019; Wacquant, 1999). Even when regulatory changes are put in place to protect barefoot entrepreneurs, they may still fail to account for unintended consequences stemming from hegemonic effects of power, as in the case of Khan et al.'s (2007) study of efforts towards eliminating child labor from the world's largest soccer ball manufacturing cluster in Sialkot, Pakistan. Policies and programs aimed at barefoot entrepreneurs are often developed based on overly optimistic assumptions (Trehan et al., 2020). In Khan et al.'s (2007) study, for instance, micro-credit provision along with school enrolment and informal education initiatives missed most women stitchers and their families, and ultimately adversely affected the well-being of barefoot entrepreneurs. Morris et al.'s (2020) proposed concept of the liability of poorness, in the form of literacy gaps, a scarcity mindset, severe non-business pressures and the lack of a safety net, may offer an explanation. Khan et al. (2007), thus, called for more research to account for taken granted institutionalized power relations and warned of the reproduction of structures of class, ownership, ethnicity and postcolonialism. Leca and Naccache (2006) also cautioned that substantial power differences may even inhibit the formation of needed coalitions to instigate and endorse institutional change in such contexts.

Overall, extant institutional entrepreneurship research has predominantly taken an agency-centric perspective, assuming that institutional entrepreneurs can mobilize resources and skills to pursue their interests and foster institutional change, while paying scant attention to power differentials (Battilana et al., 2009). As a result, there is much less work that explores the potential limits of institutional entrepreneurship in the context of extreme poverty and marginality, where unequal relations of power feature strongly (Leca and Naccache, 2006; Sutter et al., 2019; Trehan et al., 2020). Few cases of barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure have been empirically documented in the literature to understand their struggles for market inclusion amidst coercive practices from powerful established actors who manage to perpetuate their exclusion (Garud et al., 2007; Khan et al., 2007; Lawrence et al., 2012; Morris et al., 2020; Seo and Creed, 2002). Responding to growing calls to expand the domain of entrepreneurship as a solution to poverty (Bradley et al., 2019; Bruton et al., 2013) and understand the role of power in the persisting market exclusion of marginalized, barefoot entrepreneurs (Sutter et al., 2019), we ask: "How do barefoot institutional entrepreneurship efforts fail amidst resistance from powerful actors in the institutional context?"

### 3. Methods

To allow the voices of barefoot entrepreneurs to speak to us and understand the lived reality of their struggles to instigate and diffuse institutional change for their market inclusion, we focused on a case of failure: a qualitative single case study (Datta and Gailey, 2012; Imas et al., 2012; Langley, 1999; Sutter et al., 2019) of marginalized, informal waste pickers in the city of Cali, Colombia who, despite their institutional entrepreneurship efforts and enabling regulatory change, failed to enhance their market inclusion and, ultimately, alleviate their poverty. The case study approach is particularly useful for understanding complex phenomena like ours (Byrne and Shepherd, 2015; Langley, 1999). Through this case of failure we seek to bring forward a more encompassing grounded understanding of the role of power in barefoot institutional entrepreneurship, by reflexively applying our case study research in a context-sensitive manner and emphasizing the lived experiences of those who are not heard (Imas et al., 2012; Weston and Imas, 2017). By collecting fine-grained qualitative process data, we attempt to extract theory from the ground up and understand how and why events played out over time in the context (Langley et al., 2013; Zahra and Wright, 2011).

### 3.1. Research setting

Colombia is considered by the [World Economic Forum \(2015\)](#) an all-rounder economy due to its high rates of early-stage, ambitious and innovative entrepreneurs; yet, levels of poverty (27% of the population lives in poverty and 7.2% in extreme poverty), informality (almost 50% of the population works in the informal economy) and inequality (the Gini index for Colombia is 0.517, placing it as the second-most unequal country in Latin America) remain high ([DANE, 2019, 2020a; Ferreira, 2016](#)). Waste pickers, who collect and transport recyclable material from the streets or sometimes directly from landfills to be sold to the industry, live in extreme poverty conditions, at the margins of society. In 2018, around 29,773 waste pickers were recorded in a census by the Superintendency of Public Services in Colombia, but some other sources place the number of formal and informal waste pickers to around 60,000.<sup>4</sup> The same census identified that those waste pickers who were members of a waste picker association typically made on average \$314,000 COL (86 USD) monthly (below the monetary poverty line in Colombia ([DANE, 2020b](#))), with no data recorded for informal waste pickers, who typically receive a lower income and sometimes other forms of payment (drugs, alcohol among others). The poverty conditions of these barefoot entrepreneurs contrast with the immense value of the waste economy in the world, which in 2019 was estimated at 2 trillion US dollars and is projected to reach 2.3 trillion U.S. dollars in 2027 ([Allied Market Research, 2020](#)).

In our study, the waste pickers are based in the city of Cali and have relied on the streets and the Navarro garbage landfill for their informal entrepreneurial activity of waste scavenging for recycling for over 30 years (RRA Think [Tank, 2010](#)). In 2008, threatened with the closure of the Navarro garbage landfill and a law that prohibited informal waste collection in the streets, they filed (with the support of an NGO, the CIVISOL Foundation<sup>5</sup>) legal action for their protection against several municipal entities, arguing that their rights to work and a dignified life had been violated. Their case was presented to the Colombian Constitutional Court. The Court recognized the marginalized status of the waste pickers and that their fundamental rights to a life with dignity regarding their right to work, health, education, food and dignified housing were materially harmed, and, therefore, ordered the municipality of Cali to immediately adopt measures to ensure their rights as entrepreneurs and their inclusion in the waste market.

This case provided a fruitful context to study barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure through the lived experiences of the waste pickers. The aforementioned ruling by the Colombian Constitutional Court (Sentence T-291) was the first of its kind in the world at that time to recognize the discrimination that the waste pickers were experiencing and their marginalization, based on their extreme poverty conditions, hostile physical and social environment, and prevailing social stigma. The Court recognized their right as entrepreneurs in the waste marketplace, despite the informal nature of their activities and their circumstances of poverty. It prohibited the exclusion of the waste pickers from any public procurement of contracts regarding waste, including, among others, recycling, and composting. The T-291 ruling marked the beginning of a noteworthy change for the Colombian waste market and an internationally cherished victory by the waste pickers and the NGO (see article in [The Economist](#) in 2009<sup>6</sup>). Multi-national waste management companies would now be expected to reach out to waste pickers' associations and involve them in their supply chains. Yet, waste pickers' associations struggled to compete as formal entrepreneurs, amidst powerful actors in the institutional field who did not follow T-291's mandates and, instead, persistently suppressed the waste pickers' market inclusion and, over time, aggravated their market exclusion. We now explain our data sources and data analysis approach.

### 3.2. Data sources

We collected data in the form of interviews and extensive longitudinal secondary data (see [Table 1](#)). The mix of primary and secondary data enabled data triangulation. We conducted face-to-face interviews with 28 waste pickers who were active as waste pickers in Cali before and after the T-291 ruling of 2009. 19 of the waste pickers were men and 9 women, with an average age of 51. Their experience as waste pickers ranged between 11 and 50 years. The interviews took place in the streets, enabling spontaneous conversations with the waste pickers about their institutional entrepreneurship struggles. They lasted on average 30 min. We also conducted 10 interviews with the founder and Director (and only member) of the NGO (CIVISOL) (the NGO was the waste pickers' core ally in their market inclusion efforts) in the NGO's office or via video call. These lasted an hour on average. All interviews were taped and transcribed. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and later translated into English and back-translated to ensure reliability ([Sinaiko and Brislin, 1973](#)).

We complemented these interviews with extensive longitudinal secondary data through publicly available sources, covering the years between 2004 and 2019, to build further understanding of the events that took place before, during and after the T-291 ruling (2009). The secondary data (both offline and online) included interviews with waste pickers conducted by journalists and CIVISOL, as well as various published documents that portrayed actions by key stakeholders (such as the waste pickers, the NGO (CIVISOL), local authorities, the Colombian Constitutional Court, private companies, media) prior, during and after the ruling, was introduced.

Our multiple data sources helped us reconstruct the barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure process: how waste pickers' institutional change efforts interacted with immense power mechanisms by powerful actors in the field, which, over time, accentuate their market exclusion despite supportive regulatory change ([Burgelman, 2011; Jack and Raturi, 2006](#)).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.elferaldo.co/economia/colombia-pierde-2-billones-anuales-por-no-reciclar-desechos-plasticos-640305>.

<sup>5</sup> CIVISOL (Civicism and Solidarity Foundation for Systemic Change) is a foundation founded by one lawyer in Colombia that seeks to reactivate civility and solidarity to create systemic changes – permanent and substantive – that ensure growing inclusion and greater equity (<https://sites.google.com/a/civisol.org/fundacion-civisol/>).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2009/06/11/muck-and-brass-plates>.

**Table 1**

Data sources.

#	Data sources	Details
1	Interviews conducted by the research team	28 interviews with waste pickers (2019–2020 – in Spanish)  10 two-hour interviews with the founder and Director of the CIVISOL Foundation, Adriana Ruiz-Restrepo, who has been the waste pickers' main supporter in their struggles (2017–2020 – in Spanish)
2	Interviews conducted by others	Three interviews (videos) conducted by journalists in news programs, as well as a TV show (Especiales Pirry) with the founder and Director of the CIVISOL Foundation (2009, 2012 and 2014 – in Spanish)  Twenty interviews (videos) with the waste pickers conducted by the CIVISOL Foundation (2012–2013 – in Spanish)
3	Legal documents	<u>Action of protection of constitutional rights requested by two waste picker leaders to a Colombian judge (2003 – in Spanish)</u>  This document includes the arguments provided directly by waste picker leaders highlighting their circumstances, practices, conditions and limitations of rights to participate in the formal economy.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rights to enjoy of an affirmative action for waste pickers' inclusion in waste management</li> <li>• Rights to a minimum subsistence level regarding work</li> <li>• Rights to livelihood and entrepreneurship</li> </ul> <u>Legal arguments presented by CIVISOL to Colombian Constitutional Court that resulted in the Sentence T-291/09 – (2009 – in Spanish)</u>  This document provides all the arguments and analysis presented by CIVISOL to inform the Colombian Constitutional Court regarding:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty levels of waste pickers</li> <li>• Responsibilities of governmental authorities in supporting waste pickers</li> <li>• Need for an integral legal order of social inclusion for waste pickers in Colombia</li> <li>• Capabilities of waste pickers as solitary entrepreneur actors</li> <li>• Inclusion of waste pickers into the formal economy</li> </ul> <u>Colombian Constitutional Court Sentence T-291/09 (135 pages) – (2009 – in Spanish)</u>  This is the official judgment provided by the Constitutional Court of Colombia protecting the waste pickers' rights to work as entrepreneurs in the waste economy and formalizing their trade as public service providers.  <u>Senate gazette – Colombian Senate – Acts commission (35 pages) (N° 205 Bogotá, D. C., 14 May 2010) – (2010 – in Spanish)</u>  This official document presents the deliberative quorum of the Seventh Constitutional Permanent Commission of the Senate of the Republic discussing the issue of the tender of the provision of the cleaning service of the city of Cali, in light of ruling T-291 of the Constitutional Court.  <u>Organizational statutes (article of ARCA association) – (2015 – in Spanish)</u>  This document provides the list of statutes that governed the waste pickers association (ARCA <sup>®</sup> ), including the field of action, creation, purpose, legal form, social purpose and juridical capacity. Additionally, it includes the guiding principles, structural organization, strategic committees, governance, assembly, executive administrative councils, executive direction, integration, management and revision of the association's assets, termination, dissolution and liquidation.  <u>Colombian Constitutional Court Auto 268/10, 355/10, 275/11 – (2010 – in Spanish)</u> <u>Resolution CRA 720 (2015 – in Spanish)</u> <u>Decree 596 (2016 – in Spanish)</u> <u>rra (public law + social innovation) think tank, working document (2010 – in English)</u>  The Colombian Waste Pickers' Body of Law: A Case of Sustained Public Interest Litigation to Prevent Impoverishment through Law and Policy, working document, unpublished, New York, 2010  <u>News article from Adriana Ruiz-Restrepo in razonpublica.com 'Waste pickers and waste: that</u>  (continued on next page)
4	Published cases and articles in newspapers	

Table 1 (continued)

#	Data sources	Details
		<p><u>obscure object of desire' - (2013 – in Spanish)</u></p> <p>The article highlights the current situation of waste pickers in Colombia after the Sentence T-291/09. It explains the balance of recycling in Colombia where the children of an ex-president, populist mayors, opportunistic multinationals, warehouse owners, industrialists and bureaucrats have won, and waste pickers have lost everything: neither formalization nor autonomy.</p> <p><u>Newspaper article in El Tiempo - 'Clash between waste pickers: one block wants inclusion within the City sanitation system another block wants the deregulation of trash for competing in a free market of waste' - (2017 – in Spanish)</u></p> <p>The article describes the situation in Bogota before a new public tender for waste management and how the local government has decided to open the tender to the open market. It also highlights the lack of collectiveness among waste pickers, and how there is a deep division within the waste picker associations that does not allow them to advance in the consolidation as companies providing public services.</p> <p><u>Newspaper article in El Pais – 'La Ermita, temple for the protest of waste pickers' (in Spanish) – 5th August 2009 in Spanish</u></p>
5	CIVISOL website <a href="http://www.civisol.org/https://sites.google.com/a/civisol.org/fundacion-civisol/">http://www.civisol.org/https://sites.google.com/a/civisol.org/fundacion-civisol/</a>	The website includes information about the CIVISOL Foundation (history, mission, vision, projects), as well as information about the project 'trash is life' which presents the case of waste pickers (in Spanish).

<sup>a</sup> ARCA (Association of waste pickers of Cali).

### 3.3. Data analysis

To make sense of the data, our analysis progressed in three stages. First, we wrote a rich chronological case narrative of the institutional entrepreneurship efforts of the barefoot entrepreneurs in our study (Langley, 1999). We arranged our data chronologically (Langley, 1999) and identified three phases: *Change Initiation*, the period before the T291 ruling, focusing on the jolt that triggered the waste pickers' institutional change efforts for their market inclusion; *Change formalization*, the period during which the T291 ruling took place, eventually recognizing marginalized waste pickers as formal entrepreneurs and enabling their market inclusion; and *Market exclusion*, the period after the T291 ruling when the diffusion of the institutional change for the market inclusion of the waste pickers failed. Our thick narratives (Geertz, 1973) captured the involvement of different actors with different social positions and power in this barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure process: our protagonists, the marginalized, powerless waste pickers, who, with the help of the NGO (CIVISOL), were the institutional change agents, and powerful institutional actors, including local authorities, the Colombian Constitutional Court, private companies and the media. Table 2 below offers a short description of the key actors in our study. We presented the emerging case narrative to the founder and Director of the NGO to validate its accuracy and enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Second, we examined this thick description in light of our research question. Specifically, we looked at how barefoot institutional entrepreneurship efforts failed amidst resistance from powerful actors in the institutional context. To devise a coding scheme for the institutional change and power practices evident in our data, we began by using available theory-based codes in the institutional entrepreneurship literature. This enabled the coding of *framing*, *coalition building*, *employing ingenuity*, *bargaining for legitimacy*, *mobilizing a collective identity* and *collective organizing* institutional change practices (Battilana et al., 2009), and *barring*, *mythologizing*, *demonizing*, *enabling power* practices that suppressed institutional change (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). We used in-vivo codes based on concepts expressed directly in the interviews for institutional change (*begging for compliance*) and power practices (*empty promising*, *neglecting and omitting the duty to protect*, *turning a blind eye*, *not complying*, *remaining silent*, *dividing and conquering*, *reinterpreting the law*, *silencing*) emerging from our study that had not been previously captured in the literature. Then, drawing on institutional entrepreneurship and power literature, we reviewed the emerging codes and narratives, seeking to interpret how the different practices that emerged from our data fitted together to suggest more abstract, theoretical explanations in the shape of key institutional change mechanisms (**legitimizing**, **organizing**), and overt (**detering**, **delegitimizing**) and covert (**manipulating** and **abstaining**) power mechanisms that sought to suppress institutional change. The abstaining power mechanism and its corresponding practices have not been previously featured in extant institutional entrepreneurship literature. Appendix A exemplifies our analytic structure, offering descriptions and examples of our coding, along with representative quotes from our data. To ensure the trustworthiness of our analysis (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), the first two authors cross-checked and discussed the coding scheme, while the third author, who was not involved in the data collection, acted like an outsider and challenged emerging codes. We then constructed a process model (Fig. 1), showcasing the role of power in the process of barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure. We used a department peer in the third author's school, an experienced qualitative researcher familiar with the grounded procedures we followed, to conduct an analysis audit. Lastly, we drew together our interpretations in a theoretical model that provides novel insights into the role of power in barefoot institutional entrepreneurship; we call this the paradox of inclusion that drives barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure.

**Table 2**

The actors involved in the barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure process.

Actor	Social position
Waste pickers (WP)	Marginalized entrepreneurs who lack education, live in extreme poverty conditions and carry the stigma of poverty (Imas et al., 2012). Their entrepreneurial activity (waste picking for recycling) prior to the institutional change depicted in our findings was informal, i.e. outside the realm of formal laws and regulations, but legitimate within informal institutional boundaries (Webb et al., 2009b). They lack resources (knowledge, financial and social capital outside their own community) (Weston and Imas, 2017).
Non-governmental Organization (NGO) – CIVISOL	The NGO (CIVISOL) was founded by an attorney who had significant experience working in the Colombian Constitutional Court and post-graduate studies on non-for-profit law. The group of lawyers that the NGO used to support the waste pickers during the Court ruling were working in governmental institutions and prestigious private firms and offered their services pro bono. The NGO enjoyed high legitimacy with formal institutions in Colombia and beyond (The Economist, 2009).
Local authorities (LA)	Local authorities have different positions and responsibilities at local and regional level. They are able to create new laws and influence norms.
Colombian Constitutional Court (C)	It is one of the highest Courts in Colombia. Its function is to keep the integrity and supremacy of the Political Charter and decide the constitutionality of bills and legislative decrees objected to by the Government and citizens.
Private companies (PC)	Private waste management companies possess resources to influence and alter economic and political practices and legal systems, more significantly in developing countries (Eweje, 2006; Karam and Jamali, 2017; Soundararajan et al., 2016).
Media (M)	In developing countries, the media, as a social institution, tends to support the interest of bigger economic powers and established institutions (Eweje, 2006; Karam and Jamali, 2017).

## 4. Findings

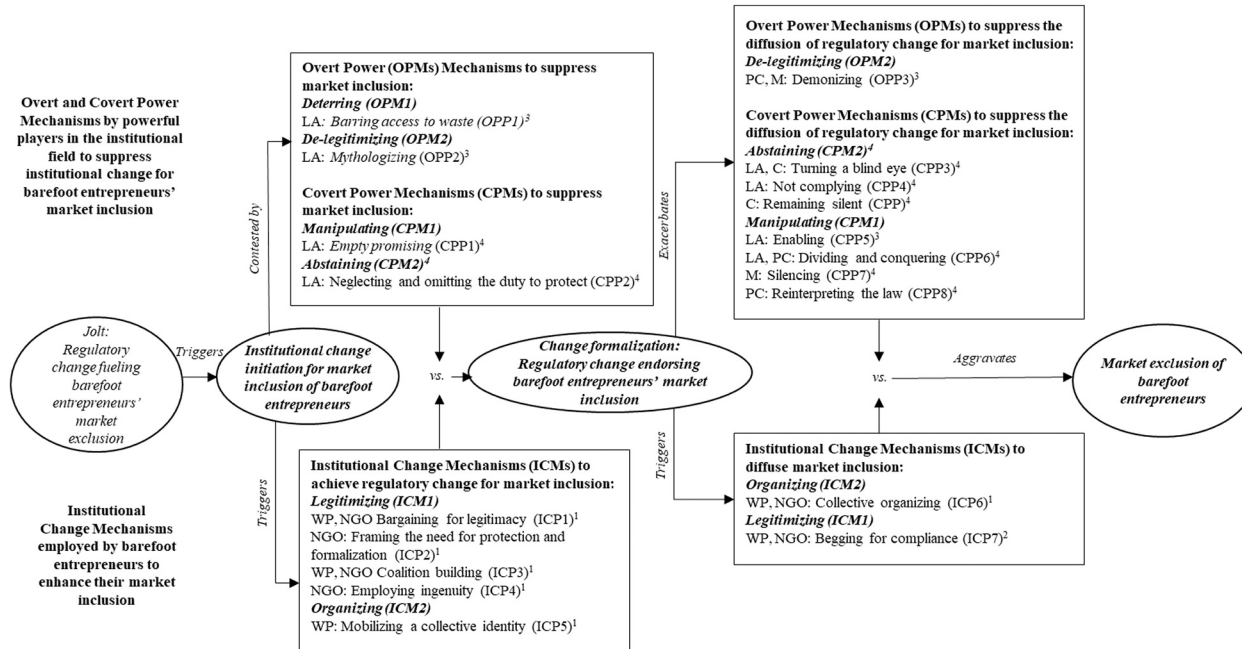
The institutional entrepreneurship struggles of the barefoot entrepreneurs in our study (the waste pickers), who, despite favorable regulatory change, failed to enhance their market inclusion *vis a vis* immense power mechanisms from powerful actors in the institutional field, unfolded in a three-phase process (*Change Initiation*, *Change Formalization*, and *Market Exclusion*). Fig. 1 below offers an overview of the barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure process.

In the following four sections, we present an account of what happened in each of the three phases summarized in Fig. 1, along with a theoretically driven analysis of why it happened. In the first section, we explain the jolt that triggered the barefoot entrepreneurs' institutional change efforts for their market inclusion. Then, in the following two sections, we describe what happened during the Change Formalization and Market Exclusion phases and punctuate the description of unfolding events and practices by theoretical explanations of the contest between barefoot entrepreneurs' institutional change mechanisms and the suppressing power mechanisms employed by powerful players in the institutional field (see Appendix A for definitions of the mechanisms and their corresponding practices). Lastly, we explain the paradox of inclusion that drives barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure, which emerged from our empirical findings.

### 4.1. Change initiation

Waste pickers' motivation to instigate institutional change for their market inclusion was triggered by a crisis created through a jolt in the field. Two regulatory changes, which were introduced in 2008, inhibited the informal entrepreneurial practice of waste picking in Colombia. First, the national law of environmental subpoena of 2008 (Law 1259) prohibited removing waste from the garbage bins and its transportation in unsuitable vehicles. This affected the traditional practices of the informal waste pickers in our study who were collecting/separating waste in the streets; if they continued to do so “*they were now risking a subpoena and could end up arrested*” (NGO Director, Interview 1). Second, in 2008, Navarro – Cali's landfill – was suddenly closed, following an environmental sanitation policy decision that “*threw 600 families of waste pickers into the streets, 1200 people, many minors by the police*” (NGO Director, Interview 1). This regulatory change restricted physical access to waste to many waste pickers separating directly in the landfill. A waste picker talked about the agony that this closure generated in their ability to make a living: “*Since Navarro closed, now we are here in the city. There my work was achieved in 70 square meters; there I did my thing. Here, I have to work in several places to get less than what Navarro gave to me. We hope soon I will recover my quality of life, because my income has been greatly affected*” (Waste Picker 1).

The Director of an NGO (an experienced attorney and its only member), who was already supporting waste pickers' co-operatives in Bogota, observed this crisis. The Director was not a stranger to the waste pickers. In 2003, the NGO worked with them to develop a case for the Colombian Constitutional Court to bid in public tenders on waste management in big cities. The NGO fought for an “*avenue of inclusion in waste management for waste speakers in poverty*” (NGO Director, Interview 1). The Court's ruling enabled the legal space for waste picker associations – “*legal entities in which waste pickers organize because they lack financial capital, but they have social capital*” (NGO Director, Interview 2) – to bid in public tenders. However, “*by the time the Court produced that ruling, the public tendering had been accelerated and was already closed*” (NGO Director, Interview 2). Observing the new jolt, the NGO's Director approached the waste pickers to help them build a new case to legitimize their entrepreneurial activities as formal entrepreneurs so that they could reinstate their access to waste, enhance their market inclusion and alleviate their poverty. As the NGO Director explained in an interview: “*When the national government closed Navarro, it took away the vital minimum from waste pickers, recycling in the landfill is blocked. We also know that law 1259 prohibits the use of wheelbarrows, so law 1259 prohibits recycling in the streets -it has blocked all street recycling in Colombia by law. Then, neither street waste pickers will be able to eat, nor those from Navarro will be able to eat. So, we made the case*” (NGO Director, Interview 1).



Note: ICM: Institutional Change Mechanism; ICP: Institutional Change Practice; OVM: Overt Power Mechanism; OVP: Overt Power Practice; CPM: Covert Power Mechanism; CPP: Covert Power Practice  
C: Court; LA: Local authorities; M: Media; NGO: Non-governmental organization; PC: Private companies; WP: Waste pickers

<sup>1</sup>Institutional change practice also mentioned in existing literature; <sup>2</sup>New institutional change practice emerging from this study; <sup>3</sup>Power practice also mentioned in existing literature; <sup>4</sup>New power mechanism and practices emerging from this study

Fig. 1. The process of barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure.

## 4.2. Change formalization

As illustrated in Fig. 1, following the jolt, the waste pickers sought regulatory change to enable their market inclusion, employing **legitimizing** (ICM1) and **organizing** (ICM2) institutional change mechanisms. Waste pickers' **legitimizing** practices included *bargaining for legitimacy of their market inclusion* (ICP1), *framing the need for their protection and formalization* (ICP2), *coalition building* with the NGO (ICP3) and *employing ingenuity* (ICP4). To fight collectively for institutional change for their market inclusion their **organizing** involved *mobilizing a collective identity* (ICP5). The waste pickers' efforts for regulatory change were met with much resistance from the local authorities, who activated overt (**detering** (OPP1), **de-legitimizing** (OPP2)) and covert (**manipulating** (CPM1), **abstaining** (CPM2)) power mechanisms to maintain the status quo and block the waste pickers' market inclusion. The local authorities exercised overt power by **detering** the waste pickers' market inclusion through *barring access to waste* (OPP1) and *mythologizing* their informality and stigma in Court hearings (OPP2). Covert power practices included **manipulating** the waste pickers by deceiving them through *empty promising* about actions for their inclusion that were not going to be carried out (CPP1) and **abstaining**, by *neglecting and omitting their duty to protect* the waste pickers (CPP2). Recognizing the need to protect the marginalized waste pickers' right to a life with dignity, the Court ruled for regulatory change, formalizing the waste pickers as entrepreneurs in the waste economy and ordering the local authorities to adopt measures to foster their market inclusion in the waste market (Ruling T-291). We now explain in more detail how this process unfolded.

In response to the jolt, waste pickers in Cali came together and took the church of the city (La Ermita) as a form of demonstration to draw attention to their poverty and marginalization and **legitimize** the need for regulatory change, *bargaining for legitimacy* (ICP1) in the waste management market (newspaper article – El Pais 2009). Individually, they filled in hundreds of 'tutelas' (Colombian legal action taken by individuals to demand protection of their constitutional rights), seeking to legitimize their right to a decent life connected with the right to work, *framing the need for protection and formalization* (ICP2). As one waste picker mentioned: *“without the opportunity to obtain the least income from the work that was taken from me, we see our children's lives and our own in danger due to lack of food, since it is very little we can get. In the same way, the life of the whole family is at risk because of not being able to access health services ...”* (Waste picker 6). Unfortunately, all the 'tutelas' were either denied or later revoked (T-291 ruling).

Amidst these 'tutelas', local authorities were **detering** their market inclusion, by continuing to *bar access to waste* (OPP1) for waste pickers, both in the streets by enforcing the law (1259/08) and in the landfill through Navarro's closure (NGO Director, Interview 2). To **delegitimize** the waste pickers' legal case, they continued *mythologizing* (OPP2) the legitimacy of the waste pickers to access waste. Even though waste pickers' entrepreneurial activity of waste collecting and recycling was, for years, informally allowed by local authorities (NGO Director, Interview 1), the local authorities argued in one of the Court documents that *“there was no contractual or legal relationship between the parties”* (Ruling T-291), essentially stripping waste pickers from access to waste. Waste pickers argued that local authorities considered them naïve and **manipulated** their good faith through *empty promising* (CPP1) to do things that they never did: the implementation of a comprehensive *“social management and employment generation plan for all families that derived their subsistence as waste pickers in the Navarro site”* (Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan (PGIRS)). For instance, a year loan agreement to operate existing recycling conveyor belts in Navarro was promised but never materialized, along with empty promises for extensive training, participation in the recovery, use and commercialization of solid waste, financing resources, education, health, and housing programs. The NGO Director highlighted the empty promising: *“the waste pickers of Navarro in good faith did believe that tolerance and multiple proposals for solutions parallel to the eviction of Navarro would lead to a life solution. Promises that today have not been kept by the promisors, are insufficient, have only been kept for a short period of time or only with respect to a part of the population”* (CIVISOL's Amicus Curiae to the Court).

Having been unsuccessful with the Court in **legitimizing** the institutional change for their market inclusion on their own through their 'tutelas', the waste pickers decided to *build a coalition* (ICP3) with the NGO CIVISOL, who was already interested in their struggles and could help them build a legal case. A waste picker noted: *“Adriana [CIVISOL founder and Director] was attracting us like a magnet... and a pedagogical process about what we had to do began”* (Waste picker 10). The NGO, with support from professional and experienced lawyers who offered their services pro bono, helped in **legitimizing** the waste pickers' case by presenting an *ingenious* (ICP4) Amicus Curiae<sup>7</sup> to the Colombian Constitutional Court, arguing, for the first time in the country and the world, the right for marginalized waste pickers to work as formal entrepreneurs in the waste management business (Senate gazette, Senate Member Rodrigo Lara Restrepo). *Framing* their need for protection and formalization (ICP2), and *bargaining* with the court for their *legitimacy* (ICP1) by requesting *“inclusion of waste pickers in the formal waste management economy”* (CIVISOL's Amicus Curiae to the Court) formed part of the legitimizing efforts. To strengthen their voice, the waste pickers **organized** collectively by *mobilizing a collective identity* (ICP5): *“When you have lived in the midst of violence and, with your gut stuck to the backbone, achieve what CIVISOL achieved to teach us to empower ourselves and see ourselves as equals this is what one for all and all for one means, to see ourselves as human beings. It is changing from well down in the streets and sidewalks of the cities to disinfect the institutions of the state as the predatory way of thinking of the individual”* (Waste picker 12).

The case was received by the Court, who mediated the competing interests by listening to both sides of the argument and asking for further evidence, as specified in the Court ruling. The Court eventually issued the T-291 ruling, recognizing that waste management was a public service in which waste pickers could participate and highlighted that local authorities were **abstaining**, by *neglecting and omitting their duty* (CPP2) to provide special protection to this marginalized group (Ruling T-291). The T-291 ordered the local

<sup>7</sup> A non-party with an interest in the outcome of a pending lawsuit who argues or presents information in support of or against one of the parties to the lawsuit. In many instances, the amicus curiae attempts to draw the court's attention to arguments or information that the parties may not have presented.

authorities to: a) abstain from promoting or executing policies/programs that can aggravate or perpetuate situations of exclusion, marginalization or discrimination of disadvantaged groups in society; b) allow the real and effective participation of waste pickers in public tenders; c) provide permanent accompaniment to waste pickers in the technical aspects required for tender; d) provide financial and organizational support to form associative or solidarity organizations; and e) ensure the effective enjoyment of waste pickers and their families' constitutional rights to health, education, decent housing and food, social security system in health, access to education for children under age, and their inclusion in social programs on food and housing. The regulatory change thus formalized the market inclusion of the waste pickers as entrepreneurs in the waste economy: *"It should not be forgotten those waste pickers, even if informally, acted as entrepreneurs, so that a suitable alternative, rather than converting them into employees of large recycling companies, is to allow them space so that they can continue to act as entrepreneurs, promoting their organizational capacity and strengthening their capacities and opportunities to properly exercise the activity they had been developing over time"* (Sentence T-291, p. 72).

#### 4.3. Market exclusion

The regulatory change, however, did not mark the end of the waste pickers' struggles for their market inclusion (see Fig. 1). Instead, while the marginalized waste pickers, with the help of the NGO, turned their emphasis on **organizing (ICM2)**, and struggled with the challenge of **collective organizing (ICP6)**, their formalization by the Court triggered immense hegemonic power mechanisms by powerful established actors in the field, who sought to quench their market inclusion. Overtly, private companies and the media continued **de-legitimizing (OPM2)** the waste pickers' market inclusion despite the Court ruling, by **demonizing (OPP3)** them, advocating prevailing negative stereotypes. The ruling also exacerbated covert power mechanisms. These included **abstaining** (e.g. practices that restrained from taking action to reinforce the institutional change, including **turning a blind eye (IMP5)**, **not complying (IMP6)** and **remaining silent (IMP7)**), **detering** (e.g. establishing barriers to access resources by the practice of **barring access to capital (IMP8)**), **manipulating** (e.g. practices that constrained institutional change in a deceiving manner including **dividing and conquering (IMP9)**, **reinterpreting the law (IMP10)** and **policing (IMP11)**), as well as **delegitimizing** (e.g. practices that contested a generalized perception that the institutional change was appropriate within the social system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions, including **demonizing (IMP12)** and **silencing (IMP13)**) institutional maintenance mechanisms. These powerful institutional maintenance pressures triggered a need for further **legitimizing** from the waste pickers and the NGO, who were **begging for compliance (ICP8)**, pleading actors in the field to recognize and implement the regulatory change. We now explain in more detail how this contest unfolded.

Once the ink of the court's order was dry, the waste pickers' battle to diffuse the institutional change for their market inclusion begun. Following their recognition by the Constitutional Court as solidarity formal waste entrepreneurs, and with the continuing support of the NGO, the waste pickers felt empowered. With the help of the NGO, they focused on their **organizing**, by **collective organizing (ICP6)**: forming a solidarity organization named ARCA (Association of waste pickers of Cali). A waste picker discussed their collective organizing efforts in one of the interviews: *"we won the lottery and I have been understanding what a business [waste management] is and a very good business that we have always had, that we have treated it in a very empirical way, in an irrational way so to speak, because we have not known the value that it has, we have not given it the added value that it needs. Now with the sentence [T-291 ruling] we understand that we can do it, but we are trying to see if we can but there have been many obstacles, from side to side. We have had all the obstacles you want but we do not want to give up here we are only a few now but we want to move on"* (Waste picker 14). Mobilizing a collective organization was far from effortless: *"We need to work together, and that is going to be the problem and it has always been the problem, working together is very complicated because we, waste pickers, have nothing and we are very distrustful"* (Waste picker 23).

While the waste pickers were striving to build ARCA, the regulatory change accentuated covert and overt power mechanisms by many powerful actors in the institutional field who sought to suppress their market inclusion. Local authorities were **turning a blind eye (CPP3)** and **not complying (CPP4)** with the Court ruling, essentially covertly **abstaining** from endorsing waste pickers' market inclusion. A waste picker explained: *"The municipality covered its eyes, lent itself to the private sector to come and compete ... resources were lowered to benefit the mayor, the secretary, but the waste picker himself continues to suffer from need, continues to suffer"* (Waste picker 18). Instead, local authorities **manipulated** the rules of public waste management tenders **enabling (CPP5)** the dominance of existing powerful players in the waste market and obstructing the inclusion of the waste pickers. Tenders included criteria that were not possible for marginalized waste picker organizations to meet (high investment, prior experience, size, among others) (NGO Director, Interview 3). For example, in 2009, the Court ordered the Superintendency of Public Service to allow and facilitate waste pickers to participate in tenders for waste management in Cali. In 2010, the Superintendency opened a new tender for the administration and collection of waste services in Cali. The tender was expected to close in 10 days, required the bidders to become private companies in the medium term, and there was no support offered to the waste pickers to structure their tenders. Unsurprisingly, the waste picker associations could not apply for the tender. A waste picker shared their struggles to meet the criteria in public tenders: *"for ARCA, it needed at least 20 million pesos and there was none, from where?, there was none... Where were we going to get that money? Going to the bank to say lend me, it is very difficult to get money for that kind of thing"* (Waste picker 14).

Senate Member Rodrigo Lara Restrepo complained about the local authorities' abstaining and manipulating practices in the Senate (page 8): *"Superintendent, there can be no compliance with the Court ruling when you open a bid and plan to close it within ten business days; ... waste pickers' associations don't know about the terms ... It is absolutely impossible for waste pickers' associations, cooperatives, to present a proposal"*. In her participation in the Senate in 2010 the leader of the waste pickers in Cali argued: *"the Court says very clearly that for this there is support, so that waste pickers can compete in the market and put us on equal terms. We see that this is not happening... they have really been very complex... as is the future of us the waste pickers of the city of Cali in these tenders... So, we waste pickers are in many disagreements, precisely with the entities in charge"*. The waste pickers complained that the local authorities, with their abstaining and manipulating practices, were in fact perpetuating their market exclusion despite the regulatory change: *"the state does not recognize us as waste pickers,*

as entrepreneurs. By sentence (the Court ruling) we are entrepreneurs, but in practice, we are not doing that. The intermediaries, the warehouse lords (bodegueros), those with capital are doing it" (Waste picker 21).

The local authorities along with private companies that dominated the local waste market also employed covert **manipulative dividing and conquering** (CPP6) practices to suppress the waste pickers' market inclusion. As a waste picker noted, waste is a big market, and private companies lobbied with local authorities so that would not have to share it with the marginalized waste pickers: "there is a mess because then you know that there are octopuses, at this moment the waste is a millionaire thing ... they want to take it. That is a time bomb, and the waste will never end" (Waste picker 11). According to the waste pickers, the private companies in the waste market and local authorities implanted doubt and decentralization in some of ARCA's members, resulting in internal conflicts and dropouts: "they [local municipality and private companies] are following the principle of divide and conquer" (Waste picker 12). The NGO Director added in one of her interviews: "multinationals and politicians start to give them little contracts and put them to fight among themselves until the atmosphere is what there is now, free competition for waste, people killing themselves for the waste in your house to see how many three pesos they throw at them in 6 months" (NGO Director, Interview 4). Powerful private companies also established a competing private formal association of waste pickers, which offered employment opportunities to waste pickers, instead of their market inclusion as a solidarity organization (NGO Director, Interview 4).

The waste pickers also noted that the media, who tend to support the interests of big economic powers and established institutional arrangements in developing countries (Eweje, 2006; Karam and Jamali, 2017), were also overtly **delegitimizing** their market inclusion. Despite the Court ruling, the media continued *demonizing* (OPP3) the image of the waste pickers: "They call me old thief. I have never taken anything from someone else, nor am I a thief, so I felt very bad" (Waste picker 4). The media were also covertly **manipulating** the diffusion of the institutional change by *silencing* (CPP7) the Court ruling and waste pickers' market inclusion struggles. The waste pickers argued that society was largely unaware of the ruling due to the media's silence: "we see that society as such does not know the sentence [T-291 ruling], we are still the homeless, the crazy, some of us have uniforms and we are the waste pickers, but nobody knows the sentence, the state and some waste pickers know it, but society as such does not, that has not been disclosed at all" (Waste picker 25). Moreover, the media did not cover their struggles in the diffusion of the regulatory change. For instance, when a group of waste pickers, with the support of the NGO Director, accused the Ministry of Housing and National Planning in a Court hearing of being in contempt of the Court's inclusion orders to enable the waste pickers to make a living as formal municipal public service providers, none of the national media channels covered this in the news. Waste pickers complained that the media acted as an ally to private companies to silence their inclusion efforts and demonize them: "with ARCA they do not want to know anything, and they have it vetoed, including what they call the press, the Fourth Estate...it is a fear in society that has being cultivated by television with the famous phrase 'the disposables'" (Waste picker 24).

These immense oppressive overt and covert power mechanisms left the waste pickers desperate for legitimacy. Marginalized and powerless, the waste pickers and the NGO **legitimizing** resorted to *begging* local authorities for compliance (ICP7) with the Court ruling to endorse their market inclusion. Faced with a dead-end, the NGO, accompanied by leaders of waste pickers, went to the Colombian Senate to plead for enabling waste pickers to access public tenders so that they can compete in the market. As the NGO Director argued in the Senate in 2010: "I do not know how we are going to do it and this above all is a request for help and aid, because CIVISOL is nothing but a Foundation of a group of citizens who have solidarity with other compatriots, and we leave them behind, but this for us is very complicated, because one does not know whether to take one way, or whether to take the other. So as soon as you believe that you won the case in the Constitutional Court, and great! there will be an inclusive tender, then you start to go backwards". At the same time, the NGO and the waste pickers begged the Court to provide further support for the institutional change. In 2010, the Court stopped a bidding process that was not inclusive, following the T-291 ruling. However, beyond that, despite several Supervisory Decisions 'Autos de seguimiento'<sup>8</sup> and 'tutelas' by waste pickers, "the court remained silent" (Waste picker 15) (IMP7). The Court thus, covertly, largely **abstained** from controlling the ruling and, instead, passed the responsibility to local authorities, *turning a blind eye* (CPP3) (NGO Director, Interview 4).

Taking advantage of the Court's **abstaining**, powerful established private companies in the waste management market continued to covertly **manipulate** the local authorities to open the market of waste in ways that did not comply with the ruling that protected the inclusion of waste pickers. In essence, private companies were *reinterpreting the law* to establish unfair competition in their own favor (CPP8). The NGO Director explained: "The consortium of private companies, founded in 2010, creates a monopsony that creates unfair competition and that creates the free market, because they set the price .... they are fragmented and people only see organizations of waste pickers, little warehouses (bodeguitas) and do not see the octopus that is behind the same one that has taken the decrees, the resolution and that is the one that says they are the advisors of the state" (NGO Director, Interview 4). "A new interpretation – this time private – of the inclusion ruling was created, according to which it is now up to the State not only to formalize the waste pickers in poverty, but also to more than 1500 satellite warehouse landlords (bodegueros) of the industry who are those who collect raw material, as industrial intermediaries, from the waste that waste pickers collect around the city during the day and take them to sell to earn a few pesos. And that is not what we, waste pickers and CIVISOL, asked the Court for, nor did the Court order it" (NGO Director intervention in the Colombian Senate in 2010). The NGO was very vocal in raising concerns about these covert manipulating practices, which prompted private companies to overtly **de-legitimize** the NGO's Director by *demonizing* her (OPP3): "they try to destroy the image of the doctor [NGO founder and Director] .... They begin to try to destroy with the support of the multinationals ... enter from the top" (Waste picker 22).

After years of immense pressure by powerful players in the field to constrain the diffusion of the institutional change, and desperate efforts by the waste pickers for their market inclusion, in 2015 and 2016, local authorities decided to follow the T-291 ruling, albeit

<sup>8</sup> Through an Auto, the level of progress in complying with the orders issued in a ruling is evaluated and, in the cases where it is deemed necessary, new orders can be issued in order to overcome the structural shortcomings of public policy.

with their own interpretation. **Manipulating** their compliance, they established a new resolution (CRA 720 of 2015) and a decree (596 of 2016) that proposed a new tariff methodology for waste utilization activities ('aprovechamiento'<sup>9</sup>) and an eight-phase process (with 20 sub-phases) for waste pickers associations, in essence *enabling* (CPP5) the dominance of powerful players in the waste market and obstructing the inclusion of the waste pickers. The procedure included a payment of around 10% of the public bill paid by citizens to associations of waste pickers authorized as a public service company. To be authorized, however, the public service company needed to register within the first five years after the decree was issued, had to have a bank account, an accountant, a website, and a warehouse, among other prerequisites. This covert *enabling* practice therefore only helped to reproduce the status quo by essentially disabling the inclusion of the waste pickers. The NGO Director explained this further in an interview: *"the court never said that, it only said organize them and contract them, who needed to formalize and create the conditions for formalization was the state, not the waste picker. They just throw all the transactional cost to the waste picker so only those with a private company behind could pay for it ...this is just the legalization of the informality, the waste picker doesn't have any certainty, formality is security ... the Court said only companies in the solidarity economy could benefit from this but right now, there are private for-profit companies receiving the 10%".* ARCA lacked the capital and technical expertise to formalize, subscribe and receive the 10% offered by the municipality, so the municipality was essentially disabling their entrepreneurial opportunities. As a leader of a waste picker association argued: *"we are busted because we are in debt, drop by drop, because with billing in 6 months they do not pay us. I don't have how to pay, I'll see what I do... Waste pickers have to wait. Here there are interests of other people, this business is tied up"*. In 2017, a study conducted by the National University in Colombia captured the waste pickers' aggravated market exclusion: with limited resources against powerful players that suppressed their inclusion in an institutional field with widespread corruption, the marginalized waste pickers found themselves increasingly excluded from the waste market despite the regulatory change (Superintendencia de Servicios Públicos Domiciliarios, 2018).

#### 4.4. The paradox of inclusion in barefoot institutional entrepreneurship

The failure process captured in our empirical findings is driven by a 'paradox of inclusion' in barefoot institutional entrepreneurship (outlined in Fig. 2).

Barefoot entrepreneurs face social and market exclusion challenges. Insofar as their entrepreneurial activities remain informal, their marginalization is perpetuated, but some degree of market inclusion, typically just enough to allow them to earn a living to survive, is tolerated by powerful actors in the institutional field. Our findings highlighted that when structural forces aggravate their market exclusion to the point that barefoot entrepreneurs can no longer earn a living, they are likely to embark on institutional change efforts to push for their market inclusion. The powerless barefoot entrepreneurs in our study pushed for regulatory change to enhance their market inclusion by employing legitimizing and organizing mechanisms, with the help of a one-person NGO who offered them legitimacy but had very limited resources. Their institutional change efforts were met with resistance by powerful Local Authorities who mobilized overt (detering and de-legitimizing) and covert (manipulating and abstaining) power mechanisms to block the barefoot entrepreneurs' market inclusion, taking advantage of their marginalization. With their fundamental rights to work and a dignified life threatened, the barefoot entrepreneurs (with the help of the NGO) eventually succeeded in their mammoth effort to gain legitimacy by the Court as a marginalized group that must be included in the waste market. The regulatory change empowered them to focus their efforts on organizing. Yet, their formalization triggered a tsunami of overt (de-legitimizing) and covert (manipulating and abstaining) power mechanisms from many powerful established actors in the market (private companies, Local Authorities, the media, even the Court) who sought to strip the waste pickers from normative and cognitive support for their market inclusion. Leveraging the barefoot entrepreneurs' marginality, powerful actors pushed hard to perpetuate the barefoot entrepreneurs' market exclusion without adhering to the Court's ruling. Lacking power and resources, the marginalized barefoot entrepreneurs ended up more excluded from the waste market. Our empirical findings thus bring to light a paradox of inclusion that drives barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure: the more marginalized barefoot entrepreneurs push for and gain regulatory legitimacy for their market inclusion, the more this accentuates overt and covert power mechanisms that strip normative and cognitive support for the institutional change, aggravating barefoot entrepreneurs' market exclusion.

## 5. Discussion

Echoing the reform perspective, which pays attention to the socially constructed experiences of poor and marginalized entrepreneurs, this research set out to explore the limits of institutional entrepreneurship in the context of extreme poverty and marginality, where unequal relations of power feature strongly (Sutter et al., 2019). Responding to calls to challenge the agency-centric assumptions of institutional entrepreneurship and theorize the role of power in barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure (Armanios and Easley, 2021; Battilana et al., 2009; DiMaggio, 1988; Khan et al., 2007; Sutter et al., 2019), we asked: "How do barefoot institutional entrepreneurship efforts fail amidst resistance from powerful actors in the institutional context?"

Our findings extend institutional entrepreneurship theory and barefoot entrepreneurship literature by illuminating the role of power in the barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure process (Garud et al., 2002; Khan et al., 2007). We show how overt (de-legitimizing and detering) and covert (manipulating and abstaining) power mechanisms suppress barefoot entrepreneurs' market inclusion efforts (legitimizing, organizing) despite regulatory change, and, over time, perpetuate their exclusion (Garud et al., 2002;

<sup>9</sup> 'Aprovechamiento': Complementary activity of the public cleaning service that includes the collection of usable waste, selective transport to the sorting station or the harvesting plant, as well as its classification and weighing by the provider.

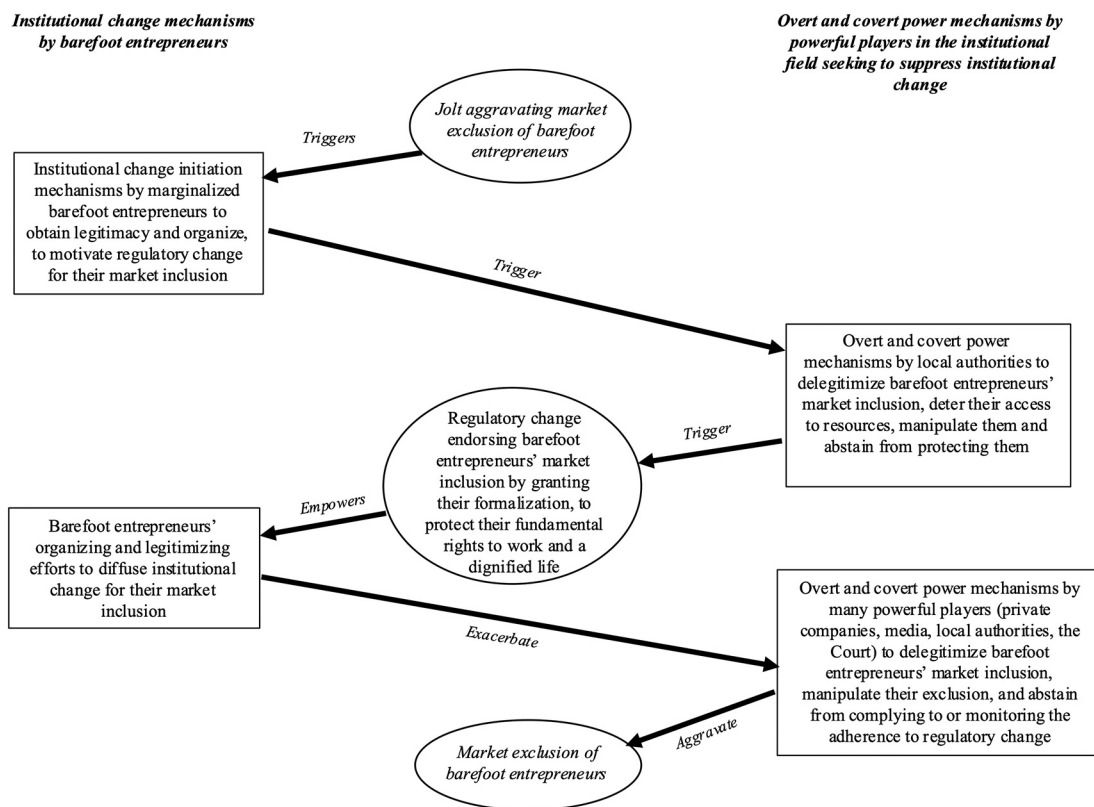


Fig. 2. The paradox of inclusion in barefoot institutional entrepreneurship.

Khan et al., 2007; Maclean et al., 2006; Maclean and Harvey, 2019). Contrary to the optimism that is often attributed to heroic institutional entrepreneurship in the mainstream literature (Tedmanson et al., 2015; Verduyn and Essers, 2017), our study reveals a paradox of inclusion that drives barefoot institutional entrepreneurship failure: the more barefoot entrepreneurs strive for their market inclusion and regulatory change endorses it, the more this aggravates overt and covert power mechanisms that suppress normative and cognitive support for the diffusion of institutional change, and over time, exacerbate barefoot entrepreneurs' market exclusion. As such, we find that formalization is not the end of the road when it comes to enhancing the market inclusion of barefoot entrepreneurs (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Khan et al., 2007). Instead, our study illustrates how the institutional vehicle of power (regulatory, normative, and cognitive power) affects how the barefoot institutional entrepreneurship process plays out (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Scott, 2005). While regulatory change may be a vital first step for barefoot entrepreneurs' market inclusion, a misfit with powerful actors' normative power (overt and covert mechanisms through which they prescribe what activities are appropriate within the market) and cognitive power (overt and covert mechanisms through which they perpetuate the stigma and disrepute of marginality and poverty), weakens the intended positive effects of regulatory change, exacerbating barefoot entrepreneurs' market exclusion (Armanios and Eesley, 2021; Castellanza, 2020; Eberhart and Eesley, 2018; Eesley et al., 2016; Eesley et al., 2018; Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Goss et al., 2011; Sine et al., 2005; Sutter et al., 2019; Willmott, 2014). By maintaining normative and cognitive structures that suppress market inclusion, powerful actors undermine regulatory reform (Eesley et al., 2016). While regulators abstain from monitoring adherence to the regulatory change and issuing sanctions when actors do not comply, powerful normative and cognitive structures work to sustain barefoot entrepreneurs' market exclusion (Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Garud et al., 2007; Lawrence et al., 2010; Mair et al., 2012; Martinez Dy, 2020; Max-Neef, 1992; Seo and Creed, 2002; Venkatesh et al., 2017; Wacquant, 1999; Willmott, 2014).

Our study also extends understanding of the role of marginality in barefoot institutional entrepreneurship (Bapuji et al., 2019; Bapuji and Chrispal, 2020; Bruton et al., 2021; Gilbert, 2007; Imas et al., 2012; Mair et al., 2012; Mair and Seelos, 2005; Marlier and Atkinson, 2010; Wacquant, 1999). Our case of failure demonstrates that barefoot entrepreneurs' marginality is a double edge sword in their institutional entrepreneurship efforts. On the one hand, their marginality motivates regulatory reform to protect their basic rights for work and a dignified life (Khan et al., 2007). On the other hand, once regulatory change threatens established hierarchies and the interests of powerful actors in the field (Goss et al., 2011), their marginality leaves them powerless against immense overt and covert power mechanisms that work to suppress the institutional change (Amorós and Cristi, 2011; Clegg et al., 2006; Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Griffin-EL and Olabisi, 2018; Khan et al., 2007; Lawrence et al., 2010; Martinez Dy, 2020; Morris et al., 2020; Leca and Naccache, 2006; Sutter et al., 2019). Because of their ongoing marginalization, it is almost impossible for barefoot entrepreneurs in the context of extreme poverty, even with the help of an under-resourced NGO, to gain normative and cognitive support within the

institutional field and enhance their market inclusion (Sutter et al., 2019). Previous studies have highlighted how inequalities around gender, ethnicity, social class and race, and their intersectionality may impede entrepreneurship (Agius Vallejo and Canizales, 2016; Dadzie and Cho, 1989; Essers and Tedmanson, 2014; Light and Rosenstein, 1995; Martinez Dy et al., 2016; Romero and Valdez, 2016; Ruiz Castro and Holvino, 2016; Tobias et al., 2013; Valdez, 2016; Verdaguer, 2009; Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Wingfield and Taylor, 2016). Echoing the reform perspective (Mair et al., 2012; Martinez Dy, 2020), our study advances those insights, showcasing how overt and covert power mechanisms perpetuate barefoot entrepreneurs' marginalization to squelch their institutional change efforts for market inclusion.

Lastly, our study contributes to broader efforts to reframe mainstream entrepreneurship theory into a more critical mode (Goss et al., 2011; Sutter et al., 2019) and the limited, yet growing work, on entrepreneurship in the margins (Martí and Mair, 2009). The struggles of barefoot institutional entrepreneurs – similar in some ways to those of indigenous entrepreneurs or the long-term unemployed (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2017; Weston and Imas, 2017) – require different theoretical frameworks that conceptualize entrepreneurship beyond the limits of its economic value. Echoing the reform perspective (Mair et al., 2012; Martinez Dy, 2020), our study similarly advocates barefoot entrepreneurship as an emancipatory force that holds potential to transform societies and alleviate poverty; but we also show that it is rife with social and market inclusion challenges stemming from power differentials and marginalization (Bruton et al., 2013; Castellanza, 2020; Hjorth, 2003; Sutter et al., 2019; Tedmanson et al., 2015). Entrepreneurship in barefoot contexts is undoubtedly a challenging endeavor, some might even say a mission impossible, but we see barefoot entrepreneurs' efforts to enhance their market and social inclusion as worth supporting, taking into account the immense potential for alleviating poverty (Bruton et al., 2013). Alternatively, scholars may choose to challenge the normative assumptions that see entrepreneurship as a positive force in such contexts (Trehan et al., 2020) and explore whether it is even really desirable for barefoot entrepreneurs, such as the waste pickers in our study, to stay tied to their occupation forever. Some may even ask, is there a danger in not allowing for creative destruction? In developed country contexts, for instance, there are no longer chimney sweeps – a dangerous occupation typically performed by children. Yet, as Khan et al. (2007) have found in their study, behind the 'velvet curtain', it must have been a difficult transition for the unemployed chimney sweeps. Our view is that this is a decision only for the barefoot entrepreneurs to make.

## 6. Limitations, further research, and policy implications

We encourage entrepreneurship scholars to incorporate power in future research as they seek to understand better barefoot institutional entrepreneurship (Agarwal and Holmes, 2019; Khan et al., 2007). The limitations of this study pose opportunities for future research. We collected data in a single country, Colombia, and from the very specific single case of marginalized waste pickers located in Cali. Although this allowed us to control for contextual variables, future work should include other barefoot entrepreneurs' voices, within Colombia (such as in Bogota and Medellin) and beyond. Further research in other countries and barefoot entrepreneurial activities would be necessary, as studies have shown that different countries and institutional settings may reveal different effects (Gohmann, 2012). In addition, this study focused on the lived experiences of barefoot institutional entrepreneurs. Future studies may wish to explore barefoot institutional entrepreneurship for market inclusion from the perspectives of powerful players in the field. Moreover, scholars may want to challenge the normative assumptions of this research that posit entrepreneurship as a positive force in barefoot settings, and examine any dangers in not allowing for creative destruction (Trehan et al., 2020).

Our study also has important implications for policymakers and development intermediaries (such as NGOs) aiming to alleviate poverty through entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship in barefoot contexts requires change that extends to social and institutional spheres (Battilana et al., 2009; Sutter et al., 2019). First, social exclusion is the Damoclean sword hanging over barefoot entrepreneurs' efforts for market inclusion. Marginalized entrepreneurs, therefore, need all the support they can get to help them gain normative and cognitive support for their inclusion in the broader (often hostile) institutional field. Formalization via the court, as well as organizing resources are essential, yet not sufficient to tackle the stigma of poverty. Policymakers and development intermediaries need to also deal with the oppressing practices of powerful actors that perpetuate marginalization. Regulators need to monitor adherence to court rulings and sanction those that don't comply (Armanios and Eesley, 2021). Moreover, governments and development agencies need to promote inclusive institutions: a more systematic approach, where agents and local government put together a process of social negotiation to achieve a more balanced power dynamic between different actors in the field (Brownell et al., 2021). They need to educate and engage local elites and society at large to embrace the reform agenda and help alleviate poverty.

Second, barefoot entrepreneurs may be unable to enhance their market inclusion and expand their entrepreneurial activities to foster growth on their own. Institutional carriers can play an important role here (Armanios and Eesley, 2021). Training and policy development must focus on building basic infrastructure to enable marginalized barefoot entrepreneurs to sustain themselves and grow their activities. But these initiatives need to be ingrained in the marginalized community and take into consideration their reality (Khan et al., 2007). Our study also shows that unless NGOs are well-resourced, more powerful actors in the field can suppress their invaluable input in supporting barefoot entrepreneurs in their institutional change efforts.

In conclusion, our study seeks to ignite a productive discussion around the limits of institutional entrepreneurship in contexts of extreme poverty where power differentials abound. We hope to motivate efforts to enable barefoot institutional entrepreneurship as a means of social change, market inclusion and, ultimately, poverty alleviation.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

Maria L. Granados: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project

administration; Validation; Writing - original draft; Writing - Review & editing

Ainurul Rosli: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Writing - Original Draft; Writing - Review & Editing

Manto Gotsi: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Writing - Review & Editing; Visualization

## Funding

This work was supported by the Global Challenges Research Fund – University of Westminster [2019] and British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grants SRG 2019\190010.

## Declaration of competing interest

None.

## Acknowledgements

We want to thank Adriana Ruiz-Restrepo, founder and Director of the CIVISOL Foundation for sharing her experience with us and, more importantly, the waste pickers for trusting us with their struggles and dreams as entrepreneurs. We would also like to thank the JBV editor, Christopher Sutter, for his continued invaluable guidance and the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

## Appendix A. Analytic structure exemplified, with representative quotes

Aggregate dimensions/ <i>2nd order themes/1st order concepts</i>	Brief explanation	Illustrative quotes
<b>Institutional change mechanisms</b>	Mechanisms employed by the barefoot entrepreneurs and the NGO that drive the institutional change for the barefoot entrepreneurs' market inclusion	(See examples below)
<b>Legitimizing</b>	Practices that support a generalized perception that the institutional change is appropriate within the social structured system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions	(See examples below)
<b>Framing</b>	Arguing for the institutional change in a compelling way	"we asked for an immediate plan for decent work relocation that prevents the deterioration of our quality of life and guarantees us access to our constitutional rights" (Waste picker 5)
<b>Coalition building (Waste pickers and NGO)</b>	Building a coalition with another entity to enhance legitimacy as institutional change agents	"people in poverty lack time, because when you're starving, you have to figure out how to eat tomorrow, then you don't have time for democracy, nor for citizenship active, one eats or defends but both at the same time cannot, that is why CIVISOL enters this case" (NGO Director addressing the Senate, 2010)
<b>Employing ingenuity</b>	Engaging in a creative approach to build legitimacy for the institutional change	"[name] and I, with advice from [name], who is the CIVISOL field man and with the pedagogy that we were absorbing from the doctor [the NGO Director], the investigations and all that, we took up the defense of the sentence, which was 10 years" (Waste picker 1)
<b>Bargaining for legitimacy</b>	Fighting for the legitimacy of the institutional change	"...in the most prestigious universities, such as centers of thought studying creative solutions for development and the fight against poverty, they have taken this case as a reference" (Senate member)
<b>Begging for compliance</b>	Pleading powerful actors in the institutional field to recognize the legitimacy of the institutional change	"...ordering an affirmative action of economic inclusion of waste pickers to the formal economy of public services by the Court. There is a multi-million dollar market that the State, society and the market could share with those who before any other actor detected, worked and they took advantage of the market since the last century. For decades now, recyclers have contributed to prevent, in silence and great deprivation, further environmental deterioration in the country" (CIVISOL Amicus Curiae)
<b>Organizing</b>	Practices to organize collectively in order to instigate and diffuse the institutional change	"...we have hopes in what the Court passed, please, we want the Sentence issued by the Court not to stay only in paper, we need pertinent actions that the state has to take, real compromises ... we continue to build our future and longing ... the sentence says very clearly, that they will support us, they will help us to be entrepreneurs, not a few more employees" (Waste picker 20)
<b>Mobilizing a collective identity</b>	Institutional change agents defining themselves as a collective	(See examples below)

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Aggregate dimensions/2nd order themes/1st order concepts	Brief explanation	Illustrative quotes
Collective organizing	Organizing the collective	<p>“... we became 14 organizations with the first principles of ARCA... We made the decision at all costs, we are going to defend ARCA” (Waste picker 2)</p> <p>“We started getting organized as a collective organization for everyone” (Waste picker 20)</p>
<b>Overt power mechanisms</b>	Direct and obvious power mechanisms from powerful players in the institutional field that suppress barefoot entrepreneurs' market inclusion	(See examples below)
<b>De-legitimizing</b>	Practices that contest a generalized perception that the institutional change is appropriate within the social structured system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions	(See examples below)
<b>Mythologizing</b>	Focusing on the past to preserve normative understandings of the institutional change agents that suppress their legitimacy	<p>“there are no constitutional or legal reasons that require the protection of the development of this economic activity by waste pickers” (Local authorities' argument in T-291 ruling documents)</p>
<b>Demonizing</b>	Advocating negative stereotypes for the institutional change agents	<p>“Invisible...They see us as pigs, marijuana, prostitution, crime, drug trafficking, murderers, who damage the environment, it is a fear of society” (Waste picker 14)</p>
<b>Deterring</b>	Practices that establish coercive barriers to the institutional change	(See examples below)
<b>Barring access to waste</b>	Establishing barriers to access resources	<p>“In the places where this activity is operated, the access and coexistence of people within it is prohibited, as well as it is prohibited that in these places where said complementary activity of the final disposal cleaning service is carried out, recycling activities are carried out in the filling work fronts” (Decree 1713 and Decree 838)</p>
<b>Covert power mechanisms</b>	Indirect and hidden power mechanisms that deter market inclusion	(See examples below)
<b>Abstaining</b>	Practices that restrain from taking action to reinforce the institutional change	(See examples below)
<b>Turning a blind eye</b>	Ignoring hurdles in the implementation of the institutional change	<p>“the state does not have the will to collaborate in this, it does not, it turns a blind eye” (Waste picker 10)</p>
<b>Remaining silent</b>	Not taking action against practices that hinder the institutional change	<p>“With all the progressiveness that the Court has had to recognize the rights of waste pickers, in Cali, there has not been a follow-up order in these three years” (NGO Director Interview 4)</p>
<b>Neglecting and omitting duty to protect</b>	Not protecting the marginalized institutional change agents	<p>“Based on the considerations set forth throughout the motive part of this ruling, the Court considers that, in effect, the municipal authorities of Cali violated the fundamental rights to a dignified life in connection with the right to work of waste pickers of Navarro” (T-291 Ruling)</p>
<b>Not complying</b>	Not complying with rulings about the institutional change	<p>“...they have a sentence [T-291] that they have to fulfill with us and they have not done it, the sentence itself, they have not fulfilled it, they have not fulfilled anything at all. ‘Give them the tools for them to become entrepreneurs’. What tools have they given us?” (Waste picker 22)</p>
<b>Manipulating</b>	Practices that constrain institutional change in a deceiving manner	(See examples below)
<b>Empty promising</b>	Promising actions to support the institutional change that are not going to be carried out	<p>“They made us a phantom decree, with the help of the doctor [Adriana] and her investigative work we only found that phantom decree... always trying to corrupt, permeate, contaminate T-291. Empty promises” (Waste picker 22)</p>
<b>Dividing and conquering</b>	Maintaining control over the institutional agents' subordination by encouraging dissent between them and, thus, preventing them to unite in opposition	<p>“Now with the situation in Cali that everyone can receive money from the bill, it will be more difficult to work together...The mayor's office is a lot to blame for the war that has been formed between the same groups of waste pickers, because they created a division between the groups of waste pickers, both urban and Navarro” (Waste picker 12)</p>
<b>Reinterpreting the law</b>	Reinterpreting the law in ways that obstruct the diffusion of the institutional change	<p>“they say that it [T-291] also says that it is free competition, then on the one hand they take give us something and on the other they take it away. This is harmful for us because it puts us in competition with the big industrialists” (Waste picker 2)</p>
<b>Enabling</b>	Ensuring compliance to rules that benefit powerful players and obstruct the institutional change	<p>“But now in 596 [decree] they actually opened the door and those who are not waste pickers entered to take over the business, then, there it is already part of the injustices that we began to see with that regulation” (Waste picker 11)</p>
<b>Silencing</b>	Being silent about the institutional change	

(continued on next page)

(continued)

Aggregate dimensions/2nd order themes/1st order concepts	Brief explanation	Illustrative quotes
		"We see that society as such does not know the sentence, we are still the homeless, the crazy, some of us have uniforms and we are the waste pickers, but nobody knows the sentence, the state and some waste pickers know it but society as such does not, that has not been disclosed at all" (Waste picker 12)

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