New perspectives about Social Entrepreneurship conceptualization

Objectives

Dees (1998) affirms that the social entrepreneurship stems from a singular species of genes of which the entrepreneur is a carrier. According to Mair and Martí (2006), social entrepreneurship represents a practice that integrates the generation of economic and social values and that holds a long and global heritage. As a phenomenon, entrepreneurship has come in for widespread consideration whether by research projects or by academics and in conjunction with entrepreneurship as a driver of social progress having become an attractive field of research (Dees & Elias, 1998; Alvord et al., 2004). Hence, and deriving from the global reach of entrepreneurship, some researchers have focused special attention on social entrepreneurship (Dees, 1998; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Mair and Martí, 2006), questioning the very nature of social entrepreneurship (Perado & McLean, 2006). According to Reis (1999) and Wallace (1999), this branch of entrepreneurship only represents a genre of the business activities specifically engaged in by non-profit organisations. In turn, Johnson (2000) perceives the sector in a more radical fashion and defines it as somewhat innovative and emerging to deal with the more complex social needs. We would then observe the difficulty of actually defining the very scope of entrepreneurship as Venkataraman (1997) identifies in arguing how attempting to define these practices may indeed turn out impossible and seeking to define social entrepreneurship an even more ambitious goal given its still relatively incipient status (Mair & Martí, 2006). Social entrepreneurship has thus emerged as an active area in research undertaken in recent decades (Choi & Majundar, 2014). Lead organisations in this field such as Ashoka, the Skoll and the Schwab Foundations have actively fostered social entrepreneurship through their interests in the characteristics and profiles of social entrepreneurs (Dacin et al., 2011). Furthermore, governments have also stepped up support for social entrepreneurship with the establishment of new organisations, new working models and encouraging new initiatives within the scope of social entrepreneurship. In recent decades, to a greater or lesser extent worldwide, university rooted entrepreneurship initiatives have flourished alongside the interest shown in them by researchers and reflecting in the profile attributed the theme in international journals (Choi & Majundar, 2014). However, despite all of the research undertaken on social

entrepreneurship, we did not identify any hitherto systematic review of the literature through recourse to bibliometric tools. Hence, with the objective of studying the intellectual structure to social entrepreneurship and identifying the geographic location of the authors studying this field in terms of both countries and institutions, we undertook this bibliometric analysis. The methodology adopted by this study enables us to tighten the focus of analysis still further on the academic orientations within the social entrepreneurship field and correspondingly identifying the main theoretical traditions to this approach while setting out how the different conceptions of this construct have evolved out of the traditional theories.

Literature review

Social entrepreneurship is closely bound up with undertaking initiatives that identify and explore viable and sustainable opportunities to provide solutions to leading social problems (Wallace, 1999). The viability of these initiatives gets evaluated according to the terms of their catalytic impact on the positive transformation of society (Dees, 1998). Within social learning processes (Bhawuk, 2008; Masgoret &Ward, 2006), entrepreneurial and leadership capacities prove particularly intriguing in terms of their capacity to bring about the sustainable development that transforms the lives of marginalised peoples in lesser developed countries worldwide (Alvord et al., 2004). Thus, the concept of social entrepreneurship holds different meanings to different researchers (Dees, 1998). One group of researchers refers to social entrepreneurship as non profit based initiatives that strive to enact alternative strategies and business models to create social value (Boschee, 1998; Austin et al., 2003). Another group of researchers, in turn, perceives this type of entrepreneurship as the inter-sectorial commercialisation of social responsibility practices (Waddock, 1988; Sagawa & Segal, 2000). Furthermore, yet another group of researchers grasps social entrepreneurship as something capable of alleviating social problems while at the same time serving as a catalyst for social transformation (Alvord et al., 2004). Despite the differences in the definitions, social entrepreneurship typically refers to a process or a behaviour; whilst the understanding of the social entrepreneur focuses on the founder/creator of the initiative along with the definition of social companies incorporating a tangible social entrepreneurship output (Mair & Martí, 2006).

Hence and broadly speaking worldwide, socially aware individuals have introduced and applied innovative business models to resolve social problems previously overlooked by companies, governmental and non governmental organisations (Zahra et al., 2009). These entrepreneurs have played a crucial role in improving adverse social conditions, especially in underdeveloped and emerging economies where the shortage of resources and corruption in the state structure and even in non governmental organisations seriously impact on the attention otherwise paid to serious social needs (Prahalad, 2005; Zahra et al., 2009). Social entrepreneurs also prove highly visible agents of change in developed economies where they apply innovative and low cost methods and strategies to resolve the most fracturing social problems (thus, poverty or gender inequality, for example) that challenge traditional solutions (Cox & Healey, 1998). In various countries, the movement towards opening the social service sector up to "market practices" (Salamon, 1999) has also fostered the desire to draw upon the efficiency of competitive markets to improve social performance (Zahra et al., 2000; Goerke, 2003). Different governments, faced by needs to drastically cut public expenditure on social services such as education and community development (Lasprogata and Cotton, 2003), have turned to this type of business activity in order to attempt to meet social needs.

Entrepreneurs, including those with a social based vocabulary, generally hold the ambitions to strive for multiple objectives and that inevitably include a diversified set of personal ambitions (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Baker et al., 2005). Traditional entrepreneurs are in large part driven by profit (Knight, 1921, Schumpeter, 1934; Kirzner, 1973) and their performance is normally measured according to their financial performance (Austin et al., 2006). Social entrepreneurs, however, very often strive after both social and economic objectives within the framework of achieving a unique opportunity (Dorado, 2006; Thompson & Doherty, 2006).

Methodology

This study deployed co-citation analysis of references both upstream and downstream to the references resulting from research. This involved analysis of co-citations of references both deriving from the research and references researched in accordance with the articles that they respectively cite. These co-citation analytical processes served to identify two networks of articles, one alluding to references about social entrepreneurship and a network containing the references underlying those resulting

from the research while we also determined the clustering of references through the appropriate analytical means.

We identically carried out analysis of the authors in terms of their nationality and academic affiliation based upon the number of articles published.

All of these analytical procedures made recourse to the VOSviewer software version 1.5.7 for the construction and visualization of bibliometric maps and correspondingly combining the VOS mapping technique with a strong visual component (van Eck & Waltman, 2009, 2010). The determination of the clusters and the respective networks of references was carried out in accordance with the methodologies previously adopted by van Eck & Noyons (2010) with their proven reliability in terms of mapping data constructed by the Multidimensional Scaling approach (van Eck, Waltman, & Berg, 2010).

Results

The initial sample of 204 articles was then reduced to those articles with at least ten citations, resulting in 43 articles. This set of 43 articles with at least 10 citations was cited in a total of 876 articles. Based on these articles, we carried out analysis of the co-citations in these 43 articles. The sample size was then trimmed back to 30 articles given that 13 articles did not contain any co-citation of any of the others. The co-citation analysis served to build the resulting co-citation network and group the 30 articles into clusters. Correspondingly, we find; cluster 1: social value, cluster 2: well-being embeddedness, cluster 3: internationalization and cluster 4: institutional.

With the objective of understanding the theoretically based references made by the 204 research articles, we undertook the analysis of all the bibliographiic references made by the respective interlinking network. We obtained a total of 9,172 bibliographic reference of which 56 were referenced by at least five citations. The articles with the greatest number of citations were the following: Mair & Marti (2006) with 67 citations, Austin et al. (2006) with 56 citations, Peredo & McLean (2006) with 45 citations, Alvord (2004) with 37 citations, and Weerawardena & Mort (2006) with 36 citations. With the exception of the article by Alvord (2004), published in a journal not included on the ISI Web of Science list of publications, all the remaining articles, in addition to being the most cited in the field of social entrepreneurship, are the most cited by articles in this field.

Implications and Value

In this article, we sought to set out the conceptual structure of social entrepreneurship. Whilst "entrepreneurship" remains difficult to define, social entrepreneurship proves correspondingly distant from attaining any consensually based definition. On the one hand, there are the intrinsic characteristics of the social entrepreneur and, on the other hand, there is the constant comparison with "commercial, profit motivated entrepreneurship" as well as the additional specific social contingencies that may trigger this type of entrepreneurship.

Within this framework, entrepreneurship has been identified not only as the motor driving economic growth but also the motive force behind swift growth in the most diverse sectors of activity. Through the bibliometric study carried out by this project, we strive to contribute towards a better understanding of the theoretical bases to the concept of "social entrepreneurship" as well as detailing the lead authors and the countries paying greatest attention to the efforts to construct an increasingly solid understanding of this emerging concept. We verify that social entrepreneurship may be grouped into four distinct approaches: social value, well-being embeddedness, internationalization and institutional. Broader and more extensive analysis of social entrepreneurship necessarily has to incorporate these four major perspectives. This thus becomes a work involving significant complexity even down to the perspectives of the actual research as regards a concept as intangible as social entrepreneurship. We may also report that the greatest interest in this concept arises out of Anglo-Saxon countries with the universities recording the largest number of publication still concentrated in just a few countries such as the United States, England, Canada and Australia.

Any research incurs its own limitations and this represents no exception as our sample only extended to entrepreneurship studies included in the Thomson/Reuters-ISI index and had we made recourse to other databases, our results would be wider reaching.

Nevertheless, we believe that this study holds important implications for the field of social entrepreneurship given its examination of co-citation data and recourse to a quantitative approach mapping the scientific publications, the intellectual structures and portraying the research trends within the scope of theories on social entrepreneurship.

Clearly, there are various dimensions open to analysis in the future. There would be particular interest deriving from examining the more recent and lesser quoted publications that ended up thereby excluded from our study. This would therefore report on and/or identify alternative theoretical clusters. Putting alternative methodologies into

practice would also complement the results reported here. Correspondingly, future studies might also consider the analytical alternatives, for example, articles published exclusively in journals dedicated to entrepreneurship and integrating specific analysis on the most recent works. These and other alternative methodological approaches may enrich our research understanding on the approaches making up social entrepreneurship and the connections existing between the various universities, academics and theoretical perspectives and positions.

Never overlooking economic reality, the social entrepreneurship approach should serve as a bridge between the economy and science. This integration into the social sciences might be based on the principles of rational actions always taking into consideration how rationality itself gets constructed out of and held up by beliefs, cultures and social values. Institutions, networks and their histories play a necessarily fundamental role in the integration of these theories

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