

Social Entrepreneurship and Enterprise

Concepts in Context



**Heather Douglas
Suzanne Grant
Editors**

Social Entrepreneurship and Enterprise: Concepts in Context
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Foreword

The emerging field of social entrepreneurship and enterprise has come far in the last two decades as academic interest in the subject has grown in breadth and depth. Indeed, the diversity of issues studied, the methodologies used, as well as the number of scholars engaged in the field have expanded dramatically. Nonetheless, the field continues to fall short in terms of its capacity to guide practitioners with research-based theoretical insights, which in turn impacts its ability to gain legitimacy as a field (Haugh, 2012). Although scholars agree that more rigorous empirical research is needed to test claims and validate theories (Battle Anderson & Dees, 2006; Hoogendoorn, Pennings & Thurik, 2010), often overlooked is the need for a broader array of theoretical approaches and research across different contexts to provide additional insight and validation. It is therefore noteworthy that the editors of this volume have brought together a collection of papers that not only advances the theory discussion but also examines social entrepreneurship and enterprise in the underexplored regions of Australia and New Zealand as well as in a number of other countries.

Although a limited number of scholars have engaged in theoretical inquiry in relation to social entrepreneurship and enterprise, a brief overview of some of the more recent theory discussions shows that much of it focuses on some aspect of institutional theory, with the vast majority based in North America and Europe (see, for example, Nicholls, 2010; Young *et al.*, 2012; Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2012; Dey & Steyaert, 2010; Di Domenico, Haugh & Tracey, 2010) with only some theory-based research going beyond these two regions (see Desa, 2012; Kerlin, 2013). As Douglas argues in the second chapter of this volume, theoretical approaches should be drawn from a range of applicable fields and vantage points including micro and macro perspectives. Acknowledging and accommodating diversity sets the stage for validating theory work across a number of geographic regions. Indeed, this combination of theory and comparative research provides the depth and breadth that is needed, not only to guide practitioner work but also to establish a solid identity for the field.

The field has begun to take an encouraging interest in social entrepreneurship and enterprise in different geographic areas, although these are largely descriptive comparisons across countries and regions (see for example Borzaga & Defourny, 2001; Defourny & Nyssens, 2008, 2010; Nyssens, 2006; Galera and Borzaga, 2009; Kerlin, 2006, 2009; Cooney, 2011, 2012; Grant, 2008; Spear, 2012; Amin, 2009; Defourny & Kim, 2011; Mook, Quarter & Ryan, 2012; Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Nielsen & Samia, 2008). These studies are important because they add to our understanding of the concept and help solidify its parameters. With better conceptualisation of social entrepreneurship and enterprise comes the ability to

quantify and test phenomenon empirically, which in turn helps lay the groundwork for later theory testing and building.

Given the current state of the social entrepreneurship and enterprise research involving theory and geographic location, what specifically is needed going forward and how does this volume help? First, although progress is being made, a clearer delineation of the social entrepreneurship/enterprise space(s) – especially boundaries – across countries is needed. Categorisation in this manner does not necessarily mean a narrow definition of social entrepreneurship and enterprise that applies everywhere. There is growing consensus around the need for a broad definition that allows for specific models of social enterprise tied to context (Kerlin, 2009; Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). These models would allow for organisational and operational variations that are a function of socioeconomic environment including culture. Second, but related to the first, is a better understanding of how large contextual factors influence social entrepreneurship and enterprise institutions and behaviours, including governments, markets, civil society, culture, and international influences. Third, the identification, application and empirical testing of theories that help explain and predict social entrepreneurship and enterprise institutions and behaviours including both macro- and micro-level theories. The final piece is the empirical testing of theories across countries for theory validation. This approach would not only build theory in the field, but also eventually provide on-the-ground guidance for social enterprise practitioners.

This volume provides important knowledge and insight on a number of these fronts. Drawing on various theories, Grant and Dart, as well as Ruebottom and McKague, turn our attention to different aspects of the framing of social enterprise as a concept and the consequences for the development of the concept in particular ways including its legitimacy. A number of chapters, including those by Dey, Pathak, as well as Gawell and Westlund, also look at social entrepreneurship in relation to government and governing, including the withdrawal of the welfare state in various countries and its influence on the development of social enterprise. The influence of government is also seen in the chapter by Ormiston and Seymour in their examination of the influence of government policies on the development of social investment in Australia.

Quite a few chapters in the volume focus on a large gap in the social enterprise literature – that of the influence of different cultures and ways of understanding on social enterprise. Brady and Haugh look at social entrepreneur networks in the varying cultural settings of the UK and Turkey, Mandinyenya and Douglas discuss the cultural and institutional shaping of a social enterprise when embedding it in Cambodia, while Ruebottom and Toubiana examine the ‘symbolic and strategic role of languages’ as mechanisms for facilitating social change across national boundaries. Eversole looks specifically at the Australian state of Tasmania to discuss the shaping of social enterprises by local development actors as a form of counterwork to the dominant approach to development in the area. Cameron and Hendriks, on the other hand, draw on narratives from Australian social enterprise practitioners to provide evidence of

counter and little narratives that depart from the grand narrative of social enterprise. These chapters open up new approaches to the concepts of social entrepreneurship and enterprise.

One of the most important contributions of the volume is its discussion on social entrepreneurship and enterprise in the indigenous communities of New Zealand and Australia. Few social enterprise studies have focused on geographical regions within countries – particularly those that represent strong cultural identities that depart significantly from the dominant one at hand. The discussion here provides insight into another important role for social enterprises as a medium for the sustainability of indigenous culture. Specifically, Dey and Grant look at how Maori cultural heritage in New Zealand provides the foundational values for social enterprise activities which benefit both the tribe and the wider community. Tedmanson, in her chapter, examines the ways in which social entrepreneurship undertaken by indigenous communities in Australia is a vehicle for building community resilience, empowering local efforts, and honouring the indigenous culture.

Overall this volume contributes another important piece to the social entrepreneurship and enterprise puzzle: What is it, where is it, and how can we harness it so that it does the most good in addressing the problems of humanity? Such scholarship pushes the boundaries of our understanding on a number of fronts and advances a groundbreaking field that has the potential to improve the lives of so many more around the world.

Janelle A Kerlin
July 2013

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“ Social Entrepreneurship (social problems solving, social purpose businesses, social investments, green business). “ International Entrepreneurship (institutions and entrepreneurial activity, SMEs and developing nations, entrepreneurship towards economic development). “ Economic Development (urban institutions and development, economic development and emerging economies). Shanghai, China. Social Problem: Poverty in rural areas of China. Chinese social enterprise. 18 Chefs. Social Entrepreneurs in Singapore.