

## Editorial Paper

# Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Phenomenon: Antecedents, Processes, Impact across Cultures and Contexts

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### INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship<sup>3</sup>, as a field of research, has gained enormous interest of academics in management and entrepreneurship literature for almost 30 years now. Also, scholars in other intellectual domains like economics, finance, marketing, political science, sociology and few others, have found it fascinating. As a term, it is common in public discourses and has found interest among policy makers, corporations, media, different groups of practitioners and professionals. As a phenomenon it is not new, although the SE term has been only recently coined (Banks, 1972; Drucker, 1979). For far more than two centuries great individuals and groups have tried to tackle the societal challenges, using economic means, such as the Rochdale Pioneers who inspired cooperative ideals, and Florence Nightingale – an English nurse and social activist, who changed the patient care landscape (Nicholls, 2006). Many of the ventures and actions of social initiatives can be traced to the earlier, medieval or even ancient times. Today, social initiatives and social enterprise have emerged in particular countries and regions as a result of

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3 For the purpose of this paper, acronym SE is used for social entrepreneurship.

their historical institutional trajectories, and “social enterprise landscape ZOO” (Young & Brewer, 2016) has become very heterogeneous.

The interest of management and entrepreneurship research into the phenomenon has resulted in an unprecedented increase in scholarly output. The historical analysis of SE research (Moss, Lumpkin & Short, 2017) published in key journals and databases shows an increase from one paper to 45 papers published per year between 1990 and 2010. SE centers established in universities like Oxford, Harvard and Cambridge have designed degree programmes, dedicated textbooks, and separate SE conferences, special journals like Social Enterprise Journal, Journal of Social Entrepreneurship and many more have been introduced for educational and publication purposes. SE has become popular as a response to the inabilities of governments and business to solve pressing social problems, including poverty, social exclusion, and environmental issues. All of the above are manifested in the diversity of different SE initiatives. Thus, we express our interest to explain and predict SE and social enterprise as phenomena, to identify related antecedents and outcomes, but also to look into the box of SE processes. This special issue attempts to respond to this interest. Diverse methodological approaches including descriptive, explanatory or exploratory ones are included in the papers in this issue. SE phenomenon is studied on an individual, organizational, and even a macro level. Different data is employed: current or archival data, primary or secondary, referring to different country settings such as Taiwan, Poland, Italy and England. Through the inclusion of such diverse perspectives and context, this issue works as a holistic approach to the phenomenon under analysis.

In the following sections of this paper, we first provide a succinct overview of SE as a phenomenon and research field. We summarize the definitional debate and point to valuable theoretical frameworks for studying SE. Next, we introduce individual authors’ contributions to the issue and, finally, we propose further suggestions for future research.

### **Theoretical and analytical approaches in social entrepreneurship and social enterprise studies**

SE and social enterprise research is strongly practice (i.e., phenomenon) driven and based on anecdotal evidence as the majority of studies are based on exemplary case studies (Alvord, Brown & Letts, 2014; Mair & Marti, 2006; Starnawska, 2016a). Most research is descriptive and not contextualized in theory (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey, 2011), with the exception of some theoretical frameworks we propose further. Many studies evidence small sample cases (Perrini & Vurro, 2006; Tracey & Jarvis, 2007; Sharir & Lerner, 2006;

Weerawardena & Mort, 2006). However, large sample studies are rare. For example, Shaw and Carter's (2007) study is an exception based on a large sample of interviews, and there are two large panel and population studies like Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) or Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (PSED). There is no doubt about the lack of large-scale studies and databases of social enterprise and social entrepreneurs too (Dacin et al., 2011). Hockerts and Wustenhagen (2010) call for more longitudinal, even long-term retrospective studies, paralleling to the need for studies on more common large sample research empirical studies. Research infrastructure on SE is weak (Lee, Battilana & Wang, 2014). This is the result of the lack of databases on social enterprise and social entrepreneurs. Also, there is still a lack of coherent, clear and universal research methods that encompass the SE phenomenon.

There are some discussions about the subject of SE field of research. Dacin and authors (2011) argue that *"defining social entrepreneurship through individual-level characteristics, processes will inevitably lead to more discussion and debate about how these characteristics should be."* Therefore, although individual level analysis is a universal subject of research, for outlining the scope of the SE phenomenon, the study of entrepreneurs individual features may lead again, like in conventional entrepreneurship research, to unresolved debate about what constitutes the core of SE. The majority of individual-level studies in this field focus on entrepreneurial intentions, which are conducted in the GEM project and north-American PSED. The studies on entrepreneurial personality or specific social entrepreneurial traits are limited (Stephan & Drencheva, 2017). There is also limited work on values, motives, identity or skills of these. Stephen and Drencheva (2017) suggest that this is due to practitioners narratives of "hero" social entrepreneurs who manage to combat multiple barriers (Borstein, 2004; Leadbeater, 1997). Also, organizational level studies, lead to confusion. As mentioned earlier, there are various SE operation models, specific for particular countries and regions, determined by historical and institutional trajectories (Defourny & Nyssens, 2012; Ciepielewska-Kowalik, Pielniński, Starnawska & Szymańska, 2015). Therefore, the heterogeneity of SE is omnipresent, and it is impossible to approach the "social enterprise zoo" (Young & Brewer, 2016) like a homogenous population of organizations.

The overview of research infrastructure provided by Lee and authors (2014) shows that the majority of key texts in academic literature is focused on an organizational level (76%) whereas only 16 % employ an individual level. These two distinct streams in the SE literature reflect the two groups of studies undertaken in the SE field. The former individual level focused work is characteristic for mature intermediate studies. Lee and authors (2014) employ this category from Edmondson and McManus (2007) explaining that such studies build on existing research and constructs, and therefore

allow for testing causal patterns. Whereas organization-level work belongs to a nascent studies group which treats the studied subject as novel, not explained and makes an effort to explore new constructs and patterns.

There are some research opportunities as theoretical contexts are concerned. It is suggested for the SE field to incorporate network related theories, institutional theory and structuration theory (Mair & Marti, 2006; Dacin et al., 2011; Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009). The network theories include social capital and stakeholder theory. Social enterprise embeddedness in the local community is more pronounced when compared with commercial entrepreneurship (Starnawska, 2017). The importance of building relationships and relying on a social network of entrepreneurs is essential for leveraging resources and building legitimacy across different sectors and different logics. It is also visible that the SE community is being strengthened by many global Foundations, like Ashoka or Skoll, which aim to support them. Moreover, in the end, a network approach can help to explain the potential for generating social impact. The institutional approach suggestion helps to provide insights into the need of SE legitimation as a separate field or sub-field of entrepreneurship practice and research. This theoretical framework also responds to the institutional barriers entrepreneurs face, and this is of particular importance for SE organizations that are set between conflicting logics. This includes the emergence of social enterprise in a variety of settings and can be, for example, explained by a social movement's theory. Also, it helps to add to the understanding of the institutionalization of SE as a field of research and practice, and what powers and institutional actors are at play. Moreover, social innovations generate institutional change, and social entrepreneurs can be analyzed as institutional entrepreneurs (Mair & Matri, 2006; Starnawska, 2017). The focus on the concept of a social entrepreneur as an institutional agent is in line with the structure-agency debate and provides opportunities for discussion on the transformative, change the potential of SE. The institutional and social capital approaches, provide arguments for more engagement of the academic community to employ more interpretivist lenses, through social constructionist approaches, which requires more in-depth and more longitudinal data collection and analysis, with more qualitative approaches, to study the complex and contextual phenomenon of SE (Starnawska, 2016b, 2018).

### **Research streams in social entrepreneurship and social enterprise**

There are two streams of thought in the current SE research field which are not explicitly distinguished by the academic community. There is a growing pressure to make it a distinct and legitimate field of inquiry. Nicholls (2010) finds SE as at a pre-paradigmatic stage and therefore the SE field of research

and practice is undergoing a process of maturation (Nicolopoulou, 2014). Other researchers seem not to follow this way of thinking and do not regard the SE field as a domain of its own right, with its own theories (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey, 2011). This latter, critical approach stems from the already existing fragmentation of the entrepreneurship field, and it questions what additional value to the theory can be provided by studying another, separate field of SE.

Most of the current SE research has focused so far on the definitional debate (Dacin, Dacin & Matear, 2010), especially in terms of scope and purpose as a subject of activity (Nicolopoulou, 2014). As Dacin and others (2010) summarize, the common issue in all SE definitions is the social aim, but it is still debatable what the “social” element in the concept of SE is (Nicholls, 2006), and there is still some discussions about what is meant by the “entrepreneurship” element. The very juxtaposition of the “social” and “entrepreneurship” generates some essentialist debates between relevant *homo politicus* and *homo economicus* (Nyborg, 2000). A high number of definitional debates have been determined by geographical, political and social antecedents, acknowledging the key role of institutional and historical contexts for social enterprise and SE emergence. These contexts vary between countries, regions, continents.

Overall, three main academic schools of thought on social enterprise have developed (Dees & Anderson, 2006; Defourny & Nyssens, 2012): social innovation, earned income, and the EMES approach. The first school deals mainly with the notion and phenomenon of social entrepreneurship, whereas the second and the third with the notion and phenomenon of social enterprise. Social innovation focuses on social innovators as individual heroes, change makers and leaders. Here the discourses are focused on “change agency” and “leadership” (Baron, 2007; Nicolopoulou, 2014) and reflect entrepreneurship approaches dominant in the mainstream literature. A lot of this discussion is generated thanks to the Ashoka Foundation promoting its fellows and similar other foundations promoting the discourse on individual change makers (Bornstein, 2004). In this area, there is intense academic work referring to SE (social entrepreneurship). The second school, on “earned income,” emphasizes the capability of social enterprise to achieve social aims through earned income. This approach also has roots in America, where in the late 80’s there was a need for non-profit organizations to generate revenues to realize their own social mission and to survive in the market at the same time (Dees & Anderson, 2012). This approach has also dominated the UK agenda of social enterprise, working on non-profits to move away from grant dependency (Tracey, Philips & Haugh, 2005). Following the effort of scholars from different countries, an EMES project under the leadership of Defourny and Nyssens (2013) put forward nine Weberian “ideal type” criteria, reflecting: social,

economic and governance dimensions of an “ideal social enterprise” which altogether constitute a constellation of guiding directions for comparative purposes. The EMES spin-off project called International Comparative Social Enterprise Models (ICSEM) has gathered together researchers from more than 50 countries worldwide who have proposed social enterprise models for their countries, to consider their institutional trajectories<sup>4</sup>. A recent attempt at universal typology of social enterprise models has been recently proposed by Defourny and Nyssens (2016) as a key finding from the ICSEM project: entrepreneurial non-profit organizations, social business, social cooperative and public sector social enterprise. Both schools, the second and the third, refer to social enterprise as a notion referring to different types of social enterprises, employing it as an “umbrella” concept encompassing a diverse population of organizations set in different institutional contexts.

Some scholars claim that the literature needs to link the gap between “social” and “entrepreneurship” (Chell, 2007) whereas others consider SE as a version of entrepreneurship (Martin & Osberg, 20007; Nicolopoulou, 2014). There is no agreement on the domain (field of research), boundaries, and definitions (Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009; Dacin, Dacin & Matear, 2010; Peredo & McLean, 2006). The challenges in theory development lie in SE discourses which are conventional and propose idealistic visionary narratives (Steyaert & Dey, 2010). Thus, moving away from exemplary cases of social enterprise and their leaders, may lead researchers to more critical and advanced approaches to the studies in the field, including the examples on the borders and the margins of the practice field, but also discovering “unsuccessful stories.” What is also problematic is that there is a widespread positive image of SE as a phenomenon in academic literature (Dey, 2010, p.121) and the existence of a “high profile” SE with its roots in entrepreneurship studies, as pursued in business schools, feeding on business rhetoric and practices, and emphasizing scaling and vision, as important elements (O’Connor, 2010, pp. 79-82).

### **Contributions**

The papers in this special issue provide insights into SE and social enterprise across different institutional contexts and countries while employing different methodological approaches and different theoretical frameworks. They help us understand the diversity of the SE phenomenon, and their methodological approaches manifest a richness of research methods that can be applied in the SE field. All of the authors recognize the unique contextualization of social enterprise and SE development in the field of practice and research

The first paper authored by Lamberto Zollo, Ricardo Rialti, Cristiano Ciappei and Andrea Boccardi (2018) “Bricolage and social entrepreneurship to address

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<sup>4</sup> For almost 40 countries diverse social enterprise models have been proposed.

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emergent social needs: A “deconstructionist” perspective” employ Derrida’s (1976, 1988) deconstructionist approach to provide insights into bricolage in a SE context. The researchers employ a retrospective longitudinal case study of an Italian SE organization which is one of the oldest non-profit organizations in the world, yet it still impacts upon the social and healthcare landscape in Italy – Misericordia. This organization exemplifies how everyday emergencies are dealt with, which makes it a suitable setting for studying social entrepreneurial solutions and social bricolage as a response manner. The case is chosen as an extreme one (Pettigrew, 1990) against the background of the exploratory nature of the study and the limited research on bricolage in an SE context. They make attempts to see if the bricolage concept can be applied in the SE context. This exploratory case analysis is done through the usage of historical and current data from archival sources, current literature including magazines, reports, communication tools, and transcripts from semi-structured interviews held with Misericordia people. The authors provide a conceptual typology of social bricolage as an entrepreneurial solution to social needs. Five strategies are identified: a rigid efficient arrangement, a flexible and effective arrangement, an inertial momentum arrangement, an elusive arrangement and a structural delay arrangement; as different institutional and entrepreneurial solutions to social needs. The findings show how Misericordia employs these strategies. The contribution of this paper is a conceptual framework on the bricolage approach in addressing emerging social needs. The paper deepens our understanding of possible applications of the bricolage concept in SE studies. It broadens the literature on entrepreneurship and, in particular, SE working with the application of a bricolage approach.

The second paper by Tanja Collavo (2018) – “Unpacking social entrepreneurship: Exploring the definition chaos and its consequences in England” focuses on the organizational level factors determining definitional confusion in SE and social enterprise. Also, the paper aims to explore what the consequences of this state of the art are for social entrepreneurs, social investors, social enterprises and policy makers. The study setting is England, where the SE sector has had a long tradition and has been subject to influences from different actors and organizations in the USA and the EU. The author makes efforts to empirically find out what the long-term effects of this definitional diversity are on multiple stakeholders. The paper uses an exploratory case study approach, where England is treated as a case. For this purpose the author analyses historical secondary data, taken from the period 1995-2016, including archival data such as newspapers, magazines, academic papers, reports produced by government and national think-tanks, to trace the development of the sector in England and factors leading to the current definitional debate. This historical approach is further employed



in a complementary analysis of archives and content from 69 archived interviews held with different stakeholders from the sector such as employees of sector intermediaries, representatives of charities, social entrepreneurs, academics, and representatives of businesses. The findings help the author to outline three dominant schools of thought in practitioner's discourse: one school on social enterprises as businesses, another on social entrepreneurs as innovators and the last as a community-related phenomenon. These are in line with the 3 schools of thought suggested in the literature on social enterprise (Defourny & Nyssens, 2013) who, apart from social innovation and the "earned income" school, put forward the aforementioned EMES approach. However, it is interesting to see that the model proposed for England represents an "earned income" school approach (Tracey, Philips & Haugh, 2005; Teasdale, 2012). In further findings, the author resumes 3 categories of opinions on how the definitional debate impacts the sector. For some, this debate brings opportunities, as it generates inclusiveness and interest in social enterprise. For others, it is a negative phenomenon, as it generates disagreements in the sector, hardens access to funding and creates confusion in making public policies. The study shows that the definitional debate in England raises discussions in practice, and shows that research and practice face similar challenges.

The next paper by Huei-Ching Liu, Ching Yin Ip and Chaoyun Liang (2018) "A new runway for journalists: On the intentions of journalists to start social enterprises" focuses on the entrepreneurial intentions of present and former journalists towards starting a social enterprise. The authors set their hypotheses in the context of the similarities between entrepreneurs and journalists, and analyze how personal traits, creativity and social capital determine the entrepreneurial intentions of journalists. Their research is based on an on-line survey run in social media groups for journalists and covers valid answers from a sample of 401 participants. The findings show no significant influence of personality traits, and the authors explain that this is due to the construction of the research hypotheses based on classic entrepreneurship literature. Another important finding is that creativity and bridging social capital has a positive significant influence on social entrepreneurial intentions. The latter is an essential message as creativity is vital in overcoming the institutional barriers (Dacin et al., 2010) that SE faces. Also, social capital is an important element in SE development, which itself is more strongly emphasized in SE literature, recognizing the role of stakeholders in social enterprise, and a strong pronouncement of embeddedness of social enterprise in a social context. The study throws light on social entrepreneurial intentions among journalists, whom themselves constitute an interesting population. Assigning the role of social entrepreneurs to journalists leads to



advocacy functions for many societal challenges. It can influence social impact thanks to potentially higher media coverage of social issues. Although the main findings are in line with the mainstream literature on entrepreneurial intentions towards conventional entrepreneurship, the subject and setting of the study in Taiwan is a very inspiring and interesting context, when discussing who social entrepreneurs are.

The last paper by Katarzyna Bachnik and Justyna Szumniak-Samolej (2018) "Social initiatives in food consumption and distribution as part of sustainable consumption and sharing economy" aims to describe and characterize social initiatives in food consumption and distribution in Poland. They present their study on the purposive sample of social initiatives in food consumption and the distribution area. In particular, reference is made to goals, operating models ("ways of acting") and their linkages to sustainable consumption and sharing economy. Four mini-cases of social initiatives in this area, established between 2013- 2016 and located in two main cities in Poland: Cracow and Warsaw, are purposively chosen as the subject of the study. These initiatives are chosen in accordance with sustainability and sharing economy criteria, presented in the paper. The authors use existing secondary data together with related social media and website content material for the case analysis. The described social ventures are grass-roots initiatives, resulting from the bottom up activity of individuals and groups. The key findings of this paper show a variety in their organizational and legal forms, varying from an initiative undertaken by volunteers, a project undertaken by students, to an informal group that set up a non-profit organization. Also, the evidence shows diverse linkages to sustainable consumption and sharing economy across the mini cases. These are involved in purchases of healthy food, promotion of responsible food consumption, being sensitive to food waste issues, motivations to care for the greater good and for nature and for others. The sharing economy dimension is visible not only through sharing food with others but also sharing on the level of building trust and community. The authors plan to undertake a study of organizational and individual behaviors in further quantitative research followed by in-depth interviews with representatives of initiatives in sustainable consumption and sharing economy, to provide more generalizable conclusions. Their mini-case study of secondary data shows the urging need for more empirical, wider scale studies. However, it needs to be emphasized that many of these initiatives are novel ones, and reflect new social movements, and are not significant in numbers. Therefore, it comes as no surprise why some research on social enterprise is still anecdotal and SE organizations and ventures are slowly occupying the SE landscape in Poland, i.e., moving towards a variety of sustainability and responsibility related initiatives, beyond a pure welfare

focus. When, in western European countries, social cooperative enterprise initiatives have become quite abundant, representing new-movements in food, environmental, cultural, educational spheres, in many central and eastern European countries, the rebirth of civil society into social initiatives and social enterprise needs more time for development (Ravensburg, Lang, Poledrini & Starnawska, 2017).

### **Future research**

In this part of the paper, we deliver summarizing suggestions for future research directions while recognizing the research gaps identified by authors in this issue. We aim to propose new ideas that can deliver insights into the SE phenomenon. The papers provide findings and conclusions relevant to the practice and research field, and emphasize the value of retrospective case studies; employing the analysis of historical data; the ongoing need of case- and small-scale studies of SE ventures and organizations in contexts where the SE phenomenon is not common; the potential of large-scale studies on individuals and their social entrepreneurial intentions; and the strong potential in the qualitative content analysis of practitioners' discourses as a methodological tool in studying the SE phenomenon.

In their work, Zollo, Rialti, Ciappei and Boccardi (2018) propose a theoretical framework encompassing the typology of social bricolage, depending on social needs and the institutions entrepreneurs cope with, and depending on entrepreneurial and institutional solutions to these social needs. This framework is studied in exploratory, longitudinal case analysis. This study has relevance for SE researchers as it provides a systematic overview of social bricolage approaches to emerging social needs. The chosen exploratory retrospective approach is also a valuable example of how archival data can be employed in a complementary manner with current primary data while studying social enterprise with long traditions. For further research, it is required to validate the proposed framework in other SE organizations and to study the assumption that bricolage is a significant opportunity for social entrepreneurs to address emergent social needs. This paper also works as an exemplary work of retrospective, longitudinal studies on SE organizations. The arguments put forward by Hockerts and Wüstenhagen (2010) regarding the need for such studies, may refer to work on historical and current data as well.

Covallo (2018) shows how qualitative analysis of existing secondary data can contribute to the understanding of the complexity of SE. This methodological approach is rather uncommon and it shows that analyses of current texts of narratives, discourses and, rhetoric, can provide a deeper understanding of the SE phenomenon, as socially constructed. This can also show the power and interplays between a variety of institutional actors

(Nicholls, 2010). A new stream of literature is emerging and this work is an exemplary example of how narrations of social enterprise can shape SE culture. For tracing the nature of the SE phenomenon, narratives from different actors could be heard to understand the complexity of the studied subject. In this sense, the recognition of practitioners' voices broadens the spectrum of studied populations. It is of particular importance, as social enterprise has not been legally framed in many institutional country contexts. For many countries, social enterprise models have been recognized (Defourny & Nyssens, 2013), but Covallo (2018) takes a parallel step to analyze practitioners' and other stakeholders' discourses on what social enterprise is. Additionally, T. Covallo's work serves as an exciting example of how qualitative content data analysis can be employed in future studies, in the light of the scarcity of widely available data on SE, and interesting and valuable findings can be generated thanks to the existing discourses and narratives.

The research of Liu, Ip and Liang (2018) confirms existing mainstream literature on conventional entrepreneurship. Their evidence from the journalist community in Taiwan shows that personal traits have no significant impact upon social entrepreneurial intentions. However creativity and bridging social capital are recognized as significant variables. The research is of particular interest, as it does not refer to entrepreneurial intentions among students or graduates or general populations, but is limited to the population of active and former journalists. Further research could potentially explain social entrepreneurial intentions in other professions and be next stage research leading to comparative analyses. The results of this research show the importance of bridging social capital which has practical implications at policy and practitioner level. To extend the SE community, other professional groups can become more and more involved in the societal challenges, which in the end can lead to higher start-up rates of social enterprises, but also strengthen many of them with professional expertise. The findings also confirm the need to employ more network related theories for SE future studies.

Bachnik and Szumniak-Sulej (2018) provide insights into Polish social initiatives in food consumption and distribution, against the background of the understudied nature of the phenomenon. The authors select a purposive sample of diverse cases of such initiatives and provide a descriptive overview of their goals, organization, and links with sustainable consumption and sharing economy. The paper works as exemplary evidence, that the majority of social venture studies are based on small samples of anecdotal evidence, as highlighted at the beginning of the paper. Therefore, having based their research on secondary data, the authors call for further research including primary data collection and more longitudinal observation. As these initiatives are still novel and grass-roots ventures, further qualitative

and exploratory approaches would be required. As the authors claim, the responsible consumption and sharing economy have become very popular in digital community, and consumer attitudes have a significant impact upon the sustainability of such initiatives.

The work presented in this issue confirms the need for more insightful qualitative studies set in varied institutional contexts, and at the same time for more large-scale studies on populations of nascent or existing social entrepreneurs or social enterprises. In the case of the former, more constructivist and network related approaches can be of further value (Starnawska, 2016a, 2018). In the case of the latter, researchers from different institutional contexts could make attempts at setting the foundations of comparative studies across countries (e.g., Ravensburg et al., 2017) but on large social enterprise populations. Also, with the growing legitimacy of SE in an educational setting (Starnawska, 2018), there lies great potential in evaluating social entrepreneurial attitudes among students and graduates and other populations such as different professions. In parallel, the work presented in this issue shows excellent opportunities in analyzing historical data, since SE is not a novel phenomenon.

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