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# 1

## Introduction

*Johanna Mair, Jeffrey Robinson and Kai Hockerts*

### **What is social entrepreneurship?**

The concept of social entrepreneurship (SE) is, in practice, recognized as encompassing a wide range of activities: enterprising individuals devoted to making a difference; social purpose business ventures dedicated to adding for-profit motivations to the nonprofit sector; new types of philanthropists supporting venture capital-like ‘investment’ portfolios; and nonprofit organizations that are reinventing themselves by drawing on lessons learned from the business world. In the past decade ‘social entrepreneurship’ has made a popular name for itself on the global scene as a ‘new phenomenon’ that is reshaping the way we think about social value creation. Some of these practices are uniquely new however many have been around for a long time having finally reached critical mass under a widely endorsed label.

SE as a field of research on the other hand is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although the development of this field from a research perspective will be discussed later in this introduction; we simply wish to highlight here that although a large number of events have been organized bringing together disparate audiences interested in the topic, to date there have been few opportunities for scholars to gather and discuss papers, themes and concepts relating specifically to the study of SE.

### **Why produce this book?**

This book results from an international conference held at IESE Business School, Barcelona in March 2005, the first in a series devoted specifically to SE research.

The number of books, newsletters, and magazine articles written on SE could easily fill several bookcases: why another handbook and yet another event series? Given all that has been said and written about SE it is surprising that very little rigorous research has been conducted on the issue. Most of the work published so far has been based on anecdotal evidence or was targeted to promote specific initiatives. The conference series that has led to this volume's publication was initiated by us to help create space for academic researchers and thus to jumpstart serious debate about this important field. By bringing established academic theories and research methods to the domain of SE, scholars can provide much needed framing and scrutiny of an area of research that is still in its infancy. At the same time we are convinced that the academic study of SE will have profound impact on many of the established management theories.

The idea for this conference series first emerged at the June 2004 Babson Kauffman Entrepreneurship Research Conference in Glasgow. The first planning meeting followed just weeks later at the Academy of Management's annual conference in New Orleans in August. Being able to produce this volume just a little more than a year after this initial meeting of the minds fills us with a sense of achievement. Such an endeavor would have been impossible without the excellent work done by the Barcelona team that organized and hosted our first International Social Entrepreneurship Research Conference (ISERC), as well as the generous sponsorship of the Anselmo Rubiralta Center for Globalization and Strategy at the IESE Business School.

Obviously a handbook such as this would have come to nothing without the contribution of the many scholars who participated in the meeting and subsequently contributed to this handbook. They are testimony to the fact that there is already a growing body of academic scholars conducting academically rigorous research work.

### **Antecedents and development of the field**

In many ways, SE as a field of study is in startup mode. The creation of a new field of study is exciting work and to that end, there have been prelaunch activities. For example, some of the elements of what we call the field of SE research were acquired from studies of nonprofit leadership and management and the research being conducted at the intersection of social issues (including environmental issues) and management. Some of the studies on the nonprofit sector examined how business-like practices were being used to achieve their notewor-

thy objectives. Other studies focused on the revenue generating strategies of nonprofit organizations. Studies categorized as social issues management focused on the efforts of large multinational corporations and their corporate social responsibility programs and performance. None of these antecedents however discussed the creation of new organizations.

The extensive literature on entrepreneurship has only recently embraced the idea that entrepreneurial actors may be driven by more than a profit motive. Some scholars have discussed the role of entrepreneurship in economic development. In our mind, all of these efforts are the primordial soup out of which scholarship about SE has risen.

Throughout this primordial stage, there were several papers written that declared the arrival of a new set of ideas. Our scan of the previous work in this area uncovered a handful of academic articles that used the term 'social entrepreneurship' and were published in peer-reviewed journals between 1990 and 2004. During this period, several interesting books on the subject also appeared. Many reports have appeared on-line that describe small scale surveys of social ventures in various regions. These reports and the books have provided important and influential contributions to the discussion but might not meet the rigorous standards necessary to push forward knowledge in an academic context.

## **The contents of this volume**

The objective of the conference and this book is to stimulate scholarly discourse. In 1999 Paul Hirsch and Daniel Levin wrote a wonderful paper on the life cycle of scholarly constructs in which they describe the tension between researchers who advocate broad 'umbrella constructs' and researchers who prefer narrowly defined issues and assume the role of 'validity police' (Hirsch and Levin, 1999). They further describe how academic constructs undergo different phases from an initial phase of excitement, through a phase of validity checks and then one where typologies are dominant, before they either collapse or become permanent. Applying their insights to the evolution of SE as an academic field we are clearly now in the 'emerging excitement' phase. Over the last five years SE has received increasing attention from many different sources – elites and politicians such as Tony Blair, businesspeople such as e-Bay founder Jeff Skoll, and institutions such as the World Economic Forum.

Table 1.1 Definitions of social entrepreneurship concepts within this volume

Author/s	Ch.	Title	Definition
Austin	3	Three avenues for social entrepreneurship research	' <b>Social entrepreneurship</b> is innovative, social value creating activity that can occur within or across the nonprofit, business, and public sectors.'
Cho	4	Politics, values and social entrepreneurship: a critical appraisal	'...a quite general working definition of <b>social entrepreneurship</b> : a set of institutional practices combining the pursuit of financial objectives with the pursuit and promotion of substantive and terminal values.'
Perrini/ Vurro	5	Social entrepreneurship: Innovation and social change across theory and practice	'... <b>social entrepreneurs</b> are change promoters in society; they pioneer innovation within the social sector through the entrepreneurial quality of a breaking idea, their capacity building aptitude, and their ability to concretely demonstrate the quality of the idea and to measure social impacts.' 'We define <b>SE</b> as a dynamic process created and managed by an individual or team (the innovative social entrepreneur), which strives to exploit social innovation with an entrepreneurial mindset and a strong need for achievement, in order to create new social value in the market and community at large.'
Robinson	7	Navigating social and institutional barriers to markets: How social entrepreneurs identify and evaluate opportunities	'...I define <b>social entrepreneurship</b> as a <i>process</i> that includes: the identification of a specific social problem and a specific solution... to address it; the evaluation of the social impact, the business model and the sustainability of the venture; and the creation of a social mission-oriented <i>for-profit</i> or a business-oriented <i>nonprofit</i> entity that pursues the double (or triple) bottom line.'

Table 1.1 Definitions of social entrepreneurship concepts within this volume – *continued*

Author/s	Ch. Title	Definition
Mair/ Noboa	8 Social entrepreneurship: How intentions to create a social venture are formed	'...we define <b>social entrepreneurship</b> as the innovative use of resource combinations to pursue opportunities aiming at the creation of organizations and/or practices that yield and sustain social benefits.'
Hockerts	10 Entrepreneurial opportunity in social purpose business ventures	' <b>Social purpose business ventures</b> are hybrid enterprises straddling the boundary between the for-profit business world and social mission-driven public and nonprofit organizations. Thus they do not fit completely in either sphere.'
Desa/ Kotha	11 Ownership, mission and environment: An exploratory analysis into the evolution of a technology social venture	'TSVs [ <b>technology social ventures</b> ]... develop and deploy technology-driven solutions to address social needs in a financially sustainable manner... TSVs address the twin cornerstones of social entrepreneurship – ownership (financial return) and mission (social impact) using advanced technology.'
Haugh	12 Social enterprise: beyond economic outcomes and individual returns	' <b>Social enterprise</b> is a collective term for a range of organizations that trade for a social purpose. They adopt one of a variety of different legal formats but have in common the principles of pursuing business-led solutions to achieve social aims, and the reinvestment of surplus for community benefit. Their objectives focus on socially desired, nonfinancial goals and their outcomes are the nonfinancial measures of the implied demand for and supply of services.'
Clifford/ Dixon	14 Green-Works: A model for combining social and ecological entrepreneurship	'... the term " <b>ecopreneur</b> " ... [defines] an ecopreneurial organization as one that is a " <i>system-transforming, socially</i>

Table 1.1 Definitions of social entrepreneurship concepts within this volume – *continued*

Author/s	Ch. Title	Definition
Seelos/Ganly/ Mair	15 Social entrepreneurs directly contribute to global development goals.	<p><i>committed...break-through venture</i>", a definition that seems to encompass both ecological and social enterprise. However [this term] draws the focus too narrowly upon the environmental aspects, and we therefore apply the term "<b>social ecopreneur</b>" ... to encompass the triple drivers of these organizations: environmental, social and economic, the latter being inherent in the concept of entrepreneurship.'</p> <p>The Schwab Foundation [source of the study population] defines a <b>social entrepreneur</b> as someone who [among other things]: 'identifies and applies practical solutions to social problems...; innovates by finding a new product, service or approach...; focuses... on social value creation...; resists being trapped by the constraints of ideology or discipline; [and] has a vision, but also a well-thought out roadmap as to how to attain the goal.'</p>

The emerging excitement surrounding the topic of SE is evident in the large number of definitions that are currently used to describe the phenomenon. This is also reflected by the variety of definitions present in this volume (Table 1.1).

The proliferation of definitions, and also different naming conventions, mirrors the multiple facets of the phenomenon. Narrowing SE down to a uniformly agreed upon definition would probably make it applicable only to a limited set of problems and issues. As Albert Cho points out in Chapter 4 of this book, restrictive definitions at this early stage seem to cause more problems than they solve, 'not least because the research community continues to explore new forms and avenues for SE'.

A look at the different papers presented here also reveals pluralism not only in terms of definition but also in terms of particular themes covered.

The chapters in Part I are generally concerned with setting an agenda for future research; they attempt an overall analysis of what has already been written in the field of SE and offer suggestions for new theoretical directions.

- **James Austin** (Chapter 3) proposes three areas for future research: comparative analysis along five possible dimensions of time, place, form, actor and practice; studies of SE in the corporate sector; and studies of collaborations in SE such as social purpose alliances and networks. To conclude, Austin suggests interdisciplinary research as a fruitful path towards achieving these aims.
- **Albert Cho** (Chapter 4) stresses the importance of taking politics and values into consideration when researching SE. He maintains a deliberately broad definition of the phenomenon but also points out that a deconstruction of the term 'social' is integral to understanding what we mean by the term 'social entrepreneurship'. Cho offers an important critique of SE and warns against conceptualizing it as a panacea for what ails society. He argues that relying on SE to plug the gaps left open by markets or social welfare systems avoids a more discursively mediated process in the broader sphere which could lead to more inclusive and integrated systemic solutions.
- **Francesco Perrini and Clodia Vurro** (Chapter 5) begin by asking: what is SE? They examine the literature to date, extracting what they believe to be the essential elements of the social entrepreneurial process and identifying the differences from what could be called 'business' or traditional entrepreneurship. A large number of socially

entrepreneurial ventures are then analyzed and the commonalities mapped to each of these essential elements to produce a descriptive framework of the SE process. The authors conclude that, while most studies to date have focused on separate elements of the process such as opportunity recognition and organizational form, a fruitful area of research might be to explore the links and relationships between these elements.

Part II concentrates on an area of research derived from existing entrepreneurship theory: that of opportunity. The chapters represented here offer an empirical approach which examines the sociological aspects behind the exploitation of social entrepreneurial opportunities and a conceptual paper theorizing the behavioral impetus which initiates such exploitation in the first place.

- **Jeffrey Robinson** (Chapter 7) examines the interplay between the economic, social and institutional barriers to market entry for social entrepreneurs and how these impact on the evaluation of entrepreneurial opportunities. He brings an important sociological dimension to bear on the relationships among three main factors: the decision to enter a particular market, the social networks in which the entrepreneur and the initiative are embedded and the types of institutions (both formal such as laws, and informal such as language and culture) that exist (or do not exist) which can help or hinder the development of the initiative. These observations and analyses are born out by the in-depth study of six social ventures.
- **Johanna Mair and Ernesto Noboa** (Chapter 8) draw on established literature in the fields of behavioral psychology and entrepreneurship as well as anecdotal evidence on social entrepreneurs to postulate a model for the formation of intentions to create a social venture. They suggest that such intentions develop from a perception of desirability which, in turn, is affected by emotional and cognitive attitudes such as empathy and moral judgment, combined with perceptions of feasibility, which are backed by enabling factors such as self-efficacy and social support.

In Part III we turn to the structures, strategies and outcomes of social entrepreneurial ventures, in other words: how do social entrepreneurs turn opportunities into successful initiatives, what are the benefits they generate and whom do they serve?

- Focusing on ‘social purpose business ventures’, typically mission-driven and socially innovative for-profit businesses, **Kai Hockerts** (Chapter 10) identifies three main sources of social entrepreneurial opportunity: activism, self help and philanthropy. Each of these provides an economic and a social value proposition which supports the entrepreneurial intention to turn an idea into a reality. His framework suggests that different sources of opportunity might lead to different operational models and strategies and could provide fertile ground for further research.
- **Geoffrey Desa and Suresh Kotha** (Chapter 11) study the evolution of projects within a startup technology social venture, Benetech in California, to uncover ways in which such a venture manages technology in a resource limited environment. Their findings suggest that, as the organization evolves, sources of opportunity shift from the experience, networks and resources available to the founder toward an interaction with the socio-political dynamic – the activist, philanthropic and volunteer communities – and the necessity of developing long term relationships with stakeholders, often entailing a parallel evolution in the organization’s mission.
- In a longitudinal study of six social enterprises in rural north-east Scotland, **Helen Haugh** (Chapter 12) observes and records the economic, social and environmental outcomes generated by these initiatives over time. Her findings indicate that, not only do such initiatives generate direct benefits but also indirect economic, social and environmental benefits such as raising the skill level of individuals in the local community and an increased sense of empowerment and overall community vibrancy. Haugh’s work correlates the positive impacts with the outcomes created by social enterprises and suggests that this approach to exploiting market opportunities in a resource poor environment offers a valuable tool for promoting social and economic regeneration.

Part IV broadens the scope of this volume to integrate sustainability and the environment into the discussion and should be taken as indicative of the many different approaches and lenses with which to view this complex phenomenon.

- **Anne Clifford and Sarah Dixon** (Chapter 14) analyze the business model of an environmental-social enterprise, GreenWorks in London, to uncover the strategies and processes that help it to balance a triple

bottom line. Based on their observations and analysis the authors conclude that successful 'ecopreneurship' is related to the mission-driven values and ideals of the founder and to creating networks of mutually benefiting stakeholders.

- ***Christian Seelos, Kate Ganly and Johanna Mair*** (Chapter 15) propose that social entrepreneurs are making valuable contributions to achieving the Millennium Development Goals proposed by the United Nations in 2000. Their study analyzes 73 initiatives worldwide and reveals that 68 per cent of these initiatives are impacting one or more of the goals and that 60 per cent of this group are operating in the countries with the lowest levels of human development where such an impact is most needed and can have the greatest effect. The authors conclude by suggesting that, with their talent for combining scarce resources and creating value networks under the harshest of conditions, such social entrepreneurs could provide a novel set of partners for multilateral development agencies who are struggling to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the target year of 2015.

The chapters in this volume represent a broad range of subject areas and theoretical perspectives within SE research. However, to move forward as a field of academic discovery SE will have to face a validity challenge. We do not mean to imply that convergence to unified paradigm is needed here but rather more rigorous research that also captures the complexity of the phenomenon. Going deeper into the motivations, structures and outcomes of SE will provide a special challenge.

### **Directions for the future of SE research**

This book consists mainly of conceptual papers and studies based on a qualitative research design. We hope that the next volume resulting from the second International Social Entrepreneurship Research Conference will take on the validity challenge by incorporating different methods and more robust theoretical foundations. We believe that SE is in a great position to face validity challenges as it attracts the interest of outstanding scholars and receives the support of practitioners who consistently provide us with reality checks.

Is SE an important area of scholarship? In this volume, we make the case for the importance of this research and invite others to join us. We believe that this research is significant and important for several

reasons. First, we believe it is essential to furthering scholarship across the disciplines of sociology, economics, political science or psychology. This is achieved by the development of conceptual, theoretical and empirical papers that challenge the prevailing constructs and ideas in a changing society.

Second, we see the potential for scholarship in SE to influence business schools. Business schools which are concerned about corporate social responsibility will also benefit from encouraging their students and stakeholders to become involved in social entrepreneurial activity. By understanding the phenomenon we can bring a new perspective to the existing theories of organizations, strategy, marketing, finance and entrepreneurship.

Third, we believe that this research has great social relevance. Conducting research in the area of SE will have practical implications that may influence the outcomes of social entrepreneurs and those that support or fund them. We hope that this has an impact on the significant issues these actors are attempting to address.

Recently, scholars have lamented that there is a lack of research in top-tier journals that demonstrates the social impact of organizations (Hinnings and Greenwood, 2002; Margolis and Walsh, 2003; Walsh, Weber and Margolis, 2003). Perrow (2000) has argued that organization theory could be reenergized by concepts and perspectives from economic sociology and social movement theory. We believe that SE is relevant to both of these arguments. SE certainly answers the call for more social issues-related research. There are real phenomena to investigate and the stakes are high (Wood, 1991a; 1991b).

Our efforts in convening the first International Social Entrepreneurship Research Conference have moved the field forward by demonstrating that rigorous research can be done in this field. Beyond this volume, we are confident that there are many more questions to be asked and answered by scholars from a variety of backgrounds. We offer both contextual and topical ideas for future research below.

### *Contexts*

1. *Early stage* – the new social venture creation process, the challenges faced by the startup and the sustainability of the social venture.
2. *Growth and scale* – the growth and scaling of social ventures.
3. *International ventures* – the social venture across different national and institutional contexts; social ventures that operate in several nations.

### Topics

1. *Innovation* – What types of social impact innovations are developed in social ventures? Where do they come from? How are they implemented?
2. *Performance metrics* – How do social entrepreneurs understand success and which measures do they use to assess their performance? What are the possibilities and limits of approaches such as the social return on investment (SROI) analysis?
3. *Social venture capital markets* – Are the financing mechanisms and criteria for social venture capital different from those from traditional venture capital? What theories might explain the underdevelopment of the social venture capital markets?
4. *Demographics* – What are the typical sectors social ventures emerge in? Are there differences by country? What is the typical size, growth and ownership structure?
5. *Networks* – Can the characteristics of social networks influence the sustainability of social entrepreneurial ventures?
6. *Public policy* – In what way would policy measures differ, if at all, for facilitating the sustainability of social entrepreneurial ventures?
7. *Values* – What role can values (ethical or moral) play in ensuring the sustainability of newly formed ventures?
8. *Strategic considerations* – How do social ventures establish their value net? Do social ventures require specific resource strategies?
9. *Organizational development* – What role do systems and processes play in ensuring the sustainability of the social venture?
10. *Governance* – What role do governance mechanisms play in ensuring the sustainability of the social entrepreneurial venture over time?
11. *Exit* – What are typical exit strategies for social ventures? How do these differ from traditional ventures? How can social ventures maintain their mission beyond the exit of the founding team?
12. *Sustainable development* – How can SE play a role in sustainable development?

What is required to move the field forward is a greater number of scholars who wish to engage in the activity of building up SE as a field of study. We admire our colleagues in strategic management who, 30 years ago, were part of a vanguard of researchers establishing a new perspective for the study of business organizations. As we look forward to the second International Social Entrepreneurship Research Conference at

New York University, we are pleased to know that there are others who are willing to take this path with us and look forward to the journey ahead.

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