

ANTECEDENTS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION – CONCEPTUAL MODEL PROPOSITION

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Abstract

In the last two decades, social entrepreneurship (SE) theory has become a broad and multifaceted stream of research. Social entrepreneurs approach social problems through novel ways, introducing innovative solutions that couple social capital and market instruments. Taken that innovation is considered by many the backbone of successful entrepreneurial ventures, the study of innovation in SE context is much needed to understand the distinctive features and origins of SE ventures. Social innovation profoundly changes the routines, resource combinations of the social system in which it occurs.

Based on extensive literature review, this article aims to establish if, why and how, in given environmental and market contexts, social innovation occur. The study explores the building blocks and dynamics of social innovation in SE context. It starts with conceptualizations of social problems as sources of any social entrepreneurial venture. It then turns to the identification of necessary components of social innovation. The article presents an integrated process-based view of social innovation and its antecedents. The findings will hopefully lead to stretching the existing theory beyond an often-travelled path and allow the formulation of testable hypotheses.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, social enterprises, social innovation.

1. Introduction

The subject of this study is the domain of social enterprises, which function at the intersection of various economic sectors in different legal forms, either for-profit, non-profit or not-for-loss, often in multiple organizational forms simultaneously (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Social entrepreneurship (SE) has been recognized in the last two decades by numerous authors as a successful pathway of tackling world's both local and global social problems (Dees, 2007, Curtis, 2007, Short et al., 2009). Their

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fundamental objective is profound and lasting structural social change (Praszkier & Nowak, 2012, p. 64). Social enterprises use economic means to introduce social change and thus transform market, human and social resources into social capital (Stryjan, 2004). Innovation stands out as a key feature of successful entrepreneurship and SE is no exception. Authors emphasise the role of innovation in bringing forth structural deep change in social systems and changing ways things are done. Dees (2007) argues that only through continuous innovation can social enterprises play the role of change agents in the social sector. Some scholars imply that SE is an innovative activity by definition and conceptualizes it as an innovative social-value creating activity (Stevenson et al., 2007).

Most social entrepreneurship conceptualizations are broad and inclusive in character, which is why scholars emphasize the need to deepen our understanding of social entrepreneurship phenomena, "to bridge the gap between our current understanding of social entrepreneurship and an enhanced knowledge that could aid in researching this emerging field (Short et al., 2009: 162). Researchers have identified numerous exploration avenues to narrow that gap and one of them is the identification of innovation pursued by social enterprise to fulfill their social goals (Bull, 2008; Short et al., 2009). This research is an answer to that call.

All forms of entrepreneurship require exploration of both micro level (socio-cognitive, emotional) and macro level (institutional, environmental) antecedents (Battilana, 2006). This study adapts a holistic view and takes the entrepreneurial opportunity lens to social entrepreneurship, since the notion of opportunity creation, recognition and exploitation are traditionally and continuously associated with entrepreneurship. Understanding the nature of opportunities is important, because it can enhance our understanding of the origins and distinctive features of all entrepreneurial acts. Authors have noted that research focus strictly on the firm, may be useful for some domains such as strategic entrepreneurship which compares performance between competitive firms, but it does not add enough insight into the entrepreneurship nexus (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Opportunity as unit of analysis in entrepreneurship research allows the assessment of entrepreneurial acts and provides a deeper understanding of its dynamics. Social entrepreneurship as an entrepreneurial act is always a response to perceived opportunity and as such requires an opportunity-based approach as well. Moreover, research evidence suggests strongly that innovative organizations are characterized primarily by an active, continuous and systematic search for opportunity and change (Francik, 2003, p. 57).

The main goal of this paper is to explore and identify the building blocks and dynamics of social innovation, the antecedents and conceptualizations of social innovation phenomenon. The driving research question is: why and how, in given environmental and market contexts, does social innovation occur?

The paper starts with introducing social enterprises, their hybrid nature and various tensions. Then it turns to opportunity as unit of analysis, just as a significant bulk of entrepreneurship theory does. It explores the antecedents of social innovation

development to sum up with a proposal of a research model. The major contribution of this study lies in extending the existing body of social entrepreneurship research providing a new perspective, placing innovation in the center of the discussion.

2. Methodology

Social entrepreneurship (SE) has emerged as an important area of research and practice. In recent years social entrepreneurship theory has emerged as sub-stream of entrepreneurship research. Parallel to that social innovation research has been growing in scope contributing largely to the development of social innovation theory.

The focus of this study is on the discussion and elaboration of social entrepreneurship and social innovation concepts. In its main objective it aims to identify the necessary components of social innovation through a process-based view. The leading method employed in this study is critical literature review.

Scientific research requires a procedure according to pre-determined steps in order to obtain the most valuable cognitive effects of the research process (Babbie, 2012, pp. 112–113). The nature of the study is multidimensional, it realises exploratory, descriptive, analytical and predictive purposes (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 5). The thorough literature study was prepared in order to conceptualise and operationalise the research objective. A five-stages model of a critical literature review proposed by Fisher (2010) was employed in this study (table 1).

Table 1. Methodological background of the research process

1	Preliminary search for sources	Keywords: social entrepreneurship, social innovation, social enterprise
2	Mapping and describing the literature	Identifying main definitions, Contrasting existing conceptualizations, Evaluating applicability
3	Evaluating the literature	Critical review of arguments and their soundness, Identifying competing and completing arguments, Comparing and evaluating arguments.
4	Radical critique	Identifying contradictions, Identifying gaps, Problematizing the stance Drawing conclusions
5	Summary and Revision	

Source: Own evaluation based on Fisher et al. (2010, pp. 94–130)

The literature review was followed by logical reasoning and inference, which resulted in the formulation of the proposed proces-based view model of social innovation.

3. Social entrepreneurship: conceptual challenges and organizational tensions

Social entrepreneurship has been recognized in the last two decades by numerous authors as a successful way of transforming the social sphere by addressing both local and global social problems (Dees, 2007, Short et al., 2009, Yunus, 2011, Praszkiel & Nowak, 2012). Social entrepreneurship had been defined in the past as a process of employing market-based methods to solve social problems (Grimes et al., 2013). By blending initiative, innovativeness, community involvement and resource mobilization, social enterprises introduce solutions that can work more effectively than state or charity standard approaches. effectively. Their advantage over government programs is autonomy, flexibility and access to private resources (Dees, 2007). The primary advantage over charity lies in the problem-solving nature rather than providing aid nature of these organizations (Yunus, 2011). The number of articles published on social enterprise in academic journalism grew from 37 in 1997 to 529 in 2000 to 14,264 in 2012 (Battilana & Lee, 2014). The increasing popularity of social enterprise has also resulted in regulatory activity aimed at supporting the development of a social enterprise field. For example, new legal forms have been created in order to better address the needs of social enterprises that are neither typical corporations nor typical not-for-profits. Yet new research is still needed. In spite of twenty years of research, it still remains fragmented and polyphonic.

Because definitions of SE have been developed in different domains (non-profit, for-profit and public sectors) a unified definition has not emerged. There are however certain features of SE phenomena that form the foundation of this research area, delineate its boundaries and lay foundations for definitions:

- first, they extend the “opportunity exploitation logic” of entrepreneurship onto the social sphere (Praszkiel & Nowak, 2012, p. 52);
- second, they blend social and financial objectives (Dees, 2007), yet the generated profit serves merely as a mean of extending the social value added (Yunus, 2011, p. 47);
- third, all coexisting conceptualizations of social enterprises refer to the ability of leveraging resources to address social problems (Dart, 2004).

And thus social entrepreneurship has been described in the past as “an innovative, social-value creating activity that can occur within or across the non-profit, business or government sector” (Stevenson et al., 2007: 4) or as a “process of creating social value by exploring and exploiting opportunities and combining resources in new ways” (Mair & Marti, 2006: 37). Both these popular definitions are overlapping and completing in nature, referring to the essence of entrepreneurship, yet

cannot serve as clear guidelines for SE recognition. In spite years of research, the distinction of social enterprises remains blurry and unclear and this is why for the purpose of this study, following the opportunity-based view of entrepreneurship, social enterprises have been defined as self-sustainable enterprises (with at least 50% of income generation) which primary goal is to create innovative social value solutions to existing social problems through the pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunity. This conceptualization remains very closely related to the dominant thread of general entrepreneurship theory. The distinction between traditional (commercial) and social enterprises lies in the intent of the founder(s) (Light, 2008, p. 8).

The fundamental difference between traditional and social entrepreneurship is the primacy of goals (figure 1). Traditional entrepreneurs through opportunity identification and exploitation seeks to achieve economic commercial goals and generate economic market value added. Social entrepreneurs through the same processes seeks to achieve social goals and generate social value added. Both types of entrepreneurs are characterized by proactive attitudes, the will to change the current state of equilibrium, and readiness to bear calculated risk. The major difference lies at their priorities. Social entrepreneurs are driven by the primacy of social goals, but they do not deny profit generation. Their economic activity and revenue streams serve their social mission. They apply market instruments within the social arena. Traditional entrepreneurs are driven by the primacy of profit generation, although they do often introduce positive social changes in their environment (e.g. by providing employment opportunities or various CSR initiatives), which are side-effects of their economic activity.

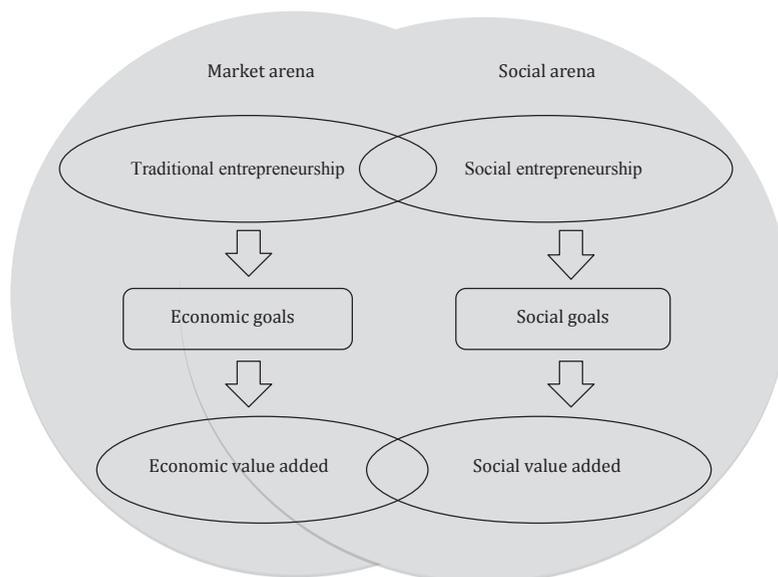


Figure 1. Traditional versus social entrepreneurship

Source: own evaluation

The existing literature depicts very specific features of social enterprises that distinguish them in many aspects from strictly business-oriented ventures, cause internal tensions and present a set of very unique organizational challenges. First of all, they pursue social goals; although they are a part of a market economy, their mission and goals lie beyond it (Hausner et al., 2008). Social enterprises are highly contextual, embedded in local relationships and networks (Praszkier & Nowak, 2012, p. 136) and highly dependent upon their various stakeholders (Stevenson et al., 2007). These include the founders, funders, partners, beneficiaries, suppliers, local community and authorities. The interests of these organizations are not always aligned (di Domenico et al., 2010). Social enterprises take numerous legal forms and cut across all sectors of the economy (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). Their financial resources are varied ranging from private capital and profit generation to government subsidies and charity donations (Leś, 2008). What's more, its customers are often not the sources of their revenue and their profit distribution is highly limited (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010).

Authors point out that social entrepreneurs respond in fundamentally different ways to adverse contextual conditions than their commercial counterparts. They are cooperative, participative and inclusive rather than rival in character (Short et al., 2009). These features are also reflected in their management style. As observed by Praszkier & Nowak (2012) social enterprises often rely on a new type of leadership, which the authors refer to as “empowering leadership” characterized by a high level of social empathy, focused on activating the potential of social groups and communities. These leaders assume the role of facilitators and enablers rather than “front men” of their organizations.

The coexisting normative definitions are numerous. The most common set of criteria depicting the characteristics of social enterprises are: the centrality of social mission, innovation, fragmented heterogeneous financing, blending social and commercial approaches, dispersed governance, stakeholder-dependence and others. In order to further distinguish the distinctive features of social entrepreneurship, to understand their nature and origin, the study focuses on the heart of the entrepreneurial act to study the origins of social innovation.

4. Social Innovation

Since Schumpeter (1934) used the term innovative to characterize the role of entrepreneurs, innovation has held a key position in entrepreneurship research. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines innovation as the act or process of introducing new ideas, devices or methods.

For years innovation has been recognized by many as a key competitive factor in business. It improves entrepreneurial productivity and returns (Salavou & Avlonitis, 2008). Lately authors are claiming that innovation plays just as crucial a role in social progress (Dees, 2007). Innovation involves deliberate application of

information, imagination and initiative to deliver new value. Social innovation refer to the process of introducing bold, novel and lasting solutions in the social sector. In numerous communities individuals constantly come up with new ideas in response to the perceived social problems. When these ideas are implemented through an intentional strategy and succeed in introducing a lasting change, we can refer to them as social innovation (Westley & Antadze, 2010). There is no better example than the Grameen bank, which introduced the notion of microcredits and transformed the economic situation of millions of people through providing access to start-up capital for those, who had no choice for any type of credit (Yunus, 2011). Therefore social innovation is oriented towards making a change at the systemic level and crosses multiple boundaries to reach more people, more organizations nested across sectors and linked in social networks (Christensen et al., 2006).

Innovation literature follows the early distinction introduced by Schumpeter to distinguish between:

- product innovation – important changes in the features of produced goods and/or services or radically new products and/or services;
- process innovation – changes in the production and/or distribution processes;
- managerial innovation – changes in the practices and/or in the organization of the workplace and/or in relations of the company with other companies;
- market innovation – new methods of commercialization and opening of new markets.

Social innovation may refer to all of the above, as social entrepreneurs often introduce completely new services or improve significantly existing ones, introduce new ways of doing things and/or new relationships between actors, as well as access or create new markets. SE often combines several types of innovation to produce deep and long lasting change in the social system. Innovation literature has established that the joint incorporation of several types of innovation can have a revolutionary effect on a firms performance (Damanpour et al., 2009), which would suggest that only a combination of innovation can provide significantly higher results.

Commercial innovations and social innovation both demonstrate creativity, new responses, and originality. Yet there are numerous differences (table 2).

Commercial innovation is implemented to address the needs of customers and consumers in order to ensure the company's future income streams. Commercial innovation are protected by the company (through trade secret, employee confidentiality or patent) to ensure the company's exclusive use of it and improve its profits, brand image and competitive position with respect to other companies. With time, as the innovation spreads through imitation or popularization, the market value of it decreases. As the innovation becomes more accessible and popular the prices of the new product or technology falls and the innovation generates less income for companies and presents less economic value.

Social innovation follows a different logic. It is designed to serve many. In social innovation, the new products, processes and solutions have to be available for all interested in their use or application for resolving or addressing social problems. They are not meant exclusively for the benefit of the creators or inventors. And with time, as the innovation spreads, its value grows, since it generates more social value and very often economic value, as in the case of microcredits. Therefore social innovation follows the logic of generosity and solidarity, instead of the logic of profits. Its creators donate them to the service of the society in general and serve as role models and examples for other partakers willing to address similar social needs. Howaldt et al. (2015) suggest that social entrepreneurship is part of the formation of a new innovation paradigm involving the opening up of the innovation process. The diffusion of social innovation multiplies the beneficial effects of innovation by allowing and encouraging everyone to make use of it, breaking away from the logic of the market.

Table 2. Distinctive features of commercial vs social innovation

Commercial innovation	Social innovation
Delivers primarily new market value	Delivers primarily new social value
Created to address customers and company's needs	Created to address the underprivileged social needs
Usually available for few	Available for all
Protected by authors	Shared by authors
Designed to serve a few	Designed to serve all
Market values decreases with diffusion	Social value increases with diffusion
Relies on market forces	Relies on solidarity
Based on market logic	Breaks away from market logic

Source: own evaluation

5. Theoretical antecedents of social innovation

Mainstream innovation literature depicts two prime groups of factors responsible for the creation and implementation of innovation (Damanpour et al., 2009):

1. internal factors, which relate to the distinctive characteristics of the firms and the entrepreneur and/or top management team; and
2. external factors which are subject to the environment surrounding the firm.

This traditional classification might not capture the domineering factors of SE innovation very well. First of all, innovation factors are not independent, but rather inter-related as for example entrepreneurs might assess the influence of the external

environment through their subjective perceptions or attitudes of external business partners might generate certain behaviors towards the environment or the firm itself. As social enterprises are highly embedded in their rich networks, innovation factors might be intertwined and interdependent.

Second, other factors might be somewhere in between internal and external. The group of factors identified as key to social innovation by SE research is social capital, which is a multidimensional concept that embraces the firm's contact network with other firms, institutions, organizations and individuals (Rodriguez & Guzman, 2013). Social capital is at the crossroads of internal and external factors. It enables and promotes exchange, cooperation and collective learning which might be crucial for the development of innovation.

And third, according to some authors, innovation by nature is a multifaceted and interdisciplinary phenomenon, and should be perceived rather as a process. Or even a social process, which is strongly embedded in the social and cultural framework (Francik, 2003, p. 47). Depicting specific internal and external factors seems to be misleading from this perspective.

Taken the above into consideration, this study aims to add new insight into the antecedents of social innovation by adapting a process-based view, investigating its building blocks suggested by existing literature and adapting the opportunity lens to the research problem.

The first concept that seems to be relevant to each and every SE venture, and hence social innovation, is the social problem that is being addressed. As suggested earlier, the prime difference between commercial and social entrepreneurship lies at the origin of the venture. Social entrepreneurs answer to a specific social condition that they wish to change. Social entrepreneurs go beyond the marketplace and turn their attention to the social arena to identify their venture opportunities. Sources of their opportunities often lie within the social disequilibrium and refer to social problems.

Social problems have been defined by sociology literature twofold: (i) as acts and conditions that violate norms and values presents in a society, and (ii) as socially induced conditions that cause psychic and material suffering for any segment of the population (Eitzen et al., 2010, p. 10). Norm violations refer to the discrepancy between socially accepted standards and reality, such as homelessness, poverty or racial discrimination. As such, what is defined as a social problem differs by audience and by time (for example slavery or women rights). Therefore, social problems by nature are subjective, but they do refer to objective reality.

Having defined the starting point of social innovation which is the social problem that it addresses, this paper adapts a process oriented approach to social innovation, tracing the path of any entrepreneurial opportunity identification/ creation and exploitation, which in the case of innovation would be referred to as creation and implementation. The main question addressed hereafter is: what determines the creation and implementation of social innovation? Mainstream entrepreneurship lit-

erature referring to opportunity can provide significant insight. Since innovation has been categorized as one of the modes of answering to entrepreneurial opportunity (Drucker, 1994; Shane, 2000), the opportunity “logic” and line of reasoning might be helpful.

It has been asserted in the past that two prime factors influence the probability that people identify and exploit opportunities: the possession of necessary information and cognitive properties of individuals (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Shane, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2002). It has been established by entrepreneurship literature that possession of necessary information can be impacted most by the entrepreneur’s prior knowledge and experience and his social networks. Opportunity development is a creative process in which the entrepreneur develops new ideas by recombining dispersed bits of incomplete knowledge that is spread among people, places and time, in novel ways that serve to create new value. In order to develop an opportunity, the entrepreneur has to combine and transform the possessed information in new ways. Differences in cognitive processing among people can influence this transformation process and thus individual propensity to identify opportunity. Some people are better than other at understanding causal links, categorizing information or have a bigger imagination.

Certain people will engage the information and experience they possess to develop social innovation. What is it that they have in common and distinctive?

Current SE literature does not provide full insight into this answer. Yet, the emerging social entrepreneurship theory does suggest a line of scientific pursue signaling the affective element of SE antecedents. Numerous papers have emphasized the role of compassion in individual-opportunity nexus dynamics (Grimes et al., 2013) claiming that the process of social entrepreneurship opportunity recognition is embedded in a configuration of individual dispositions, motivations and cognition patterns related to compassion (Dees, 2007). Compassion encourages and channels the engagement of cognition processes towards social problem identification and socially oriented ventures. Compassion has been identified as one of the most distinctive features of social entrepreneurs, distinguishing them from other forms. As depicted earlier in the paper, commercial entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship share many similarities. However, the latter’s focus on social mission alongside market-based instruments separates them from all other ventures. Social entrepreneurship literature consistently points to the theoretical importance of compassion (Mair & Marti, 2006; Shaw & Carter, 2007), as a unique motivator of social entrepreneurship, placing the emphasis on the other, rather than on personal gains. Compassion creates a distinct motivational and driving force that compliments traditional theories of entrepreneurship.

Another factor studied in regard to social innovation, is sociological imagination. Whereas compassion will enable the entrepreneur to recognize a social problem, sociological imagination will enable him to critically assess that problem, identify societal patterns behind it and search for solutions. Sociological imagina-

tion is a cognitive individual-level meta-structure which combines an openness to and awareness of diversity across social groups and problems with a propensity and ability to synthesize across this diversity. According to Eitzen et al. (2010, p. 8), individuals who possess sociological imagination: (i) are willing and able to view the social world from the perspective of others, (ii) are capable of perceiving, analyzing, and decoding social environments and societal patterns, (iii) can accurately identify effective actions in the social environment, and (iv) possess the behavioral flexibility and discipline to act appropriately. Sociological imagination is associated rather with the system-blame approach, than person-blame approach of social problems and thus with the will to find solutions and act upon them.

Since compassion and sociological imagination are cognitive abilities involving absorption and transformation of information, it appears critical to the process of opportunity identification in SE contexts and thus to innovation as well. Both of these properties are built on intellectual, psychological and social capital building blocks that take time to develop and constantly evolve with time, as the entrepreneurs experience and relationships change.

Figure 1 synthesizes the above discussion and presents a holistic perspective on social innovation antecedents in SE context. In short, new ideas start with the identification of a social problem and with information based on prior knowledge and new information. Cognition processes can transform these sources of knowledge into completely new ideas. Diverse cognitive abilities, especially compassion and sociological imagination, of the entrepreneur, can enhance the process transforming the social problem into social innovation. Various internal factors, both individual and organizational will play a role in turning ideas into specific innovation. An entrepreneurial mind will search for ways of employing market forces and instruments to transform the ailing social reality. An entrepreneurial mindset, referring to the traits approach of entrepreneurship, will determine whether the social innovation will become reality. Social innovation is the backbone and a constitutional element of social entrepreneurship processes. The implementation of social innovation can give start to social enterprises and/or social innovation can be implemented within existing ones. One way or the another, social innovation fuels the social entrepreneurship arena and in the long term, transforms the social reality and social arrangements. Social capital acts as an enabler of these processes by activating human energy and providing a synergy effect. Figure 2 presents graphically the above reasoning incorporating compassion and sociological imagination into the equation of social innovation.

The proposed model draws attention to path-dependency of social innovation diffusion. It shows that the pattern of social innovation development, is driven by the commitment to solving social problems. The social problem remains at the heart of social innovation and is the driving force and compass of the innovation process. The entrepreneur draws from prior knowledge and experience as well as possessed information and is enabled and fueled by compassion, sociological imagination and substandard cognitive abilities. Compassion and sociological imagination will en-

hance social awareness and determination, being critical to the first phase, innovation creation, in the minds of individuals. But only an entrepreneurial mindset will push individuals towards market-based solutions to the identified social problems. Social capital is a catalyzer of innovative processes that authors numerously point to (Cooke & Wills, 1999; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Curtis, 2007). Therefore, entrepreneurial mindset, skills and social capital trigger the second phase – innovation implementation.

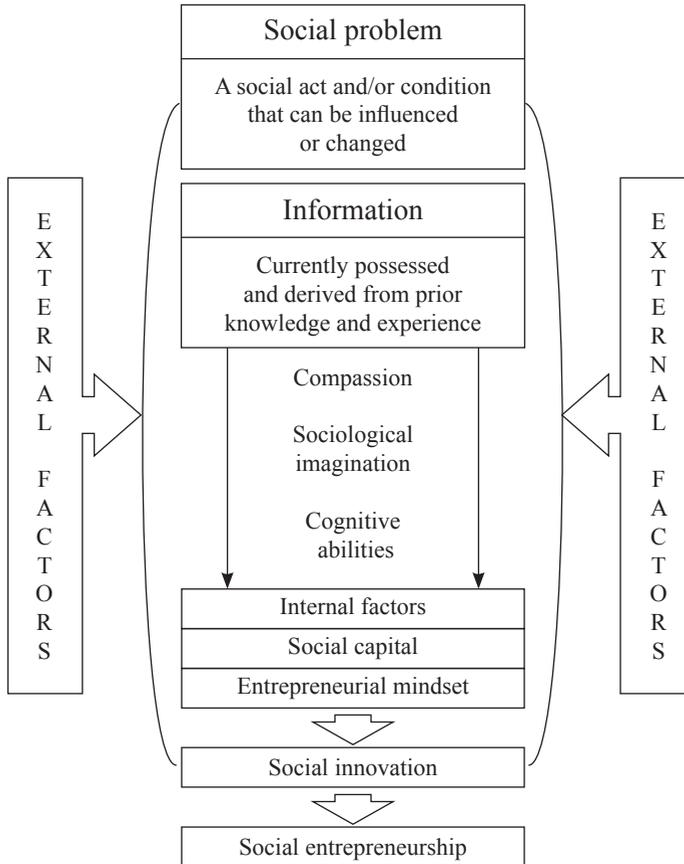


Figure 2. Process-based view of social innovation

Source: own evaluation

The model is set in a broad environmental context. Naturally, the process of social innovation is highly determined by external factors, both macro level (environmental) and mezzo level (market specific). Environmental and market conditions will largely influence the entrepreneur’s decisions. Individual perception and judgment will determine the interpretation of the observed reality.

6. Conclusions

The study suggests that social innovation occurs as a result of social problem identification and the perception of that problem in terms of a potential opportunity. The process of social innovation creation and implementation is based on the transformation of knowledge and experience into new ideas and involves various cognitive abilities, among which in the context of SE compassion and sociological imagination appear to be critical.

This study hopes to contribute to the discussion devoted to opportunity-based approach to social entrepreneurship. It synthesizes fragmented pieces of research from the domains of social entrepreneurship, mainstream entrepreneurship and innovation theory and proposes a process-based view of social innovation. The model exposes the role of time in innovation development suggesting that social innovation is a path dependent process strongly influenced by the individual level of compassion, sociological imagination in the preliminary phase and entrepreneurial mindset and social capital in the subsequent phase.

Hopefully, the model can serve as a useful lens for hypotheses formulation and testing within the research domain of social entrepreneurship. It opens up several potential inquiry paths to pursue. All of the variables of the model differ from one individual to another. Based on their earlier experience, individual cognitive properties and social ties, some entrepreneurs can acquire, utilize and process information quicker than others. They can therefore make quicker decisions. Grimes et al. (2013) suggested the need to study how these individual microprocesses interact with macro and mezzo level determinants, for example, when and how macro level determinants will stimulate or restrain these macroprocesses involved in opportunity discovery and innovation creation. Another interesting line of research to pursue is testing if and how individual cognitive skills, including compassion and sociological imagination contribute to overcoming external limitations in innovation creation. Similarly: if and how social capital enables and stimulates the implementation of social innovation?

Surely, there remains much work to be done in deepening our understanding of social innovation dynamics and various internal relationships within the proposed model. Thus, greater engagement and quantitative studies, preferably transnational, will impact the successful initiation, development, implementation and scaling of social innovation.

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PRZESŁANKI INNOWACJI SPOŁECZNYCH – PROPOZYCJA MODELU BADAWCZEGO

Streszczenie

W ostatnich dekadach przedsiębiorczość społeczna rozwinęła się w wielowątkowy i interdyscyplinarny obszar badań naukowych, zakorzeniony w teorii przedsiębiorczości. Biorąc pod uwagę, że innowacje stanowią filar działań przedsiębiorczych, badania poświęcone innowacjom w kontekście społecznym wydają się uzasadnione i pożądane z punktu widzenia rozwoju tego młodego obszaru badawczego jakim jest przedsiębiorczość społeczna. Innowacje społeczne wprowadzają nową wartość w rzeczywistość społeczną, przeobrażają ją poprzez nowe kombinacje zasobów.

Niniejsze opracowanie oparte jest na pogłębionej analizie literatury i ma na celu poprzez krytykę i syntezę ustalić dlaczego i jak w danych kontekstach społecznych zachodzi zjawisko innowacji społecznych. Opracowanie identyfikuje składowe innowacji społecznych, niezbędne warunki ich kreacji, wdrażania i rozwoju. Podsumowaniem rozważań jest propozycja modelu badawczego innowacji społecznych w ujęciu procesowym. Efekty niniejszego opracowania mogą posłużyć do formułowania hipotez badawczych w obszarze innowacji społecznych, które byłyby punktem wyjścia do badań empirycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorczość społeczna, przedsiębiorstwa społeczne, innowacje społeczne.