Pre-paradigmatic Status of Social Entrepreneurship Research: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT *Social entrepreneurship (SE) research has been presented in the literature as a field of action in a pre-paradigmatic state, a field that lacks an established epistemology. Despite that impediment, several qualitative and quantitative studies have already been undertaken on the sole base of some institutions' worldview and without previous solidification of theory. Consequently, critics and social constructivists have found much ambivalence in these and owing to the resulting mess, even question SE's legitimization as a distinctive item of research. Articles on the topic of SE make use of a variety of frameworks, borrowing from neo-institutional or dialectic theory, bringing with them different research methods and views from other disciplines. Instead of proposing another conceptual approach and yet contributing to the ongoing discussion, the authors enact on a deductive journey by examining and clustering underlying paradigmatic assumptions found in a large-scale sample (>300) of current articles. In comparison to results from the management (entrepreneurship) literature, the study finds statistical evidence to the hypotheses that SE differs in researchers' paradigms, that seminal SE research transcends the foci on either detached structures or individuals, and that research in SE is often led by advocacy worldviews of the researchers themselves.*

KEY WORDS: Social entrepreneurship, methodology, paradigm, research

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship (SE) as an emerging research field has been well received and embraced by authors from a variety of disciplines (Ireland and Webb 2007; Short, Moss, and Lumpkin 2009b), such as sociology (Hockerts, Mair, and Robinson 2010; Kriauciunas, Parmigiani, and Rivera-Santos 2011), entrepreneurship (Chell, Nicolopoulou, and Karatas-Ozkan 2010; Corner and Ho 2010), (public) management (Bagnoli and Megali 2009; Meyskens et al. 2010), ethics (Cornelius et al. 2008), finance (Austin,

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Stevenson, and Wei Skillern 2006), politics and institutions (Hemerijck 2002; Dey and Steyaert 2010), and psychology and education (Chand and Misra 2009).

Mair and Marti (2006) introduce SE as a playground for different perspectives and diverse theoretical lenses: '... *the variegated nature and multiple expressions of social entrepreneurship make it a fascinating playground for different perspectives and literature, and at the same time, suggest that it should be studied through diverse theoretical lenses.'*

However, a diversity in discipline does not necessarily result in a likewise implied diversity of the meta-theories, as meta-theoretical underpinnings can cross and transcend boundaries (Giddens 1984; Scott 1987; Gergen and Thatchenkery 1998; Perren and Ram 2004; McCullough and Willoughby 2009).

Nicholls (2010, 613) characterizes this variety even as a: ... *multidisciplinary contest over the epistemology of the field that has failed to set any normative boundaries around the term.* Following Nicholls' (2010) research, this paper attempts to evaluate and test the claimed pre-paradigmatic (nascent) and transcending status of SE research by conducting a large-scale study on the scholarly literature in SE. Besides bringing new evidence to the researchers' calls for paradigms and self-awareness, such a meta-examination should also provide additional insights into the development and layout of the field itself.

While there are some articles discussing paradigmatic implications in SE research in an anecdotal way, a quantitative analysis of the meta-theoretical assumptions in SE research has been missing so far. Clearing philosophical and societal foundations of a field, however, is of high relevance if scholars search for *justification, consolidation or solidification* of their approaches (Grant and Perren 2002; Jennings, Perren, and Carter 2005). To thus gain insight into the construction of paradigmatic *leitmotifs,* the authors set out to evaluate the scholarly literature on SE in the context of the paradigm-framework by Burrell and Morgan (1979) (hereafter BM), using a large-scale quantitative study. This is done in direct comparison to a seminal article by Grant and Perren (2002), in which the commercial entrepreneurship literature was examined the same way (Jennings, Perren, and Carter 2005).

To differentiate from the previous and related study conducted by Short, Moss, and Lumpkin (2009a), which examines the more obvious methodological choices in SE, the authors see 'method' itself as too influenced, for example, by journals' demands and authors' preferences. Examining methods and forms (e.g. the presence of hypotheses) as in their nevertheless highly valuable article does not consider the insightful interplay between ontology, epistemology and method, and starts itself from a 'functionalist' assumption, leaving out the individual researcher and context. Rather than looking at the symptoms, the authors want to go to the very beginning and start their evaluation at a deeper level by carving out the paradigmatical underpinnings based upon ontology and epistemology (Burrell and Morgan 1979; Jensen 1986; Burrell and Morgan 2005). Traditional methods of literature review and coding will fall short to achieve such an undertaking, so, differently from Short et al., the authors chose the in-depth approach of coding for proxy-artefacts (see

Appendices 1 and 2 for examples of this method). The ultimate aim of this study thus is to shed new light on:

- Existing paradigmatic and methodological choices in SE research
- Predominant influences from disciplines, researchers worldviews and theories
- Differences to management research methodology
- Longitudinal development of the field in terms of its epistemology

Existing Paradigmatic Discussions in Social Entrepreneurship Research

Given the name of the field, one may derive the conclusion that research on SE is just another offspring of entrepreneurship research. However, when reading through the literature, it becomes eminent that research methodology and inherent paradigms differ from the commercial entrepreneurship literature. Within the field of traditional for-profit entrepreneurship, most of the applied theory of research is located within the bounds of the 'Functionalist' paradigm (Burrell and Morgan 1979; Grant and Perren 2002; Burrell and Morgan 2005), and thus characterized by an objectivist perspective and rooted in a regulation view on society (Chell and Pittaway 1998; Jennings, Perren, and Carter 2005).

In the SE literature, however, at first glance, relatively few authors embark on quantitative, theory-testing research from a positivist epistemology, within a realist ontology (Short, Moss, and Lumpkin 2009b), rather the opposite:

- Definitions are called for with caution (Zahra et al. 2009; Lehner 2011a).
- Outcomes depend on the eye of the observer (Hill, Kothari, Shea 2010; Hoogendoorn, Pennings, and Thurik 2010).
- The individual is seen as a hero-like actor in, for example, creating opportunities (Seelos and Mair 2005; Mair and Marti 2009).
- Institutions are using different definitions of SE for their own, sometimes divergent and intrinsic agenda (Dey and Steyaert 2010; Hervieux, Gedajlovic, and Turcotte 2010; Nicholls 2010; Steyaert and Dey 2010).

Even the word SE, although constituting the essence of the field (Mair and Marti 2006), is regarded as spanning a tension-field, as being mutual exclusive (Ruvio and Shoham 2011). Two very different domains and discourses are combined by the dualistic aim of creating social value (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011) and at the same time achieving economic stability and self-sustainability (Nicholls 2006; Hockerts, Mair, and Robinson 2010). Therefore, SE research has to cater for a dual logic, social and entrepreneurial, and is often criticized for not delivering methodological robustness by omitting one or the other (Edmondson and McManus 2007; Peattie and Morley 2008; Lehner 2011b).

Articles on SE are displayed by scholars as being grounded in a subjective ontology with an anti-positivist epistemology and a voluntaristic view of human nature (Burrell and Morgan 2005, Hervieux, Gedajlovic, and Turcotte

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2010; Nicholls 2010; Steyaert and Dey 2010). Scholars apply qualitative inter-
pretive coding schemes in thematic analyses, based on Denzin and Lincoln
(2003) and Di Domenico, Haugh, and Tracey, (2010), are using myth and
metaphors to define the world of social entrepreneurs (Cho 2006; Trivedi and
Stokols 2011), enact on (critically) analysing the underlying discourse (Down-
ing 2005; Jones, Latham, and Betta 2008; Dey 2010; Dey and Steyaert 2010)
and yet others start by defining social entrepreneurs as change agents a priori
from an advocacy point of view. Due to the nascent nature of the field and its
researchers' cautious approach to finding a definition, as well as due to the
on-going redefinition of the research agenda, several scholars such as Nicholls
(2010) or Hervieux, Gedajlovic, and Turcotte (2010) examine the process of
legitimization. Nicholls (2010), following Kuhn (1963, 1996)) calls SE a field
in a pre-paradigmatic state, a field that lacks an established epistemology.
Through the lenses of the structuration theory (Giddens 1984), Nicholls iden-
tifies how institutions try to gain control over the field in a power struggle
through their narrative-logic and discourses in a reflexive isomorphism. Her-
vieux examines the legitimization of SE through a discourse analysis. Short,
Moss, and Lumpkin (2009a, 2009b) further examine the field of SE research
through their applied methods and form and consequently find a lack of for-
mal hypotheses and rigorous methods. Suggestions in their article include the
future inclusion of quantitative methods such as multivariate-analysis and
the call to include well-established theories from strategic entrepreneurship.
However, this would imply that SE is grounded paradigmatically within the
domain of entrepreneurship and that its definitions and boundaries are al-
ready carved out in a way to allow for quantitative theory testing. Still, even
in current years, most SE scholars begin with what seems a quest for the defi-
nition and a careful exploration of the field (Zahra et al. 2009). This contra-
dicts the very assumption of maturity in the field of SE research (Edmondson
and McManus 2007) and calls for a careful examination of its philosophical
underpinnings.

In such an interpretive effort, dealing with worldviews, it needs to be noted
that the authors themselves originate from the management discipline and
are entrepreneurship scholars. The mindset and choice of foundational
articles for comparison therefore stem from this field.

A Choice of Frameworks and Hypotheses for the Analysis

As Grant and Perren (2002) state, Burrell and Morgans' (1979) *Sociological
Paradigms and Organisational Analysis* is still one of the most widely dissemi-
nated paradigmatic frameworks. There are over 600 citations to Burrell and
Morgan (1979) in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) from the years
1990 to 2000 (Grant and Perren 2002). While many disciplines and theories
can be openly identified as contributing to the field (compare the introduction
of this article) and are sometimes even competing with each other in a quest
for legitimacy, the ultimate underpinnings in the form of '*a philosophy of
science and a theory of society*' (Burrell and Morgan 1979) are of high rele-
vance if scholars search for justification, consolidation or solidification of their

approaches (Jensen 1986; Grant and Perren 2002; Jennings, Perren, and Carter 2005; Bates and Jenkins 2007; Akehurst et al. 2011). To enable such a quest for the philosophical underpinnings of a research field and come up with evidentiary data, a closer look on philosophical assumptions within the prevailing literature seems appropriate. As a framework, the authors are using BM's terminological definitions and positions. Their assumptions are based on:

- Ontology: What exists in the world, what is the nature and structure of it
- Epistemology: The nature of human knowledge and understanding that can be acquired through different means of inquiry
- Methodology: How can we find out whatever it is believed to be known

and are either explicitly (openly stated) or implicitly used as a base by researchers (Jensen 1986; Bates and Jenkins 2007; Akehurst et al. 2011; Jones, Coviello, and Tang 2011). Within these, the extreme positions are reflected in, on the one hand, 'Positivism', standing for a realist ontology with a positivist epistemology, a deterministic view of human nature and nomothetic (typically quantitative) methodology and, on the other hand, 'Anti-Positivism' with a subjective ontology, an anti-positivist epistemology, a voluntaristic (free) view on human nature and ideographic (typically qualitative) methodology. These terms are explored in detail in BM's framework. Edmondson and McManus (2007) examine a methodological fit in management research between the maturity of a field and its research methods. They see a correlation between qualitative methodology and nascent fields, mixed methodology for transcending and intermediate fields, and qualitative methodology for mature fields. This brings us to the first hypothesis formulated in the framework of BM: if SE research actually is regarded a nascent field, the majority or researchers will embrace a *subjective* view, with a *nominalist* ontology and *anti-positivist* epistemology.

Hypothesis 1: (Subjectivist) *Subjectivist (classification) = % of articles falling into either the Interpretivist or Radical Humanist quadrant.*

Similarly, researchers hold differing views about the nature of society, for example, whether they see cohesion or disintegration. This particular view has an impact on the perspective and ultimately on the valuation and presentation of their findings. Based upon BM's definitions, the 'Regulation' perspective explains status quo, organization, coherence, structure, social order, consensus, social integration, solidarity, individual and actuality, and in contrast, the 'Radical Change' perspective is concerned with explaining structural conflicts, domination and subjugation, contradictions, emancipation and potentiality (see Table 2).

These independent ends then span a two-dimensional force field of:
x: (Subjective to Objective) −> y: (Regulation to Radical Change)
thus setting the quadrants for four distinct paradigms: *'Functionalist', 'Interpretive', 'Radical Humanist' and 'Radical Structuralist'* (Burrell and

Table 1. Assumptions in the objective and subjective view in Burrell and Morgan (1979)

	Objective view	Subjective view
Ontology	Realism	Nominalist
Epistemology	Positivist	Anti-positivist
Human Nature	Determinism	Voluntarism
Methodology	Nomothetic	Ideographic

Table 2. Assumptions in the radical and regulation view in Burrell and Morgan (1979)

	Radical view	Regulation view
Dynamic	Change	Status quo
Nature	Conflict	Order
Decision and will forming	Power, domination	Consensus
Participation	Emancipation	Solidarity
Capital	Deprivation	Need satisfaction
Time frame, scope	Potentiality, future	Actuality

Morgan 1979; Burrell and Morgan 2005), These quadrants enable the systematic clustering and identification of meta-theoretical assumptions of researchers that underpin the shared philosophy, perspective, mode of theorizing, and approaches.

The 'Functionalist' paradigm has been shown to dominate in the commercial entrepreneurship literature (Grant and Perren 2002; Jennings, Perren, and Carter 2005), but what about the other three paradigms for the analysis of social theory, namely 'Interpretive', 'Radical Humanist' and 'Radical Structuralist'? Can we identify these in SE research? If yes, and as these paradigms are typically more seen in research from authors rooted in other disciplines than entrepreneurship or management, it would mean that SE research is distinctive in that matter, and as such, SE research may well influence the domain of entrepreneurship research as a whole in reflection. It will be interesting to see whether the paradigmatic choice in the SE literature can be identified as clear as in the management (entrepreneurship) literature (Grant and Perren 2002). If not, it would mean that the complex and possibly hybrid nature of SE needs to transcend traditional, fixed paradigms in dealing with its idiosyncratic aspects. If SE research deals with hybridity through multi-level and interdisciplinary approaches from pragmatical viewpoints, it will necessarily transcend traditional paradigms. This brings us to the next hypothesis, in contrast and comparison to Grant and Perren (2002) and Edmondson and McManus (2007) :

Hypothesis 2: (Transcending) *Transcending (classification) = % of articles that span more than one quadrant.*

We see researchers holding different perspectives on society in SE research as compared to commercial entrepreneurship. The SE literature is written

sometimes from a more radical angle, for example, with a perspective on overcoming social injustice through change and innovation, brought upon by newly empowered change agents (sic) on a societal level (Mair, Marti, and Ganly 2007; Mair and Marti 2007; Mair and Marti 2009). Empowerment issues and advocacy points of view (Creswell 2009) are of high importance in SE research – something rather new in academic management and entrepreneurship literature. However, perhaps due to publication pressure, many articles seem to cover their radical and constructivist core with traditional functionalist methods as was found out in the authors' preliminary readings. This brings us to the third hypotheses. If motivation for doing research in SE at least partially stems from an advocacy perspective of the researchers, data will provide evidence of radical views on society in the SE literature. In comparison to the management literature, even a small percentage will show a different approach.

H3: (Advocacy) *Advocacy (classification) = % of articles that expose a radical view on society.*

As it is in the nature of a personal worldview, that its manifesto has been created through on-going reflexive isomorphic processes, this process of intrinsic creation also makes it difficult to argue with. Such disagreement may sometimes lead to an inability to accept each other's viewpoints. As Kuhn (1963) noted – that established paradigms provide sources of legitimacy for dominant actors, and this could well be a resource strategy for them – researchers in the field need to be careful on what bases their paradigms of SE are nurtured because: '*Paradigmatic development is an arena in which power and dominance is expressed often through the deliberative construction of 'a dense network of connections' that aims intentionally and systematically to consolidate relevant centers of power and influence to impose the dominance of their views across the institutionalization of the field*'. (Kuhn 1963, 618)

Ideological, epistemological and ontological dimensions of SE have already been critically examined in a variety of ways (Haugh 2005; Nicholls and Cho 2006; Cho 2006; Chell 2007; Peattie and Morley 2008; Dey and Steyaert 2010; Steyaert and Dey 2010) and the applied methods were scrutinized (Short, Moss, and Lumpkin 2009b), but so far, no systematic review of underlying meta-theoretical assumptions has been conducted. BM's framework seems to be particularly suited for such a task, as it is widely accepted and the dimensions of Change and Regulation have a high significance in SE discourse. This framework became also a de facto standard, given that several disciplines and research fields have made use of it to examine their own theoretical underpinnings. Grant and Perren (2002) have used it in the entrepreneurship field; their article is taken as a reference point for this research. In addition, Short, Moss, and Lumpkin (2009a, 2009b) have undertaken a large survey on SE research, concerning methodology. Their results are also reflected upon. Following their lead and adhering to the set standards will alleviate discussion and the execution of subsequent comparative studies.

Critical Views to Burrell and Morgan

It has to be acknowledged that this framework has been criticized and adapted by several scholars. Especially the incommensurability of paradigms, the exclusiveness and non-comparability between the worldviews, and the arbitrary division between objectivity and subjectivity have been questioned (Alvesson and Willmott 1996; Deetz 1996; Scherer 1998; Burrell 1999; Scherer and Steinmann 1999; Heugens and Scherer 2010). Such a lively discussion can also be seen, however, as a positive sign of impact and recognition of this framework and the authors still hold the merits of their original assumptions and propositions for the meta-theoretical analysis of the SE literature – as most of the original assumptions are still valued and found suitable for an inquiry by high-quality research journals (Chell and Pittaway 1998; Grant and Perren 2002; Jennings, Perren, and Carter 2005).

Alternatives

Giddens' structuration theory (1984) claims a transcendence from paradigmatic meta-theories and draws upon interpretative, structural and structuralist sociologies (Mouzelis 2000). This framework has been used by Nicholls (2010) in the SE realm, but it was not chosen by the authors, as it does not provide a solid theory for a quantitative analysis itself. Rather 'Structuration' was compiled and elaborated by Giddens as a modular toolbox to overcome limits of other theories (Giddens 1984; Scott 1987; Mouzelis 2000; Grant and Perren 2002; Watkins-Mathys 2005; Pérez 2008; McCullough and Willoughby 2009) and thus can also be seen as an extension rather than a falsification of BM. Hypothesis 2, 'Transcending,' is influenced by the ideas presented by Giddens. Also Bourdieu (Steyaert 2007; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008) and with him philosophical foundations from Wittgenstein, Husserl, Weber or Marx would have been an option. However, such a choice would have not provided a likewise commonly accepted framework (Grant and Perren 2002) and thus have counter-measured the authors' intentions to allow for a field-wide discussion based on common ground.

Methodological Considerations

To come up with valid findings, the authors followed well-established procedures of analysing the literature, as demonstrated and seen in Grant and Perren (2002), Harden and Thomas (2005) and Kyro and Kansikas (2005). The method flow holds to the stages of a systematic literature review as found in Harden and Thomas (2005): (a) development of user-driven review questions and boundaries, (b) development of a review protocol, (c) comprehensive research, (d) application of inclusion criteria, (e) quality assessment, (f) data extraction, (g) statistical computation, and (h) synthesis of findings.

The authors were using a two-step approach. First, they selected and included scholarly articles that were searchable through the SSCI from the years 2005 till 2011. In a second step, they identified journals, edited books

Table 3. Identified journals with articles of relevance as compiled by the authors

Journals with articles of relevance	
Business Horizons	Journal of Entrepreneurship
Business Review, University of Auckland	Journal of Innovation Economics
Corporate Governance	Journal of Management
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	Journal of Public Affairs Education
International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business	Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development
International Small Business Journal	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship
Journal of Business Ethics	Journal of World Business
Journal of Business Venturing	Transaction Society
International Journal of Entrepreneurship Behaviour and Research	Socio-economic Review
Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal
International Journal of Emerging Markets	Journal of Enterprising Communities
Public Administration Review	Social Enterprise Journal
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly	International Journal of Social Economics
Organization Studies	International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations
Regional Studies	Academy of Management Journal

and conferences in the references of these articles. The (not exclusive) list of journals, which were seen to contribute several cited articles to the topic, is compiled in Table 3. Quite a few more journals contributing only a small number of articles to the field were included in the literature survey but not listed here.

In a third step, these journals were then searched for articles with keywords *'social entrepreneur', 'social enterprise', 'social venture' or 'social business'*. To provide a sound sample of the SE literature, the preliminary selection process was highly inclusive.

However, the found articles then had to pass a reflexive, quantitative sort and selection criterion, based on the self-computed citation count within the constant growing body of articles under review. To keep the sample of literature relevant, the authors only included articles with a citation count of at least 2. This arbitrary low number was chosen as citation counts within this young developing field are generally not high (except for some highly influential and foundational articles that appear to be heavily cited), and even articles from top journals sometimes only counted for three or four citations. This inclusive approach seems especially important in a multi-disciplinary field such as SE, where power-structures of research communities (management, entrepreneurship, sociology, politics, etc) may easily wrongly disqualify other important contributing research through a much lesser citation count.

To validate the idiosyncratic sorting by the authors based on the found citations, the authors were using Harzing's 'Publish or Perish' software (Harzing 2008). It was found that apart from some early seminal articles, the

vast majority of articles in higher ranked journals appeared from 2005 onwards.

For the classification within the framework of BM, the authors were using the qualitative method of a thematic analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Methodical findings and paradigmatically relevant text fragments were explored (see Appendices 1 and 2 for examples of this method). While the identification of the method was comparatively manageable – as most papers had a section explaining the applied methods – the paradigmatic part turned out to be more sophisticated. For this, the authors embarked on a deductive coding of the articles according to the constructs identified by BM (see Tables 4 and 5).

Finally, to differentiate 'extraordinary research' (breaking away from established theories, opening new windows) from 'normal science' in SE

Table 4. Four socio-philosophical positions and their meaning (Burrell and Morgan 1979)

	Interpretation	Result
Ontology	Is reality existing detached from mind or a product of the individual? Is reality given or a product of the mind?	
Realism	Realism assumes that the real world has hard, tangible structures that exist irrespective of our labels. The social world is separate from the individual's perception of it and has the same hard structures as the physical world.	Objective
Nominalism	Nominalism assumes that social reality is relative, and the 'social world' is built up mainly by names, concepts and labels that help the individuals structure reality. These labels, however, are artificial creations, often only fully comprehended by the creator.	Subjective
Epistemology	What forms of knowledge can be obtained, and how can truth and false be distinguished? Can knowledge be acquired, or must it be in-depth experienced?	
Positivist	Positivists believe knowledge to explain and predict what happens in the social world can be obtained by searching for patterns and relationships between people. They believe one can develop hypotheses and test them.	Objective
Anti-positivist	Anti-positivists claim that observing behaviour cannot help one understand it. One must experience it directly and personally in their extreme form.	Subjective
Human nature	Are humans determined by their environment or do humans create their environment?	
Determinism	Plan	Objective
Voluntarism	'Free will'	Subjective
Methodology	How can we find out about what we believe exists?	
Nomothetic	Nomothetic methodology relies on scientific methods as seen, for example, in physics and hypothesis testing, using quantitative tests like surveys, experiments and standardized tools.	Objective
Ideographic	Ideographic inquiry focuses on 'getting inside' a subject and exploring the background. This often includes involvement in people's normal lives and observations.	Subjective

Table 5. Paradigms as seen by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and sample occurrences within the SE literature

Paradigm		Examples from the SE literature
Interpretivist Focuses on how individuals create, modify and interpret the world, and see things as more relativistic.	Nominal Anti-positivist Ideographic Voluntarism Regulation	Steyaert and Dey (2010) Nicholls (2010)
Radical humanist Same as an interpretivist, but with aspects (low threshold) of a radical view as seen in Table 2	Nominal Anti-positivist Ideographic Voluntarism Radical View	Dey and Steyaert (2010) Mair and Marti (2007)
Functionalist Examines relationships and regularities between the elements. They search for concepts and universal laws to explain reality.	Realism Positivist Determinism Nomothetic Regulation	Korosec and Berman (2006) Bagnoli and Megali (2009)
Radical structuralist Same as Functionalist but with aspects (low threshold) of a radical view as seen in Table 2.	Realism Positivist Determinism Nomothetic Radical View	Chand (2009) Murphy and Coombes (2009)

(Kuhn 1970), the authors chose to compare (interpretively) all articles to Kuhn's demands that authors doing extraordinary research:

- find difficulty in relating their work to existing published research studies in the field,
- demonstrate a heightened awareness of methodology and reflexivity that extends far beyond that typically exhibited in the 'Functionalist' paradigm papers that dominate top journals.

Coding

In order to achieve the set research aims and claim validity, the authors followed procedures of analysing the literature (Grant and Perren 2002; Harden and Thomas 2005; Kyro and Kansikas 2005) through *applying a well-established systematic review and coding process* on a large (>300) sample[1] of the SE literature from peer-reviewed high-quality journals. The data were then statistically evaluated and computed to provide answers to Hypothesis 1–Hypothesis 3.

The found articles were deductively coded to the framework by examining proxy evidence (Grant and Perren 2002) (see Appendices 1 and 2 for examples) and matching these to the paradigmatic positions as seen in BM's framework (see Tables 1 and 2). The inherent meaning as well as the classification order is displayed in Tables 4 and 5.

In order to classify articles within the framework, the authors focused first on the single attributes such as ontology, epistemology, human nature, methodology and the view on society based upon the definition and position of BM's framework, and then matched the outcome to the corresponding paradigms (see Table 5).

In order to transparently display the coding process based on the textual proxies, sample codings are presented in Appendices 1 and 2 as a pars pro toto, based on two articles. The first one was later classified in the 'Interpretivist' paradigm (Steyaert and Dey 2010), and, in contrast, the second one in the 'Functionalist' paradigm (Korosec and Berman 2006). The samples show only some textual fragments, while in the complete process a categorical fit was only derived *after several redundant occurrences* of the codes in the articles.

Outcomes and Authors' Inter-coding

At the end of the coding of each article, there were three outcomes to deal with as displayed in Table 6. Several articles showed tendencies to deviate in one attribute from the classification framework. Methodology, for example, was found to be of a qualitative nature, e.g. a case study, whereas the underlying meta-theory would have been one from Positivism and Realism. Such occurrences were then dealt with as seen in Table 6, outcome 3, and it was individually examined whether these deviations were voluntarily and knowingly emplaced (e.g. due to the nascent research field) or whether these could be seen as erroneous, as contradicting a methodological fit. Such a reflexive process by the authors was meant to increase the validity of qualitative work through reducing errors based upon individual biases.

Table 6. Possible outcomes of the coding process and subsequent steps

Possible outcome of the coding process	Steps
1. Agreement on the individual attributes between the authors	On to classification as seen in Table 5
2. Disagreement on the individual attributes	Discussion and possible re-evaluation –>
	Decision –>
	On to classification as seen in Table 5
3. Conflicting or inconsistent individual attributes seen by both authors	Discussion and possible re-evaluation –>
	Examination of whether the approach was chosen voluntarily and documented within the article –> then either (a) or (b) –>
	(a) On to classification using a 'best-fitting' approach. Remarks
	(b) Classifying paradigm as pragmatist through induction. Remarks

Findings and Evaluation

Literature was identified and examined through the processes described in the previous sections and subsequently clustered, based on the criteria of BM's framework (see Tables 4 and 5). The emerging data were then

1. statistically evaluated as presented in tables,
2. reflectively put into the context of the existing literature.

In total there were 323 articles analysed and structured as seen in Table 7.

Evaluation of Hypothesis 1 (Subjectivist)

If SE research actually is regarded a nascent field, the majority or researchers will embrace a Subjective view, with nominalist ontology and anti-positivist epistemology in BM's terminology. Subjectivist (classification) = % of articles falling into either the Interpretivist or Radical Humanist quadrant. *Subjectivist (classification) = 50% + 4% = 54%*

The research purpose leads to explorative, descriptive or causal research designs, depending on the maturity of a field and the corresponding research questions (Edmondson and McManus 2007). Thus, as SE research is still in its early stages (Short, Moss, and Lumpkin 2009a; Nicholls 2010), its literature often needs to employ explorative research designs based on qualitative strategies of inquiry due to the nascent character of the field. However, the exact interplay between purposes, fitting strategies of inquiry and methodology, and the baseline paradigmatic assumptions needs to be further questioned to derive implications.

As earlier reviews on the commercial entrepreneurship literature would suggest, the authors expected the majority share of papers as being classified in the 'Functionalist' paradigm (Grant and Perren 2002). In SE research, however, the majority of the articles were found to be based on the philosophy of the 'Interpretivists', and as such, the literature actually differs greatly from commercial entrepreneurship and management research. The authors see a significant portion of the SE research literature based in the two quadrants of Interpretivist and Radical Humanist (lesser), and thus found evidence suggesting that *Hypothesis 1 is much higher than in commercial entrepreneurship* and researchers themselves are seeing SE as a nascent field, lacking an established epistemology.

Table 7. Classification of the SE literature, $N = 323$

Paradigm	Count/percentage
Functionalist	146 (45%)
Radical structuralist	4 (1%)
Interpretivist	161 (50%)
Radical humanist	12 (4%)

Evaluation of Hypothesis 2 (Transcending)

If SE research deals with hybridity through multi-level and interdisciplinary approaches from pragmatical viewpoints, it will necessarily transcend traditional paradigms. Transcending (classification) = % of articles that span more than one quadrant. *Transcending (classification) = 22%.*

A multitude of disciplines and topics could be identified, amongst from sociology and business, entrepreneurship and strategic management, organizational behaviour, policy and politics, and ethics and spirituality.

What was remarkable for the authors was that several topics were often called for in the literature, but so far have been found to be persistently missing. Examples are the role of finance, strategy, scaling, alliances, mergers & acquisitions, experience, education and work–life balance. Ecology, however, seems to have recently found its way into SE research as more and more papers emerge since 2010 (Trivedi 2010). The longitudinal transformation of social entrepreneurs into more managerial oriented social enterprises (Lehner 2011a) is still an almost unresearched and promising field that was called for in the literature.

82% of SE literature was relying at least partially on qualitative methods in data evaluation, and 48% of the articles included a more conceptual nature, theorizing SE and social entrepreneurial processes. Many articles can thus be classified within the 'Interpretivist' paradigm; this is different from the commercial entrepreneurship literature where most of the research can be classified within the 'Functionalist' paradigm (Grant and Perren 2002), as can be seen in Table 8.

Every fifth article (22%) showed inconsistencies during the classification in the framework of BM. While pleading for an objectivist perspective, authors were, for example, using ideographic methods and paying attention to individuals and phenomena (Lehner 2011b). While some may see these approaches as erroneous and a disregard of methodological fitness (Edmondson and McManus 2007), the authors see a necessary pragmatically mixed-method approach, suiting the complex field of SE research (Creswell 2009). Also, whether to use nomothetic or idiographic approaches in the social sciences, whose subjects are unique individuals (idiographic perspective) but from whom certain general properties or behaviour according to general rules (nomothetic perspective) shall be derived, can pose a challenge and has thus be taken into account in the analysis of methodological fitness (Molina-Azorin and Cameron 2010).

Table 8. Emerging irregularities and peculiarities, and multiple entries possible (therefore, sum > 100%)

Statistics to induce further exploration	Percentage
Articles with inconsistencies between paradigm (BM) and methods	70 (22%)
Conceptual papers	155 (48%)
Qualitative methods	258 (82%)
Quantitative methods	61 (19%)

Paradigmatic *leitmotifs* can be identified from a longitudinal perspective. Early literature between 2005 and 2007 is full of contradictions and inconsistencies, traditional 'Functionalist' thinking is being challenged by the need of constructional awareness, and attempts to derive generalization through, sometimes inadequate, means. 2008–2011 saw a dawn on self-confidence in the field and several endeavours to argue critically on the construction of SE and its legitimacy. Scholars seem to have become more alert to the paradoxes of SE research (Peattie and Morley 2008). Attempts include new conceptualizations through, for example, *schools of thought* (Hoogendoorn, Pennings, and Thurik 2010) or the adoption of theories such as *neo-institutionalism and structuralism* to find explanations. In addition, 2008–2011 sees an increasing number of linguists, constructivists and structuralists, examining the political dimension of the grand narration of SE (Dey and Steyaert 2010; Jones, Latham, and Betta 2008).

The findings, especially the increasing number of mixed-method studies, the development and struggle of paradigmatic *leitmotifs* and the researchers' experimentation with several grand theories, provide evidence for Hypothesis 2, a *transcending of traditional paradigms* in the SE literature. This clearly differs from the management literature, where we find most articles set in a clear positivist worldview (Grant and Perren 2002; Jennings, Perren, and Carter 2005).

Evaluation of Hypothesis 3 (Advocacy)

If motivation for doing research in SE at least partially stems from an advocacy perspective of the researchers, data will provide evidence of more radical views on society in the SE literature. Advocacy (classification) = % of articles that expose a more radical view on society. *Advocacy (classification) = 5%.*

While in the classic entrepreneurship literature a societal view of 'Regulation' is very common (Grant and Perren 2002), the SE literature also includes more 'Radical' views on *conflict, power, emancipation, potentiality and future*. The SE literature seems to be a playground for advocacy and political agendas, much more than commercial entrepreneurship. However, possibly through adverse preconceptions towards radical approaches, this view is not as obvious as, for example, in classical Marx, and often offers itself *almost subliminal* on a low threshold in the articles. While talking about managerial decisions, the ultimate goal of a so-called change-maker (Drayton 2006) is the disruption of incumbent structures. The researchers' views and standpoints are of high significance, and justice and empowerment seems to be an underlying motif in many of SE articles, though they do not use the language traditionally asserted to radical views.

Therefore, the outcome of H3 appears unclear, and the method of proxy artefact interpretation seems inadequate, as the inherent radical perspective is often not expressively stated but rather implicitly hinted at. Critical discourse analysis and more studies from a political perspective may shed more light on this nevertheless highly relevant dimension (Perren and Jennings 2005; Dey 2010)

Conclusions

The high percentage of conceptual papers may be seen as yet another sign that SE research is still in flux, searching for a direction and legitimacy, and that theories are still rare. Some scholars from the management sciences argue that only when *a theory* has been found and research (meaning data gathering and analytical) methods are typically quantitative, only then the field gains legitimacy (Cummings 2007). However, paradigms as well as methodological fits (Edmondson and McManus 2007) in the existing high-quality SE literature have been shown to differ in their approaches from the commercial management and entrepreneurship literature. Thus, Cummings legitimacy criteria may not be applicable in SE. The body of literature itself so far rises exponentially. 2008–2010 has seen almost triple the amount of new journal articles compared to the numbers in 2005–2007.

While some may see the discovered transcending approaches as erroneous and deny methodological robustness to these papers, others may embrace them as a new dawn on how research in SE should be done. It may be interesting to raise the question and see whether these approaches will hold only in a seemingly socially constructed field such as SE, with such a diverse background in theories and disciplines, or whether these renewed perspectives may actually reflect back on commercial entrepreneurship and management research – and thus break the dominance of the 'Functionalist' paradigm in these. The authors value such transcending underpinnings in the literature for bridging an important gap between objectivism's focus on detached structures, with its lacking regard for humanistic elements – and subjectivism's exclusive attention to individual or group agency, which is missing a careful consideration for the socio-structural context.

To finally answer the side-question on extraordinary research following Kuhn, the authors saw the following approach in the highly influential SE literature, amongst from (Dees and Anderson 2006; Mair and Marti 2006; Weerawardena and Mort 2006; Zahra et al. 2009; Nicholls 2010). The methodologies used in these papers actually transcend the paradigmatic boundaries presented by BM, and it may be fruitful to further examine whether such approaches can be regarded as prototypes of SE research, *as they ultimately overcome objectivism's focus on disconnected structures, and likewise, subjectivism's elite attention to the individual or crowd action, through including humanist elements as well as a thorough consideration of the socio-structural context.*

Remarkably, most of these seminal articles showed a 'consistent' worldview on:

- Ontology: A constructivist view with some realism
- Epistemology: Hermeneutics and structuralism
- Methodology: Interpretive structuralism and focus on the analysis of cases in terms of agency and structure
- Social action: Voluntarism with structural constraints.

Based on the findings of this study, SE fails to be understood from a purely positivist view, as it often presents itself as a *voluntarily constructed phenomenon* through narration and politics. Therefore, a mixed-mode approach is

necessary to allow for cautious generalizations within specific contexts. As this study shows, the early state of the research field (Nicholls 2010) mandates to borrow qualitative methods to explore and construct the SE body of knowledge. Quantitative approaches may not build on solid grounds yet. The researchers' worldviews have a tremendous impact on the findings and selection of perspectives in SE research. A paradigmatic shift in the researchers' communities themselves, towards a more pragmatic viewpoint, is necessary to come to a mutual understanding of the phenomenon and to allow not only for interdisciplinary approaches, but also for a fruitful exchange between these disciplines, which has been requested earlier by Ireland and Webb (2007) and Short, Moss, and Lumpkin (2009a, 2009b).

Note

1. The full list of articles can be downloaded from the authors' institution's pages.

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Appendix 1

Interpretivist Example

As Steyaert and Dey (2010) write:

(2010) '... Taking a theoretical view of research as 'enactment', this paper explores research as a constitutive act and explores a range of ways of relating with and constructing the subject of inquiry...'

Research is seen as a constitutive act, and relates with the subject: cataloged as Nominalism

(2010) '... Research agendas are more than just negotiations that pinpoint potential directions for accommodating the careers of scholars; they can also be seen as political and ethical tools for considering other possible worlds ...'

The subject of inquiry is seen as hermeneutic, as being constructed: cataloged as Anti Positivist

(2010) '... that if social entrepreneurship aims to counter social injustices, poverty, disasters or diseases at source, there is also a need to invent research practices that are able to 'match' this complexity, that are critical of the research process and that also consider how research can contribute to the ongoing enactments of different social words to increase the interventionist dimension of enactive research.'

Researchers are seen not only to consider social change, but also to initiate the process through their research: cataloged as Voluntarism

(2010) '... Critique as denaturalizing operates on the basis of a linguistic paradigm (Deetz 2003*) that conceives of social entrepreneurship as being the product of particular social or dialogical practices* (Cho 2006).

This displays a focus on analysis in terms of agency and structure, thus being interpretive of the language: cataloged as Idiographic

Outcome

The view on society of this paper was not easy to derive. While there are several hints to a more *Radical view* (e.g. calling research 'dangerous', identifying intervening potential) the authors finally concluded to categorize it in the **Regulation view** as most of these hints were merely used to explain how society and individuals reflect on SE research. Matching the attributes as seen in Table 5, the underlying meta-theories of the paper were thus identified as belonging to the **Interpretivist** group.

Appendix 2

Functionalist Example

As Korosec and Berman (2006) write:

(2006) 'This study examines how cities help social entrepreneurship the activity of private individuals and organizations taking initiative to address social challenges in their communities.'

Social entrepreneurship is seen as being existent irrespective of any names: cataloged as Realism

(2006) 'This study examines activities through which municipalities support the development of programs and efforts by private individuals in their communities, and how these activities affect social entrepreneurship in their communities.'

A search for patterns and relationships can help explain the world: cataloged as Positivist

(2006) 'A survey was mailed to city managers and chief administrative officers (CAOs) of 544 U.S. cities with populations over 50,000 during the fall of 2003 ...'

Use of statistics and large-scale surveys: cataloged as Nomothetic

(2006) 'We also examined correlates of the aggregate measure of municipal support. For example, we assessed the prevalence of concerns about municipal support for social entrepreneurship and their impact on that support.'
The environment has an influence on the actors: cataloged as Determinism

(2006) 'Of course, social entrepreneurs are also expected use modern management practices in their efforts
The view on society is on regulation and management: cataloged as Regulation

Outcome
According to the framework in Table 5, this article was classified as belonging to the **Functionalist** paradigm group.