

Mapping Social Enterprise Models Some evidence from the “ICSEM” Project

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Purpose

In this introductory paper, we attempt to demonstrate that it is feasible to theoretically and empirically build an international typology of social enterprise models. We first rely on our previous work (Defourny and Nyssens, 2017), suggesting that the concept of “interest principles” can serve as a cornerstone in such perspective. This concept, when combined with that of social enterprises’ “resource mixes”, allows to design an analytical tool that shows from which “matrices” and through which “trajectories” several distinct social enterprise models can emerge, namely the “non-profit entrepreneurial model”, the “social cooperative model”, the “social business model” and the “public sector model”.

Design/methodology/approach

This paper combines deductive and inductive approaches. In a deductive perspective, we build upon the analytical framework proposed by Gui (1991) to identify capital interest, mutual interest and general interest as key driving forces and fundamental motives in the overall economy. To confront our theoretical construction and our tentative typology of SE models with field realities, we also adopt an inductive approach, relying on bottom-up research strategies developed in the seven “ICSEM country contributions” forming this special issue.

Findings

At first view, mapping exercises of social enterprise categories in the seven countries seem to highlight a high degree of heterogeneity. However, a closer analysis of these apparently diverging contributions clearly suggests that the four major SE models derived from our theoretical framework find significant empirical support in most—if not all—countries.

Originality/value

Although major statistical work to test our typology of SE models remains to be carried out, mainly through the exploitation of the international ICSEM database (which covers over 700 social enterprises from more than 40 countries), this paper represents a first—although limited—attempt to collect empirical evidence for testing this typology.