



Social entrepreneurship research: A source of explanation, prediction, and delight

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurship, as a practice and a field for scholarly investigation, provides a unique opportunity to challenge, question, and rethink concepts and assumptions from different fields of management and business research. This article puts forward a view of social entrepreneurship as a process that catalyzes social change and addresses important social needs in a way that is not dominated by direct financial benefits for the entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurship is seen as differing from other forms of entrepreneurship in the relatively higher priority given to promoting social value and development versus capturing economic value. To stimulate future research the authors introduce the concept of embeddedness as a nexus between theoretical perspectives for the study of social entrepreneurship.

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1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship as a practice that integrates economic *and* social value creation has a long heritage and a global presence. The global efforts of Ashoka, founded by Bill Drayton in 1980, to provide seed funding for entrepreneurs with a social vision (<http://www.ashoka.org>); the multiple activities of Grameen Bank, established by Professor Muhammad Yunus in 1976 to eradicate poverty and empower women in Bangladesh (<http://www.grameen-info.org>); or the use of arts to develop community programs in Pittsburgh by the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, founded by Bill Strickland in 1968 (<http://www.manchesterguild.org>): these are all contemporary manifestations of a phenomenon that finds its historical precedents in, among other things, the values of Victorian Liberalism.

While entrepreneurial phenomena aimed at economic development have received a great amount of scholarly attention, entrepreneurship as a process to foster social progress has only recently attracted the interest of researchers (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004; Dees & Elias, 1998). Similar to entrepreneurship in its early days as a field of scholarly endeavor, social entrepreneurship research is still largely phenomenon-driven. Existing most studies are typically based on anecdotal evidence or case studies, applying diverse research designs and methods and introducing insights from other disciplines. Like entrepreneurship, which even today lacks a unifying paradigm (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), the term “social entrepreneurship” has taken on a variety of meanings (Dees, 1998).

The concept of social entrepreneurship is still poorly defined and its boundaries to other fields of study remain fuzzy. While to some this may appear to be a problem, we see it as a unique opportunity for researchers from different fields and disciplines, such as entrepreneurship, sociology and organizational

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theory, to challenge and rethink central concepts and assumptions.

This article aims to unveil the core of social entrepreneurship in order to guide future research. Our basic premise is that if social entrepreneurship is to become a structured field of research, an effort must be made to clarify and define key concepts and constructs. To this end, we draw on practical examples of social entrepreneurship to identify and elaborate on the essential components.

While the view of social entrepreneurship put forward in this article is far from complete, we see it as an important first step to enhance our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon and facilitate future research. We contend, with Weick (1995), that a good theory explains, predicts, and delights. This article represents an effort to stimulate research that goes beyond descriptive studies to realize the promise of social entrepreneurship as a source of explanation, prediction, and delight.

The article is organized as follows. First, we examine the meaning of the terms “social” and “entrepreneurship”, which constitute the essence of the phenomenon. We offer a working definition of social entrepreneurship and elaborate on its distinctive characteristics. In a next step, we portray social entrepreneurship as a fascinating playground for different theories and literatures. In particular, we build on sociology and organizational theory and look at how structuration theory and theories on institutional entrepreneurs, social capital and social movements, may contribute to the understanding of social entrepreneurship. We conclude with some questions for future research that could define the future of social entrepreneurship as an area of research.

2. On the concept of social entrepreneurship

The concept of social entrepreneurship means different things to different people and researchers (Dees, 1998). One group of researchers refers to social entrepreneurship as not-for-profit initiatives in search of alternative funding strategies, or management schemes to create social value (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skiller, 2003; Boschee, 1998). A second group of researchers understands it as the socially responsible practice of commercial businesses engaged in cross-sector partnerships (Sagawa & Segal, 2000; Waddock, 1988). And a third group views social entrepreneurship as a means to alleviate social problems and catalyze social transformation (Alvord et al., 2004).

It is important to note the conceptual differences between definitions. Definitions of social *entrepreneur-*

ship typically refer to a process or behavior; definitions of social *entrepreneurs* focus instead on the founder of the initiative; and definitions of social *enterprises* refer to the tangible outcome of social entrepreneurship. Despite the large number of definitions, systematic attempts to map initiatives and definitions are rare (see Boschee (1995) and Waddock and Post (1995), for two exceptions). While complementary definitions, each focusing on different aspects of the phenomenon, are not necessarily an impediment in the search for theory, we still do not have a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon and lack a clear understanding of how social entrepreneurship should be studied.

This article sets out to elucidate the meaning of social entrepreneurship in order to facilitate further research. Building on established research in entrepreneurship and recent studies on social entrepreneurship, we propose a working definition of the concept. We view social entrepreneurship broadly, as a process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change and/or address social needs.

Definitions of entrepreneurial phenomena are hardly able to capture the whole picture. The definition offered in this article aims to reflect some of our basic assumptions. First, we view social entrepreneurship as a *process* of creating value by combining resources in new ways. Second, these resource combinations are intended primarily to explore and exploit opportunities to create social value by stimulating social change or meeting social needs. And third, when viewed as a process, social entrepreneurship involves the offering of services and products but can also refer to the creation of new organizations. Importantly, social entrepreneurship, as viewed in this article, can occur equally well in a new organization or in an established organization, where it may be labeled “social intrapreneurship”. Like intrapreneurship in the business sector, social intrapreneurship can refer to either new venture creation or entrepreneurial process innovation. The organizational context in which social entrepreneurship occurs, i.e., newly created or established organizations, sets it apart from other more loosely structured initiatives aimed at social change, such as activist movements.

In the next paragraphs, we will elaborate on the definition put forward in this article by systematically examining the two defining terms of the concept, namely, “social” and “entrepreneurship”. This approach will allow us to capture the essence of social entrepreneurship and explore potential differences between social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship in the business sector.

2.1. The social element in the definition

Possibly, the greatest challenge in understanding social entrepreneurship lies in defining the boundaries of what we mean by *social*. At first glance, social entrepreneurship might be thought to differ from entrepreneurship in the business sector in that the latter is associated with the profit motive, whereas social entrepreneurship is an expression of altruism. We argue against such a dichotomous line of thinking for two reasons. First, although social entrepreneurship is often based on ethical motives and moral responsibility, the motives for social entrepreneurship can also include less altruistic reasons such as personal fulfillment. Second, and more importantly, entrepreneurship in the business sector also has a social aspect. As Venkataraman puts it, “entrepreneurship is particularly productive from a social welfare perspective when, in the process of pursuing selfish ends, entrepreneurs also enhance social wealth by creating new markets, new industries, new technology, new institutional forms, new jobs, and net increases in real productivity” (1997: 133). While the profit motive might be “a central engine” of entrepreneurship, it does not preclude other motivations. Shane, Locke, and Collins (2003), for example, demonstrate the importance of motivation to the study of entrepreneurship.

What then is the distinctive social domain of social entrepreneurship? Analysis of three successful cases of social entrepreneurship around the globe—the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the Aravind Eye Hospital in India and Sekem in Egypt—reveals a common feature: all three creatively combine resources—resources that often they themselves do not possess—to address a social problem and thereby alter existing social structures. The Grameen Bank, founded by Professor Muhammad Yunus in 1976, has changed the life of millions. By bringing financial services to the poor, particularly women, it helps them establish profitable businesses to fight poverty (Yunus, 1999). Over the last twenty years, the Aravind Eye Hospital, established in 1976 by Dr. Venkataswamy in India, has offered eye-care services and cataract surgery to cure blindness at a very small fraction of the cost of such services in the developed world (<http://www.aravind.com>). Finally, Sekem, created by Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish in 1977 as a social venture, is today a multi-business. It not only creates economic, social, and cultural value, but has also had a significant impact on Egyptian society. It was instrumental in reducing pesticide use in Egyptian cotton fields by 90% and has created institutions such as schools, a university, an adult education center, and a

medical center (Seelos & Mair, 2005a). In sum, these examples show how social entrepreneurship catalyzes social transformation by meeting social needs. Value creation in all three cases embraces both social and economic aspects. The main focus, however, is on social value, while economic value creation is seen as a necessary condition to ensure financial viability.

It is important to note that while the above examples of social entrepreneurship in developing countries have been deliberately chosen to illustrate the global dimension of the phenomenon, social entrepreneurship also occurs and has been studied in the developed world. A large number of studies have actually centered on community development in the United States, Canada and the UK.

2.2. The entrepreneurial element in the definition

While early studies centered on the question of how the personality or background of the entrepreneur determines entrepreneurial behavior today it is widely recognized that the focus of entrepreneurship research should be the entrepreneurial process or behavior. An increasing number of researchers are studying entrepreneurial processes outside of the business sector and the role of entrepreneurship in society. Finally, although the field is still characterized by multiple paradigms, the notion of opportunities has been widely accepted as a defining element of entrepreneurship.

Research on social entrepreneurship has to some extent replicated the empirical and theoretical evolution of entrepreneurship. Researchers have focused on the personality of the social entrepreneur, the particular behavior or process involved, or the social opportunity in order to emphasize its entrepreneurial nature and thus differentiate it from other phenomena. A popular—early—stream of research has focused on the *personality of the social entrepreneur*. According to studies following this approach, social entrepreneurs are characterized by very special traits (Drayton, 2002), special leadership skills (Thompson, Alvy, & Lees, 2000), a passion to realize their vision (Bornstein, 1998), and a strong ethical fiber (Drayton, 2002). Despite the ongoing momentum of research aimed at identifying distinctive entrepreneurial individual differences, we are skeptical whether this approach will elucidate key differences between social entrepreneurs and other actors. It has been repeatedly pointed out that “who the entrepreneur is” is not the right question to ask (Gartner, 1988). Building on a behavioral tradition in entrepreneurship, we argue that examining the set of activities underlying social entrepreneurship as a

process may be a more fruitful approach. A number of researchers have emphasized the entrepreneurial process, i.e., “how” entrepreneurs act, as a way of differentiating between social initiatives and social “entrepreneurial” initiatives (Dees, 1998). Finally, a recent stream of research has focused on the “social value creating” nature of the opportunities entrepreneurially discovered and exploited, in order to distinguish social entrepreneurship from other entrepreneurial phenomena (Guclu, Dees, & Anderson, 2002).

2.3. Distinctive features of social entrepreneurship

A number of authors have emphasized the not-for-profit nature of social entrepreneurial activities as a distinctive feature of social entrepreneurship. We argue that social entrepreneurship can take place equally well on a for-profit basis. Our examination of various for-profit and not-for-profit initiatives suggests that the choice of set-up is typically dictated by the nature of the social needs addressed, the amount of resources needed, the scope for raising capital, and the ability to capture economic value. The following examples illustrate this pattern.

The Institute for One World Health (IOWH), founded by Dr. Victoria Hale in 2000, is the world’s first not-for-profit pharmaceutical company and develops drugs for neglected diseases (<http://www.iowh.org>). It has challenged traditional assumptions within the industry that seemed incompatible with providing medicines to those most in need in developing countries. It has redesigned the whole value chain of drug development and delivery (Seelos & Mair, 2005b). Not-for-profit status allowed IOWH to raise the necessary capital to set up the operation and ensure other critical resources such as compounds and expert time. The specific business model that Dr. Hale has chosen for IOWH and the particular (basic social) needs IOWH targets clearly favor the adoption of a not-for-profit operating scheme.

The business model that Muhammad Yunus developed for the Grameen Bank or that Dr. Abouleish chose for Sekem, on the other hand, fits perfectly with a for-profit scheme. Both the Grameen Bank and Sekem use profits generated by their main activities to engage in new social ventures: Grameen has launched ventures such as Grameen Telecom or Grameen Energy, while Sekem has launched several social ventures, including a university and a hospital. In sum, whether social entrepreneurs choose a not-for-profit or a for-profit vehicle often depends on the particular business model and the specific social needs addressed.

Rather than profit versus not-for-profit, we argue that the main difference between entrepreneurship in the business sector and social entrepreneurship lies in the relative priority given to social wealth creation versus economic wealth creation. In business entrepreneurship, social wealth is a by-product of the economic value created (Venkataraman, 1997); in social entrepreneurship, the main focus is on social value creation. However this does not mean that social entrepreneurial initiatives should not embrace an “earned income” strategy, quite the opposite as the examples described previously aptly demonstrate. For the Grameen Bank, creating economic value is critical to ensure that it is able to continue with its mission, namely to change the life of the poorest of the poor by providing loans. The same holds for the Aravind Eye Hospital (to continue providing eye services and cataract surgery for the poor), for Sekem (to continue building a better Egypt), and for IOWH (to develop drugs to fight neglected diseases in developing countries). In social entrepreneurship, social wealth creation is the primary objective, while economic value creation, in the form of earned income, is necessary to ensure the sustainability of the initiative and financial self-sufficiency.

An additional distinctive feature of social entrepreneurship lies in the limited potential to capture the value created. Social entrepreneurs who address basic social needs, such as food, shelter or education, very often find it difficult to capture economic value because, although the “customers” are willing, often they are unable to pay even a small part of the price of the products and services provided (Seelos & Mair, 2005a).

Research on social entrepreneurship has clearly drawn on and benefited from previous work on entrepreneurship. Approaches and constructs stemming from research on entrepreneurship in the business sector shaped the first attempts to conceptualize social entrepreneurship. We believe that now it is time to go one step further: the rise of social entrepreneurship, both as a practice and as a theoretical endeavor, provides a unique opportunity for the field of entrepreneurship to challenge, question, and rethink important concepts and assumptions in its effort towards a unifying paradigm.

3. Perspectives for studying social entrepreneurship

The variegated nature and multiple expressions of social entrepreneurship make it a fascinating playground for different perspectives and literatures. A common feature of emergent fields of research is the absence of clear theoretical boundaries and the need to

coalesce thinking from other disciplines. Undoubtedly, this involves the risk that social entrepreneurship “may never gain the consensus and legitimacy that academics seek and may be viewed merely as a venue in which other disciplinary perspectives may be tested” (Busenitz et al., 2003). We believe, however, that knowledge on social entrepreneurship can only be enhanced by the use of a variety of theoretical lenses and a combination of different research methods. Rather than providing an exhaustive list of perspectives, we aver that social entrepreneurship has different facets and varies according to the socioeconomic and cultural environment. Viewing social entrepreneurship as a process resulting from the continuous interaction between social entrepreneurs and the context in which they and their activities are embedded, we bring together insights from sociology, political science and organization theory to enrich our theoretical understanding of the subject.

In a seminal article, Granovetter (1985) argued that economic environments are embedded in social and structural relationships that modify neoclassical predictions of atomistic economic behavior. We believe that social entrepreneurship, like entrepreneurship in the business sector, cannot be understood in a purely economic sense but needs to be examined in light of the social context, and the local environment. Thus, we see the concept of embeddedness as the nexus between the ideas and theoretical perspectives introduced in the following sections: structuration theory, institutional entrepreneurship, social capital, and social movements.

3.1. Structuration theory

The concept of embeddedness implies that it is impossible to detach the agent (social entrepreneur) from the structure (community, society, etc.). One of the issues that has received most attention in recent decades in sociological literature is the duality of agency and structure, and the integration of the two (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1979, 1984).

The examples of the Aravind Eye Hospital in India or Sekem in Egypt illustrate this duality of agency and structure. While the context (structure) enabled Dr. Venkataswamy and Dr. Abouleish (agents) to act, their actions altered the socioeconomic context (structure). In response to this apparent dichotomy and continuous dynamism, Giddens’ (1979, 1984) structuration theory is an attempt to articulate a process-oriented theory that treats structure as both a product of and a constraint upon human action. Giddens’ theory may help us to better understand how social entrepreneurship comes into being by directing our attention to a fundamental

unit of analysis: the interaction between the social entrepreneur and the context. That interaction is crucial to understanding the process of social entrepreneurship. Thus, structuration theory provides a promising lens to examine how the context enables and constrains the appearance of social entrepreneurship and how social change occurs.

3.2. Institutional entrepreneurship

DiMaggio (1988) introduced the notion of institutional entrepreneurship as an attempt to explain how institutions arise or change. Institutional entrepreneurs are actors who have an interest in modifying institutional structures or in creating new ones. They leverage resources to create new institutions or transform existing ones (Fligstein, 1997).

The foregoing examples of social entrepreneurship also allow us to visualize how the activities of the founders of Grameen Bank or Sekem catalyzed social change by altering long-established institutions or organizational fields. Indeed, social entrepreneurs’ ability to change norms (e.g., money cannot be loaned without collateral, much less to the poor) may turn out to be even more significant than the initial problems that they set out to address. Accordingly, we argue that an institutional entrepreneurship perspective is a promising way to understand the role of social entrepreneurship in changing or giving birth to norms, institutions and structure. Furthermore, it may be an interesting lens through which to study the emergence of social entrepreneurship; for example, by examining the conflict between the values of social entrepreneurs and their perceptions of reality or, in institutional entrepreneurship terminology, between social entrepreneurs’ beliefs and their shared norms (i.e., institutions).

We also see potential for the social entrepreneurship phenomenon to inform theory on institutional entrepreneurship. Neither DiMaggio’s (1988) nor Fligstein’s (1997) theory of institutional entrepreneurship are explicit about the paradox of embedded agency (Holm, 1995). Highly embedded actors may be conditioned by the very institution and therefore not consider changing existing rules. Embeddedness might reflect both an enabling and a constraining condition at the same time. Although it is easier for highly embedded social entrepreneurs to ensure access to resources and win legitimacy, less embedded actors are more likely to engage in social ventures that challenge rules and norms, as they are not “locked” into the existing structure. Clearly, an answer as to whether such a paradox exists and how to resolve it will require further research.

3.3. Social capital

Social capital is broadly described by researchers as actual and potential assets embedded in relationships among individuals, communities, networks and societies (Burt, 1997; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Sociologists and organizational theorists have elaborated three highly interrelated dimensions of social capital: structural capital—the structure of the overall network of relations (Burt, 1992); relational capital—the kind and quality of an actor's personal relations (Granovetter, 1992); and cognitive capital—the degree to which an individual shares a common code and systems of meaning within a community (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The third, or cognitive, dimension also refers to how normative and mimetic forces shape behavior, and its implications are therefore consistent with our previous discussion. In what follows we will elaborate on how the first two dimensions may contribute to the study of social entrepreneurship.

The structural dimension refers to the overall pattern of connections between actors—that is, whom one reaches (Burt, 1992). Various authors have emphasized the importance of networks for social entrepreneurship. Structural capital defines the potential or possibilities that the social entrepreneur has to access information, resources and support. It is important to understand the structural dimension of social capital, how it can be built, increased and, most importantly, maintained, since it is one of the factors that will determine whether and to what extent social entrepreneurs are able to solve and alleviate social problems, and elevate them to the public sphere.

The relational dimension of social capital focuses on the quality of relationships, such as trust, respect and friendliness. There is growing evidence that when trust is built up between parties, they are more eager to engage in cooperative activity, through which further trust may be generated (Fukuyama, 1997). The Grameen Bank's credit delivery system is a good example. Borrowers are organized into small homogeneous groups, sharing responsibility for loans granted to other members of their group, and facilitating solidarity, as well as participatory interaction. It is important to understand how trust is created among the different members of the group, but also how trust between the members and the Grameen Bank is sustained.

Although the literature on social capital mainly emphasizes its positive consequences, social capital may also involve risks and less desirable effects. Previous research has identified four important negative

consequences: exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms (Portes, 1998).

Consider the characteristic of the Grameen Bank credit delivery system: it enhances solidarity. While solidarity is generally thought to be positive, in some circumstances it may backfire. Various authors have emphasized the downside of overembeddedness. For example, Gargiulo and Bernassi (1999) claimed that strong solidarity with ingroup members may result in overembeddedness, which reduces the flow of new ideas into the group and can result in parochialism and inertia.

3.4. Social movements

Social movement researchers have focused their efforts on four key issues: (1) political opportunities and threats; (2) resource mobilizing structures and active appropriation of sites for mobilization; (3) collective action frames and identity formation; and (4) established repertoires of contention and innovative collective action by challengers and their member opponents (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001).

Several insights from the social movements literature have been applied to the study of social entrepreneurship. Both social movements and social entrepreneurship are concerned with social transformation. Efforts by scholars working on social movements to understand the motivation behind the desire to bring about social change are highly relevant to the study of social entrepreneurship. Similarly, knowledge on the different tactics used by social movements—e.g., mobilization of people, protest, negotiation, etc. (Andrews, 2001)—may be useful for social entrepreneurship research and practice.

Finally, the social movements literature cautions about evaluating initiatives exclusively in terms of success or failure. Andrews stated that “success implies the attainment of specific, widely shared goals, but the goals of most social movements are contested by participants and observers. Goals also change over the course of a movement” (2001: 72). Applying these insights to assess outcome or performance of social entrepreneurship, one could argue that instead of focusing on the success or failure of a program or initiative, it would be better to start measuring degrees of success or failure, always bearing in mind the intended and unintended consequences of the initiative. This would allow us to study whether and how learning takes place in the process, and to find out how social entrepreneurs detect and manage problems and errors and, more importantly, whether they learn from those failures and change their behavior accordingly.

To enhance our knowledge of social entrepreneurship as a field of study and practice, it is necessary to consider the properties and purpose of the system in which social entrepreneurs are embedded, and also clarify their role within the system. Our purpose in this section has been to stress the importance of the continuous interaction between social entrepreneurs and the context in which they are embedded. This will help us to understand and explain why and how social change is possible.

4. Final remarks

The objective of this article has been to arouse academic curiosity for social entrepreneurship. We consider social entrepreneurship to be a particularly exciting and fruitful research topic and it is our hope that this article will bring us a step closer toward legitimizing and inspiring social entrepreneurship as a means to create social and economic value and as a field of research.

The working definition of social entrepreneurship put forward in this article is intended to facilitate a more detailed examination of the main components of social entrepreneurship, namely the social element and the entrepreneurial element. We suggested that further empirical and conceptual work is needed to establish a comprehensive picture of social entrepreneurship.

Many of the issues we have brought up in this article are typical of any emerging field of research: the need to draw boundaries so as to delimit scope and clarify whether it really is an independent field of research, and the need to identify the different levels of analysis, disciplines and literatures. To conclude, we will elaborate on topics and issues we consider important in order to advance our understanding of social entrepreneurship: social entrepreneurship as an independent field of research, assessing social performance and impact, and clarifying the role of embeddedness.

Probably one of the most controversial issues is whether social entrepreneurship is an *independent field of research*. Many studies on social entrepreneurship have adopted concepts and terminology used in the established entrepreneurship literature. Does this imply that social entrepreneurship is a sub-category of entrepreneurship, in which the social context provides a new and unusual setting in which to study and test entrepreneurial phenomena? In this article, we have tried to identify the distinctive domain of social entrepreneurship. We argued that social entrepreneurship differs from other forms of entrepreneurship in that it gives higher priority to social value creation—by

catalyzing social change and/or catering to social needs—than to value capture. We believe that social entrepreneurship deserves considerable attention as a field of research. It has enormous potential to inform and enhance the field of entrepreneurship, as it provides an excellent opportunity to challenge and rethink central concepts and assumptions.

Assessing *social performance and impact* is one of the greatest challenges for practitioners and researchers in social entrepreneurship. The real problem may not be the measurement per se, but how the measures may be used to “quantify” the performance and impact of social entrepreneurship. Many consider it very difficult, if not impossible, to quantify socio-economic, environmental and social effects. As Emerson pointed out, “for many of those active in the social sector, it has been taken as a virtual given that most elements of social value stand beyond measurement and quantification” (2003: 40). Yet it is necessary to make major efforts in this direction and to develop useful and meaningful measures that capture the impact of social entrepreneurship and reflect the objectives pursued. Clearly, more research and managerial practice is needed in order to establish social impact as an essential dimension of performance assessment.

We have repeatedly emphasized that social entrepreneurship takes on multiple forms, depending on socio-economic and cultural circumstances. Put differently, we pointed to the importance of the *concept of embeddedness* to the study of social entrepreneurship. A promising area of research lies in examining the enabling and/or constraining effects of embeddedness. A high level of embeddedness may inhibit the emergence of initiatives aimed at social change—particularly when those initiatives involve changing the rules of the game. This poses an interesting additional question: assuming that social entrepreneurship involves various stages, e.g., an intention formation stage, a start-up stage, a growth stage, a consolidation stage, etc., how does embeddedness affect social entrepreneurship at each of these various stages? One could argue that embeddedness has a positive effect on the ability of entrepreneurs to access and ensure critical resources and is therefore important during the start-up, development, or scaling out stage. On the other hand, it may have a negative effect during the intention formation stage, i.e., the phase when the entrepreneur decides whether or not to take on the challenge.

It is important to note that, given the early stage of the field, a wide variety of research questions requires further attention. Social entrepreneurship provides a fascinating playground for research drawing from

different perspectives and literatures. We conclude with a list of questions that provides only a snapshot of important issues. If context and embeddedness is so important, to what extent is it possible to transfer practices and scale out initiatives across geographic and community borders? Are some forms of organizing for social entrepreneurship better suited to address specific needs than others? How does social entrepreneurship differ in developed and developing countries? Can we observe geographical clusters with higher levels of social entrepreneurial activity, e.g., India and Bangladesh, or Brazil and Ecuador? If so, what explains the emergence of such clusters? Are there isomorphic forces within and across clusters? What institutional factors explain the emergence of social entrepreneurship and what theoretical lenses may help us understand those factors? What is the link between social entrepreneurship and sustainable development, and how can social entrepreneurship contribute to sustainable development?

It is our hope that the answers to these questions, and the further questions and answers to which they give rise, will help to consolidate social entrepreneurship as a fertile source of explanation, prediction and delight.

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