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      Social Entrepreneurship Research Agenda

Social Entrepreneurship Research

Social Entrepreneurship (SE) can be seen as having a multitude of meanings (Mair & Marti, 2006; Thompson & Doherty, 2006; Weerawardena & Mort, 2006).

From a practical perspective, it dennomiates a form of entrepreneurship, where social entrepreneurs create and deliver social value by employing market based strategies and approaches for client and income generation. Approaches include top down, where well-off, well-educated people devote their time and money to start such an endeavour, and bottom up, where people at, what Franklin D. Roosevelt and later Prahalad call the "bottom of the pyramid" (Prahalad, 2010) start up ventures themselves. Activities such as micro-credit loans, for example supplied through the Grameen bank (Yunus & Weber, 2007) are of high importance for their success (Mair & Marti, 2009). When examining case studies of social entrepreneurs, and the social innovation they bring with, it can easily be understood why (Mair & Marti, 2006) call SE research: *A source of explanation, prediction, and delight*.

On a macro level, SE is increasingly seen as providing an exit strategy for states to alleviate their budgets in social welfare spending (Ferrera, Hemerijck, & Rhodes, 2004; Hemerijck, 2002; Travaglini, 2009; Webb, Kistruck, Ireland, & Ketchen Jr, 2010). It is as such endorsed and fostered through several legislative and incentitave measurements by states such as Italy or the UK (Galera & Borzaga, 2009; Nyssens, Adam, & Johnson, 2006).

On a more radical level it is seen as a rally sign for bringing about change, be it polictical, economical or social (Drayton, 2006). Several institutions, such as Ashoka or the Hub, have already created a fruitful business environment of financing, teaching, publishing and propagating SE, often based on their own definition of SE and their own political agenda (Nicholls, 2010)

For researchers however, the field is far from well defined (Peattie & Morley, 2008), different schools of thought have been identified (Hoogendoorn, Pennings, & Thurik, 2010) and at the same time criticised; the field is displayed as having been created through reflexive isomorphisms by several institutions for their intrinsic agendas (Dey & Steyaert, 2010; Nicholls, 2010)
and some even call it a mess (D. Jones & Keogh, 2006; R. Jones, Latham, & Betta, 2008) due to the ambivalences in definitions, constantly changing research agendas and the competing disciplines within.

What can be seen is that the inherent hybridity of SE, for example in the placement of SE between market and civil society is building up a tension field, both fruitful and destructive. While such and other hybridity enables researchers to look on the field from a multitude of disciplines and

perspectives (Mair & Marti, 2006), it also hinders in delivering commonly recognized theories that could be tested in a quantitative way (Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009). However such theory development and testing is often seen as being necessary for the legitimization of a field (Cummings, 2007) and exactly this, research on SE seems to fail to deliver.

Researchers agree that one obstacle to deal with, is the ambiguity of SE. Some argue that this ambiguity stems from an inherent hybridity of the concept and present among others the following examples (Dey & Steyaert, 2010; Nicholls, 2006, 2010; Steyaert & Dey, 2010):

- "Social" and "Entrepreneurship" as structural dichotomy
- SE as taking place in between market and civil society
- The entrepreneurial motivation torn between doing social good and money accumulation
- stakeholder participation versus personal fulfilment

From a constructivist's perspective, several questions arise.

First, are we too quick in arguing that there is such a thing as dichotomy in social and entrepreneurship or are these terms just culturally loaded? In other words, are we presented with a false-dilemma?
On the other hand, if this dichotomy in its true antagonistic meaning is present in cultural settings, is it legit when researchers diminish the dividing forces by accepting them as hybridity, calling them lightly a *dual bottom line*

Research in SE is often based upon such assumptions (Dey & Steyaert, 2010; Steyaert & Dey, 2010), literature either focuses on one aspect, neglecting the other (Adam, 2008) or brings together seemingly dividing aspects without much consideration (Edwards & Edwards, 2008).

In order to further explore the boundaries of this emerging field, and to contribute to a better understanding of, what James Joyce once called *the relevance, the whatness of a thing*, SE research requires special approaches, a triangulation in methods, disciplines and approaches.

This is exactly what the reviewers for this conference were looking for in the abstracts and papers and I am convinced they did an excellent job on that.

In this spirit, I want to welcome you again and wish you a fruitful conference, thank you!