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EDITORIAL

VOLUNTAS Virtual Issue: Social Enterprise

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Research focusing on social enterprise has become a frequent and popular topic in nonprofit and civil society scholarship. This virtual issue presents a curated collection of landmark social enterprise articles, put together by five guest editors, published in VOLUNTAS since the inaugural issue of the journal.

Each guest editor started by exploring the research on social enterprise in VOLUNTAS, and voted for their recommendations on the most foundational or impactful articles. Additional aspects such as citation count, uniqueness of contribution, and potential for influence were also considered. Ultimately, nine articles were selected for inclusion in the virtual issue.[1] Thematically, the guest editorial team found that the nominated articles fell into two broad groups: those dealing with the definition or nature of social enterprise, and then those tackling the applied questions regarding how to manage such enterprises. In this short editorial, the guest editorial team provides a brief overview of the nine selected articles.

Conceptualizing Social Enterprise

Researching social enterprise, conceptually and operationally, remains a quest that scholars are never tired of. The initial foundational articles in the field were attempts at defining what a social enterprise is, and how the social enterprise model is different from traditional business models. In articles published in VOLUNTAS, this definitional quest has often been complicated and enhanced by including an international or comparative element. Though every social enterprise author continues to include their own interpretation on key elements, such as whether nonprofits and cooperatives ought to be viewed as social enterprises, or how much earned income is necessary to meet the criteria of being labeled a social enterprise, nearly half of this virutal issue is dedicated to articles which tackle this fundamental discussion as the main theme.

First, Kerlin (2006) is one of the landmark introductions to historical institutionalism in the social enterprise context, and this article received more votes from the guest editorial team than any other article. Though the relevance of historical and social origins had been discussed by other authors in the nonprofit context, it is arguably even more useful in describing the wide variety of articles and corporate forms involved in the broad social enterprise sector. Second, the article delineates what was previously hinted at among scholars but not overtly stated: that a very large gap in conceptualization existed between social enterprise scholars from the USA and those in Europe. These comparisons would later form the framework for a host of comparative social enterprise studies which incorporated multi-level cultural and historical influences into the evolution of social enterprise within countries.

Several of these later articles that focused on the definition or nature of social enterprise are also included in the collection. There are two which provide frameworks for the "zoo" of social enterprise on a worldwide level. Kerlin (2010) extends social origins theory and historical institutional theory to the global social enterprise stage. The article argues that differences in scale and form of social enterprise activity are a consequence of socio-economic context and the unique histories of different global regions.

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[1] https://link.springer.com/collections/iejaecjiif.

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This nation-level typology has practical implications in terms of policy development and support for social enterprise activities, particularly organizational sustainability.

Defourny & Nyssens (2017) undertook the monumental task of building an international typology of social enterprise. Though this paper is conceptual, it reflects the framework for the large-scale empirical study headed by Defourny and Nyssens known as the ICSEM (International Comparative Social Enterprise Models) project. It is effectively a conceptual road map for the large amount of research stemming from that effort, which involved 230 researchers from 60 countries (EMES, 2022).

Blessing (2015) tackles three important questions related to social enterprise. The first is the categorization of an important mixed market in social goods, which is housing. With several different sectors active in this space, the achievement of classifying the entities involved is noteworthy on its own. Second, the author examines the impact of market-based reforms—modernization—on this dynamic system. And finally, we have the opportunity to look at two different national contexts, England and Holland, as a means of discerning the unique aspects of each. Not only is this a fascinating example of how social enterprises evolve in particular contexts, but it is also an exemplar for high-quality conceptual papers.

Finally, Mazzei (2017) provides insights on two crucial, but often overlooked pieces of the social enterprise literature: the role of place and the importance of the ecosystem to success. Place is gaining increasing attention in topics such as philanthropy, so the use of two related but unique cities in the same region offers a useful context. The choice of place as a factor also allows the paper to focus on what specifically makes such a place hospitable to social enterprises. Though the author notes that previous works have used ethnography, the careful attention to methods here (including details such as the role of the framework and how many months were spent at each location) is a boon for a journal that attracts readers from many methodological backgrounds. The resulting thick description offers insights on everything from economic history to quotes from local entrepreneurs, and it paints a complete and effective picture of both places.

Organizing and Managing Social Enterprises

As efforts to define social enterprise continue, more recently we also see a growing trend to dissect issues of organizational type, governance, and management in the field. Many of the more recent studies published in VOLUNTAS build on the foundational work of definition by developing new taxonomies of social enterprise groups, exploring relationships between institutional environments and business models, and unpacking critical issues of decision making and governance for specific social enterprise types. The second half of this virtual issue highlights articles that take apart the social enterprise construct and examine its key organizational and managerial components.

Ávila & Amorim (2021) bridge the conversation between social enterprise definition and management by providing a taxonomy of four social enterprise groups. Their taxonomy is based on the combination of the levels (i.e., low vs. high) of social- and market identity. The four groups are: social businesses, more-than-profit businesses, socially concerned organizations and enterprising nonprofits. They then apply the taxonomy using the SEFORIS database of social enterprises across Europe, Russia, and China. The authors make an important contribution to social enterprise scholarship by explicitly describing the tradeoff between geographical scope and how involved clients or beneficiaries can be. Their classification is a helpful step in taking social enterprise scholarship from defining to classifying, and subsequently uncovering critical management and governance issues.

Hung & Wang (2021) use a national survey of 1250 Canadian social enterprises and confirm that social enterprises' financial strategies (i.e., degree of commercialization and revenue diversification) are affected by institutional constraints and market competition. Therefore, this study offers insights for us to understand the financial autonomy and funding flexibility of social enterprises. In contrast to some of the other studies in this virtual issue, the authors specifically focus on the business model and *how* social enterprises function in different contexts. In doing so, they also connect operational and management issues to the broader institutional environment that social enterprises inhabit.

Ismail & Johnson (2019) focus on the Middle East and North Africa in their study of management and decision making in social enterprises through the lens of paradox theory. Critical to managers in most organizations, paradoxes are even more important in social enterprise given their dual objectives, which may often be at odds with each other. The authors describe three important ways in which social enterprise managers contend with paradoxes: trust, moral legitimacy, and participatory leadership, and offer a number of recommendations for practice.

Lastly, Wolf & Mair (2019) provide important theorizing on the concept of integrated hybrids as a unique form of social enterprise. Integrated business models (in which customers are also beneficiaries) offer important challenges of governance, especially with respect to mission drift. The authors combine this fresh perspective with classical institutional theory, and revitalize theory on how organizations that are founded with the best of intentions can lose

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sight of their initial mission, which seems especially relevant nowadays. Instead of a more transactional and vertical control and compliance approach, the authors theorize a governance approach that emphasizes the normative side of social enterprises: purpose (providing a shared identity), commitment and coordinating around small wins (mediators between purpose and commitments). This governance approach is more transformational rather than transactional, and it responds to the "social" side of social enterprises. This study is important to aid us to understand the accountability issues of social enterprises.

In sum, the selected articles reflect the wide variety found in the social enterprise and entrepreneurship literature. The global nature of social enterprises mirrors the breadth of coverage in VOLUNTAS—ranging from the Middle East & North Africa to Canada, Russia, Europe, among other regions. There is also a variety of methods and data sources, from the decision of the individual entrepreneur up to the construction of country-level typologies. As the field moves forward, we hope that this diversity in geography, approach, and research question keeps developing so that we can continue to better understand such a multi-faceted and evolving concept.

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