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TOWARDS A CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: SOME LESSONS FROM ISRAEL

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An important development of the past decade, especially since the economic crisis of 2008, has been the emergence of new and variegated forms of social enterprises. Very broadly, social enterprises are social mission driven organizations which apply market-based strategies to achieve a social (or environmental) purpose. These vary from organizations or enterprises that find new creative ways to integrate marginalized populations (the homeless, ex-convicts, persons with handicaps, etc.) into society by creating suitable employment opportunities for them to others that focus on environmental issues, such as cooperatives that invest in wind turbines in order to protect the environment and save on energy cost. The spread of social enterprises has been global, and it received a big boost after Muhammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his innovative work on micro-financing (Yunus, 2008). The idea of combining social (or environmental) purposes with a business orientation and creating an organization to carry out a social mission in an economically sustainable way is intriguing and attractive to social entrepreneurs, investors, researchers and policy-makers alike. Regarding the latter, in several countries, such as the U.K., the US, Belgium, Finland and Italy there are policy initiatives to promote such organizations.

Yet, while the *concept* of social enterprise is attractive, if it is to "catch", it needs to be given an organizational expression and in conceptualizing it - the unit of analysis should be social enterprise *organizations*. Unfortunately, despite the growing scholarly interest in the study of social enterprises and the proliferation of case studies, a clear conceptualization of this emerging organizational form, let alone an agreed-upon definition and typology of social enterprises has not yet been reached. Consequently both theory and research on the formation of social enterprises, the ways they sustain themselves, their unique characteristics and their impact are at the beginning stages.

The paper has four parts: It first outlines the major definitions of social enterprise, the debates around them and their developments over time as well as the existing conceptualizations to analyze the concept. In its second part the paper focuses on a central organizational features of social enterprises, looks for their expressions in the real world and identifies two missing components in the existing conceptualizations and consequently in the definitions of social enterprises. In its third part it reports some findings about social enterprise entities, including a form that was developed in Israel and is based on the Kibbutz model. The final part of the paper concludes with the implications of such a definition for policy and practice in the field.

Social enterprise is an elusive term that is defined and interpreted differently by different people and in different contexts (Kerlin, 2010). The most common definition is the simple one, defining social enterprises as *social mission driven organizations that apply market-based strategies to achieve a social/environmental purpose*. Such a general definition can cover a wide variety of organizations, with different legal forms. Furthermore, as it says nothing about whether the "market-based strategies" (i.e. commercial activities) are used exclusively or not, it may include different configurations of funding sources, which broadens its base significantly.

We argue that social enterprises represent a new and unique type of organization. By combining social goals with a business orientation, both critical for their mission and survival, they represent a new breed of organizations with two kinds of "logics" that in the past were not perceived as belonging under the same organizational roof. The business logic, with its focus on competition and private ownership, did not seem as a fitting context to deal with social issues or problems. These are traditionally dealt with by a service logic that emphasizes a charitable, empathetic orientation. Putting these two orientations together calls for creative organizational solutions, especially if these organizations are to be stable and sustainable.

1. DEFINING AND CONCEPTUALIZING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

A literature review of the definitions of social enterprise suggests that there are basically two approaches to defining the concept:

1. A simple and general "categorical" definition, outlining its most important feature
2. An elaborate definition, in the "ideal-type" tradition of organizations, based on different components, which outline its various characteristics.

1.1. The Simple Definition and the Social Enterprise Domain

There are several wording variations to the simple definition, but basically they all suggest that social enterprises are "social mission driven organizations that apply market-based strategies to achieve a social/environmental purpose". The focus in such a definition is the social mission, which lies at the heart of the entity – it is its *raison d'être*. Yet, the market-based/commercial activities are not less important as they are applied to achieve the social mission; they are not an external component (i.e. a funding source) – they are an integral component of the organization – a part of its DNA. This combination also represents the newness of the concept, as traditionally organizations with a social mission do not make use of market-based strategies to achieve their mission.

Such a general definition can be used map the domain of "social enterprise" and to distinguish social enterprise organizations from other types of organizations.

One way to approach the need to map the domain of social enterprise is to view organizations that have business and social components along a continuum. Those stretch from purely business entities with a CSR/philanthropic component, to NPOs with a commercial component that is unrelated to the organization's mission (Dees, 1998). However, as the definition states clearly that the concept concerns itself with "social mission-driven" organizations, namely, organizations whose main purpose is *social* (or environmental), the definition excludes the entire line of business organizations with a CSR component, whose main purpose is the maximization of profits for the owner(s), and the social-focused activity serves as an adjunct. On the other side of the continuum there are NPOs with a commercial activity. While NPOs have, by definition, a social mission, the literature as well as the law in many countries, distinguishes between their "related" and "unrelated" (to the organization's mission) commercial activities. The former are treated as an integral part of the organization's mission that actually complement it, whereas the latter are seen as external to the organization - they serve only as income-generating activities for the NPO, and are usually not tax-exempt. As we will show below, from an organizational dynamics perspective there is a major difference between those two forms of commercial activities in the NPO. Thus, similarly to the CSR component in business firms that does not alter significantly the firm's overall mission and orientation, which remains the maximization of profits for the owner(s), "unrelated" commercial activity does not alter significantly the NPO's overall orientation as the organization does not "apply market-based strategies *to achieve its purposes*". In actuality, the only configuration along the continuum that meets those conditions is the one in the center, namely, organizations with a social mission that use a business methodology to achieve it. In those, the two orientations are equally mixed, as both are equally important for the organization. Mapping the domain of social enterprise should focus on those.

1.2. The Elaborate Definition

The wide variety of legal and organizational forms and the different traditions and practices in the social enterprise domain have led some researchers to use a different approach to defining

social enterprise, an approach that is based on the "ideal-type" formulation, whereby an organizational phenomenon is presented along its most important characteristics, which, when put together create an ideal type of that entity. Such an approach to defining an organizational entity is an important research tool as it focuses the attention to specific qualities of the entity beyond its main feature, that are comparable with other similar entities.

In the literature on social enterprise, the EMES (European Research Network) Project developed such a definition, which entails a set of criteria that are likely to be found or should be found in a SE entity; entities are supposed to strive to meet many of those (Defourny&Borzaga, 2001). The specific mix and level of conditions is not specified. The specific legal status of the entity is also irrelevant in this conceptual framework.

The EMES criteria entail four economic/business and five social parameters.

The economic/business criteria are:

1. *A continuous activity, producing and selling goods and/or services*
2. *A high degree of autonomy*
3. *A significant level of economic risk*
4. *A minimum amount of paid work*

The social criteria are:

1. *An explicit aim to benefit the community*
2. *An initiative launched by a group of citizens*
3. *Decision-making power not based on capital ownership*
4. *A participatory nature, which involves the various parties affected by the activity*
5. *Limited profit distribution*

Those nine criteria by which a social enterprise entity should be judged lay the foundations for a more detailed definition, as it goes beyond the idea of mixing a business orientation with social purposes, and adds to those the dimensions of initiation of the entity and principles of its governance, thus it suggests additional criteria by which to judge or evaluate SE entities. Also, using an ideal-type format suggests in effect a dynamic approach to social enterprise – a developmental one, something the entity should strive for and also could be evaluated against. Thus for example, adding the aspects of governance and decision-making suggest in effect that a SE entity cannot be governed and managed as a regular business corporation and certain structural provisions need to be in place to ensure that. As the authors suggest, the combined criteria include features of an NPO and a cooperative.

One can argue whether or not the nine criteria used are the most important ones along which to evaluate social enterprises. That definition however was the result of a comprehensive European study in 15 countries and reflects both the conceptual thinking and the data on those entities in the countries studied at the time (mid-1990's). If compared to the simple, categorical definition, which focuses on the mix between social purposes and business strategies, this definition adds at least 4 dimensions or features, which further accentuate the uniqueness of those entities when compared to other types of organizations. These are: (1) the entity is a product of *citizens' initiative*; (2) it features *citizens' (or stake-holders') participation* in decision making and management; (3) it is *autonomous* from government; and (4) it needs to be *competitive* (the economic risk factor).

Roughly a decade after the EMES project and its definition was published, and recognizing the evolution of social entrepreneurship/social innovation thinking and its impact on social

enterprise, two of the EMES researchers have developed an updated version of the definition (Defourny&Nyssens, 2010).It is based on the same ideal-type approach, but it takes into consideration major developments onsocial enterprise thinking, especially in the US. They reduce the number of parameters to five and create a more compact definition

- A Social mission – the *raison d'être* of the entity; not a side-effect (e.g. CSR)
- The production of goods/services and their relation to the social mission
- Economic risks – attempts to base resources on commercial activity, but not exclusively
- The structure of governance – the idea that the social enterprise should reflect its multi-stakeholders nature and its community orientation
- Channels for the dissemination of social innovation

That formulation, when compared to the EMES earlier work, adds a new dimension, inexistent before, namely the social innovation dimension. It is a product of the past decade's emphasis, especially in the US, on the social entrepreneurship/social innovation paradigm.

1.3. Existing Conceptualizations and Schools of Thought of Social Enterprise

In the theoretical literature on social enterprise there are three different schools of thought within which the concept of "social enterprise" is analyzed. These are: (1) *Social Entrepreneurship/Social Innovation*, studied primarily within a business administration orientation; (2) *Social Economy* with a focus on cooperatives, studied often within an economic and/or sociological orientation; (3) *Nonprofit Organizations with an earned income component*, studied often too with an economic and/or sociological orientation.

The Social Entrepreneurship/Social Innovation school of thought is clearly the leading one. It has developed within the business domain after the high-tech bubble entered the world and marked a new era in how the economy develops. The notion that a single entrepreneur with a brilliant idea can build a major corporation and reap millions in a relatively short period has spread to the social domain after being very much encouraged by the same business entrepreneurs. That social entrepreneurship/social innovation school of thought suggests in effect that novel ideas in the social domain (for example on how to integrate the handicapped in society or how to empower women), with a good business plan can create significant improvement/change for a particular population or in a particular field. This is especially true in light of the bureaucratic nature of social service systems that do not encourage innovations, and the lack of funding for new ideas and approaches in the public sector. The specific legal form within which these novel ideas should be applied is irrelevant in this framework, which, in an entrepreneurial fashion attempts to implement its idea within a "social enterprise", with the hope that if successful, it could be enlarged and disseminated to other geographic locations and possibly impact policy in the domain (Nicholls, 2006).

In terms of its theoretical orientation – it focuses primarily on the *entrepreneurial process* – new ways to analyze the problem(s) at hand, new ways to analyze the resources and the processes of change, the roles of the actors (entrepreneurs) in that process etc. That orientation is in charge for the introduction of such concepts as "business plan" or "cost-benefit analysis" and other similar ones from the business world to the social domain.

Dozens of centers for research and teaching of social entrepreneurship and social innovation have been established in the leading Business Schools around the world, such as Harvard, Stanford, Duke universities in the US, Oxford University in the UK and INSEAD Fontainebleau in France, to name a few.

The Social Economy school of thought is mostly a European conceptual framework, encompassing the study of cooperatives, associations and mutual societies, based on a tradition of solidarity and devoid from a strict non-distribution constraint existing in the US vis-à-vis nonprofit organizations. In this tradition the “social” and “economic” are inseparable in citizens’ associations and organizations as they complement each other. The cooperative form epitomizes that link and within it one can obviously find economic structures and concepts such as selling activity, paid work and market competition, but also social ones such as community interest, solidarity, volunteer work, members’ participation and involvement in decision making, etc. While traditionally that school of thought was focused on the cooperative organizational form, in the more recent literature one can find a switch to the “social enterprise” as an encompassing organizational concept of all forms of the social economy (Amin, 2009).

Centers of research and teaching with this orientation exist primarily in Europe such as in the University of Liege in Belgium, the University of Valencia in Spain, Trento University in Italy, but also in North America such as the University of Toronto in Canada.

The Earned Income Component in NPOs In the literature on the nonprofit sector, the component based on commercial activity and considered earned income for the organization (to be distinguished from grants or contracts from the public sector and philanthropic funds from donors and foundations), is viewed as “social enterprise”. Often, such a component, in order to exist within the NPO, needs to be self-sufficient or rely on other than sales income to a minimal extent only. This means that it has to develop its own business strategies in marketing, finance, pricing etc. Within the third sector literature - commercial activity, with its own logic and dynamics, if substantial, is seen as making an impact on the infrastructure of the entire organization, including its mission. A major debate in this literature has to do with analyses of the issue of revenue from commercial activity “crowding out” revenues from other sources (Weisbrod, 1998; Young, 1998).

Another aspect of the introduction of commercial activity into NPOs, which is often debated from a legal perspective, has to do with the nature of that activity – whether it is or it is not related to the organization’s mission. An example can be a nonprofit organization providing social or recreational services for the elderly, which also provides employment opportunities for its clients and sells the products on the market. In that example the income is “related”, as the employment component clearly relates to the mission of the organization, which by this activity, extends the services it offers. “Unrelated” income constitutes income from a commercial source owned by the NPO that is fed into the organization’s budget but has nothing to do with the mission of the NPO. An example can be a business firm, say a gas station, owned by the NPO (because it was donated to it). While the income of such endeavor goes to the owner - the NPO, as it is not related to the mission of the organization it cannot claim for tax-exemption; the NPO ownership of the business component does not in itself entitle it for it.

Centers to study the Third Sector and philanthropy from an inter-disciplinary perspective exist throughout the world in universities such as Johns Hopkins, UCLA, Georgia State, the University of Texas in the US; Heidelberg University in Germany, University of Bologna in Italy and Ben Gurion University in Israel.

Thus, these are three schools of thought, all using the “social enterprise” concept, each coming from a different perspective and tradition and assigning it a different meaning and emphasis: *Social entrepreneurship* – places the emphasis on the process of moving from a new and innovative idea to its implementation; *social economy* – places the emphasis on the nature of

citizens' organizations based on solidarity that combine social and economic goals; *earned income within NPOs* – places the emphasis on the nature and impact of an earned income component within an NPO on the entire organization.

Exactly as there are different formulations to analyze the social enterprise concept, we find social enterprise organizations within different legal structures. Given the categorical definition used, social enterprises are usually found within three legal frameworks:

(1) *Cooperatives*, commonly registered as "mutual associations" and similar legal structures, where the members are also the owners of the assets of the organization and the profits of their activities are distributed amongst them;

(2) Within *NPOs*, registered as "associations" or other third sector legal frameworks, where the commercial component belongs to the NPO or a subsidiary thereof, which employs the workers and pays their salaries;

(3) As *Social Businesses* registered as business corporations, where the owner(s) are entitled to receive back their investment (sometimes with a reduced level of profit) and the earnings of the enterprise are invested back in the firm.

The first two forms are well known and have existed for a long time; the last one is fairly new and came into public awareness by Muhammad Yunus' work.

Social enterprise entities, namely, organizations combining social purposes with a business strategy can be formed within all three legal forms. There are different considerations to use one or the other, but in all three forms they will have to come to grips with a fundamental problem characteristic of these organizations, namely how to balance between the social goals and business strategy.

Using those conceptualizations in analyzing actual social enterprises that meet the general/ categorical definition listed above clearly shows that these are insufficient as each is just portraying a part of the picture. The *Social entrepreneurship* perspective is placing the focus on the initiation and beginning evolution of the enterprise, but is not providing tools to understand the SE entity on the long-haul. It does not deal with the complex dynamics of combining social goals and business methods and how an organization can sustain itself with such an innate tension. The *social economy* and the *earned income within NPOs* perspectives, each focuses on a particular form of social enterprise and does not include others, so they are limiting as well.

2. ANALYZING SOCIAL ENTERPRISES: MISSING PERSPECTIVES

2.1. An Organizational Theory Perspective

Analyzing social enterprises, of all legal forms, from an organizational theory perspective can shed new light on their particular dynamics, not only on how they are initiated and come into the world but even more importantly how they survive and sustain themselves. If we are to use the elaborate definitions that focus the attention to the *dynamics* of these entities, we need to analyze them as organizations. Such a perspective will ask, for example the following questions:

- How do such entities secure their needed resources?
- What strategies do they develop to balance their two competing paradigms?
- How do they create viable and effective governing bodies based on multi-stakeholders participation?

An analysis of social enterprises from an organizational theory perspective reveals in fact that combining the two "logics" or orientations under the same organizational roof, creates a new

organizational hybrid (Billis, 2009). Hybrids are organizations that entail two (or more) different orientations within the same organizational framework, all critical for the organization's survival. Hybrid organizations can be created by combining two sectorial orientations such as business and public orientations or third sector and public orientations. They can also be created by combining two modes of activity such as service delivery and advocacy, or funding and service delivery, as is the case in some operating foundations. In all those cases the two orientations are critical, even vital for the organization's survival (Hasenfeld&Gidron, 2005).

The duality of orientations in social enterprises is expressed in the way they deal with their workers, say people with handicaps: Are they treated as workers or as clients in a social agency? How in absenteeism or late arrivals to work treated? The discipline of coming to work regularly and on time is obviously a part of the client's/worker's rehabilitation process, but who decides to fire such a delinquent person, and when and how is such a decision made and carried out? Another example is the marketing strategy: Does it accentuate the fact that the enterprise employs a marginal population or is the focus on the quality of the product/service? Yet another example is related to the entity's sources of funding; while the entity strives to be self-sustaining and base itself on revenues from sales only, this is not always possible, especially not in the initial stages of its development. How long can/should it be subsidized? At what rate? How is such a decision related to the internal dynamics within the entity and its success/lack thereof of its social mission? Finally, the entire process of governance and decision-making and the extent to which the enterprise's multi-stakeholders are a part of it is yet another dimension that an organizational theory perspective allows us to analyze.

Given that organizations tend to specialize and tend to create unitary orientations, a hybrid "creature" is not self-explanatory, cannot be created easily and needs to be carefully planned and worked on. Usually special linkage mechanisms are needed to bridge between the different paradigms and work out relevant procedures on how to balance the two orientations and enable the organization not only to survive but to achieve its goals and thrive.

An organizational perspective enables us also to compare between different social enterprises – on the base of their legal status, the populations they focus on, their age, size or other variables, and assess their performance - both social and business, in order to develop knowledge on this particular *form of entity*.

Thus, in summary, the social enterprise form is in fact a unique (hybrid) organizational entity that combines two orientations that according to common practice do not fit in the same organization. The knowledge on such entities and their specific organizational dynamics is in its beginning stages.

2.2. A Moral Consumption Perspective

Analyses of the ways some social enterprise entities secure their resources, especially financial resources from sales, shows that they often use marketing strategies that focus on their social mission. From a consumer's perspective, by purchasing a product or service from a social enterprise the consumer makes a statement, not only about his/her support for a particular target population, but also, implicitly, about his/her support for a different kind of business morality, where the motive is not maximization of profits for owners but a focus on a social mission. Such a purchase is considered *social* or *moral consumption* suggesting that consumers have the power to change norms in the business world (Nicholls, 2006).

The concept of "moral consumption" taken from Fair Trade practice, pertains to businesses and brands that are not resorting to abusive and exploitative practices along the production chain (mostly towards suppliers in the Southern Hemisphere). Support for such brands is considered a social and political statement. Social enterprise organizations, if they are to use marketing strategies based on their social mission and encourage consumers to support their products or services because of their social mission, need to make sure that their own practices, while trying to help a specific target population, do not abuse or exploit another, anywhere along the business process. Obviously only a few social enterprises are using raw materials produced in the South; thus the issue of moral consumption needs to be enlarged and should also pertain to levels of salaries, working conditions and benefits of those involved, directly and indirectly, in the production or service delivery process. In short, the idea is that the social enterprise form, by the very fact that it has a specific social mission, which is expressed by its structure and organizational procedures, needs to abide by certain moral rules or else its social mission is put into question. The idea that consumers have a role in this process is intriguing as it has the potential not only to encourage social enterprises, but also to create meaningful changes in the way the business sector conducts its affairs.

3. ISRAELI SOCIAL ENTERPRISE "SECTOR"

The Israeli social enterprise is in its nascent stages. We estimate there are several dozen social businesses, some 150 NPOs with a "related" business component and a several dozen "social cooperatives", some evolving around employment creation opportunities for marginalized populations, others around environmental issues (Gidron&Yogev, 2010).

Israel is of course very famous for its Kibbutz institution – an example for a shared and cooperative way of life, which started some 100 years ago. The Kibbutzim developed traditionally in rural areas and based themselves in the 1920's through the 1950's on agriculture and related forms of production. Its famous communal and shared life style of its members was the cornerstone of its internal organization. As such it cared not only for its own members but took upon itself national social functions such as absorption of new immigrants, rehabilitation of youth in distress etc.

In the 1980's as a result of economic changes, the Kibbutz movement underwent a major crisis and a clear process of abandoning the communal/collective life style has begun. The idea of equal compensation for all members regardless of their economic contribution gave way to a process of privatization whereby people were no longer equally compensated and some measures of economic worth of their inputs were put into place. Furthermore, the famous Kibbutz "institutions" such as the collective dining hall have been replaced by family eating arrangements.

In the late 1980's and 1990's a reaction to this "privatization" process started among young Kibbutz members, who thought the Kibbutz ideology is still relevant, albeit in a different configuration. They started the *Urban Kibbutz* movement. The idea is to lead a collective way of life, not in a new location, somewhere in the desert or the mountains but in an urban neighborhood, intermingling with the local population. Such Kibbutzim form a nucleus of 20-30 members who rent or buy apartments in a low class neighborhood in a large city or town and live there, working in local jobs and sharing their income as in the original Kibbutz days. They have an ideology of reducing social gaps in society and are involved in the community life, engaging in local communal projects, especially with children and youth. With time those young members form families and have children, who go to local schools and are also integrated in the

neighborhood. In some of those Kibbutzim a nursery and kindergarten have been established for the Kibbutz children, which is also open to neighborhood children.

Their Kibbutz has two forms of revenue: (1) members' salaries obtained by work in different jobs and professions based on individual preference and skill; (2) collective endeavors created by members, mostly in the service provision of educational or social services, for which they are contracted by the local municipality or a government ministry. Sometimes, an urban Kibbutz has both forms.

The phenomenon is not large; there are roughly a dozen such Kibbutzim, but many of them exist for over 20 years, which says something about their stability.

A slight variation of the Urban Kibbutzim, are the *Shahaf Communities*. These too are composed of groups of 20-30 young people, many of them university graduates, who choose to live in a low-class neighborhood or a small town in the country's periphery. They share the values of upgrading and uplifting the community where they reside, but they do not lead a collective life style as the Urban Kibbutzim do. The idea here is that life within such a community for several years will create a commitment by those members to remain there, make that place their home and upgrade the community. There are roughly a dozen such communities, mostly supported by a consortium of philanthropic funds, but lately they are moving towards a more sustainable existence based on the social business concept.

4. CONCLUSIONS

While the Social Enterprise concept is tossed around frequently, our knowledge about what it is and what it does is limited. The organizational focus lays the foundation for treatment of social enterprise entities as a unique category of organizations, because they integrate social goals with a market-driven orientation, but also because of their community base and moral commitment. What is strikingly missing in the existing literature on social enterprise is the recognition that the success or failure of these ventures depends on the organizational framework they establish. There is a serious omission in the literature on how such enterprises are expressed in an organizational structure and the processes within it that try to bridge between the conflicting orientations. These tensions have major implications on appropriate theoretical models and research methodologies to study social enterprises. We argue that organizational forms that combine social goals with a business imperative create both conceptual and practical challenges that call for an organizational perspective, currently missing in the literature on social enterprises. These include: a) analysis of the tensions between their service logic and business logic; b) the impact of these tensions on organizational stability and performance; and c) the structure of the organization, its governance system and its internal operations. In a parallel stream there is also a need to develop knowledge on whether these entities are effective in dealing with the social/environmental issues they target and which specific populations can benefit from them most.

Those two streams should inform responsible public policy on how to encourage the phenomenon.

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