

Young Social Entrepreneurs and Social Challenges: The ‘Parallelo’ Case Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The chapter is focused on social entrepreneurship and, after providing a comprehensive literature review on the topics, aims at providing evidence of the decision-making process of social entrepreneurs and of the strategies they implement by focusing on a single case study, namely “Parallelo.” Parallelo was founded in 2017 by four young Italian social entrepreneurs with the aim of promoting social inclusion of fragile categories and foreign people. Their ‘formula’ is the ‘social lab’ involving creative craftsmen that collaborate in the design and creation of sustainable products based on recyclable/discarded materials. By implementing a narrative approach, the case study is developed following step-by-step the social enterprise establishment and development. In doing so, the study aims at contributing to the social entrepreneurship field of research and at providing insights for practitioners about how decisions are made and strategies implemented within social entrepreneurial teams.

INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship is increasingly attracting the interest of scholars and practitioners due to its positive impact on economies and its peculiar characteristics. When social organisations are financially autonomous, they are considered an efficient way to provide public services and improve the general welfare. In this respect, social entrepreneurship is intended as a process aimed at social change, involving local communities and improving their wealth. Social enterprises are often established in changing environments that oblige them to be adaptable and flexible in order to provide, in the fastest and most efficient way, the best service and product possible to clients. In this respect, ‘change’, ‘adaptability’ and ‘flexibility’ appear to be key terms to bear in mind while navigating this multifaced field of study.

The term ‘social entrepreneurship’ was initially perceived as strictly linked to public organisation and to the non-profit sector (Waddock and Post, 1991). It was intended as a solution to solve market voids and to sustain activities that could not generate revenues (Campbell, 1997). It has also been conceptualised as a ‘multidimensional construct involving the expression of entrepreneurially virtuous behaviour to achieve the social mission, a coherent unity of purpose and action in the face of moral complexity, the ability to recognise social value creating opportunities and key decision-making characteristics of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking’ (Sullivan Mort, Weerawardena and Carnegie, 2003, p. 32). Only recently, its relevance for the private sector was underlined (Thompson, 2000). The key aspect remains the ‘social mission’. However, social enterprises are diversified in terms of activity and form which make it even more difficult to determine the theoretical framework one needs to refer to (Bacq and Janssen, 2011).

Accordingly, scholars agree on the fact that social entrepreneurs require special leadership and innovative abilities (Abu-Saifan, 2012; Waddock and Post, 1991). In this respect, Abu-Saifan (2012) asserts that a social entrepreneur has a mission: to create social value for its customers. In doing this, they are socially alert, i.e., they recognise and pursue new opportunities to fulfil its mission. Entrepreneurial alertness come from ‘skills, experiences, attitudes and special insights’ (Murphy and Coombes, 2009, p. 333). According to Zahra et al. (2009), social entrepreneurs may be great visionaries, able to recognise worldwide social issues and then mobilise competent divisions in order to help reaching their vision. They are often defined as ‘visionary individuals’ (Bacq and Janssen, 2011, p. 382) or as people with ‘visionary insights’ (Bacq and Janssen, 2011, p. 397). But also as people who mix visionary creativity with problem-solving rational creativity. Consequently, social entrepreneurs are totally concentrated on their vision and also focused on opportunity definition. Moreover, entrepreneurial vision is accompanied by a thoughtful strategic plan that helps in reaching long-term goals (Schwab foundation, 1998). To stay focused, a

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