


Chapter 12

Social Entrepreneurship Typologies: Mapping the Territory


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ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing research in the field of social entrepreneurship (SE), unfortunately there is not yet consensus on its conceptualization. The main points of disagreement are related to the business mission and to the source of income. Based on these two dimensions and a bottom-up approach, this chapter contributes to previous literature by proposing and empirically exploring a categorization of three types of social entrepreneurs—socially responsible entrepreneur (SRE), social enterprise entrepreneur (SEE), and social initiative entrepreneur (SIE)—which is applied empirically to explore the social entrepreneurs' personal characteristics (gender, age, and education), similarities, and differences. Multinomial logistic regressions are applied on an international sample of GEM data that includes 11,280 commercial entrepreneurs and 3,373 social entrepreneurs. The findings of the study will permit researchers and practitioners to understand previous empirical findings on social entrepreneurship more clearly and to advance in the study of this evolving phenomenon.

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INTRODUCTION

Within the entrepreneurship field, certain areas have been gaining prominence in recent years, because they have particularities that require the development of new lines of research. This is especially the case of social entrepreneurship (SE) (Lepoutre et al., 2013), for which there is an exponentially growing number of papers that discuss the institutionalization of SE, the emergence of thematic clusters within the area and several methodological issues that require further attention (Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018). Along this line, SE is currently a field of study in its own right and it has a powerful identity that has to be approached scientifically (Choi & Majumdar, 2014). It seems that the novelty along this line of research lies more on the label that is given to the phenomenon of “social entrepreneurship” than on the phenomenon itself (Dees, 2001). Apart from isolated early research on the topic, the term SE only emerged in the academic world in the late 1990s (Boschee, 1995; Leadbeater, 1997). Since then, research has proliferated in searching for a unified definition of what should be understood by SE, social entrepreneur and social enterprise (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Bedi & Yadav, 2019; Brouard & Larivet, 2010; Cagarman et al., 2020; Defourny & Nyssens, 2017; Doherty et al., 2014; Kraus et al., 2014; Rey-Martí et al., 2016; Short et al., 2009). Researchers have also devoted numerous efforts to differentiating social entrepreneurship from traditional, regular or commercial entrepreneurship (Austin et al., 2006).

In these advances, one of the major foundations of SE research has found that it still lacks a clear conceptualization of the construct (Mort et al., 2003) and that its meaning is not widely understood across disciplines, countries and researchers (Lepoutre et al., 2013). However, as Cukier et al. (2011) state, almost all previous studies acknowledge three different levels of comprehension: a micro-level, where the focus is on individual entrepreneurs; a meso level, where the focus is on organizations; and, a macro level, which focuses on an overall perspective of the economic and social context.

Whereas numerous researchers advocate a very narrow definition of the concept, only acknowledging earned-income non-profit organizations in support of its charitable missions (Boschee & McClurg, 2003), other scholars argue that the definition has become so inclusive that it now has an immense tent into which all manner of socially beneficial activities fit (Martin & Osberg, 2007). Therefore, the looseness of the definition has resulted in different studies applying it in different ways, which complicates the possibility of developing further solid research based on a consensus on how to apply the definition adequately for research purposes (Lyon et al., 2010). Lack of clarity around what is and is not SE may also lead to exaggerated claims about its positive attributes and policies merely based on expectation rather than evidence (Teasdale, 2010).

Additionally, it is unfortunate that, from an academic point of view, research in the field of SE has only remained theoretical or, at most, descriptive but partisan (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Dacin et al., 2010; García-Jurado et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2020). Very few conceptual constructions have been tested against or derived from, empirical evidence (Defourny & Nyssens, 2017). What is more, most empirical studies follow the case study methodology or are based on stories of successful social entrepreneurs, which prevents in-depth knowledge of these types of entrepreneurs (Lepoutre et al., 2013; Nicolás & Rubio, 2012). Missing from current scholarly work on SE are studies that can test the scope and generalizability of theoretical propositions, discover antecedents and consequences of social entrepreneurial activity, and statistically analyze differences among various social entrepreneurs through a large-scale quantitative dataset (Lepoutre et al., 2013).

Based on the limited scope of previous research on SE, this study aims to contribute to this line of research by feeding previous theoretical conceptualization efforts with a new contribution starting from

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