Social Entrepreneurship - Addressing Symptoms Of Or Solutions To Wicked Problems?

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Social entrepreneurship and social enterprises are currently ascribed a potential to solve ‘all sorts’ of problems both in welfare societies as well as in developing countries with weak welfare structures (see eg. Borzaga and Defourny 2001; Yunus 2008). This hope is many times backed up by arguments of individuals capacity to choose and act in the interest of socially marginalized groups or the public good (Dees 1998; Nicholls 2010) and/or references to success stories in which social entrepreneurship and social enterprises play a crucial role (see eg. Nicholls 2006; Mair, Robinson and Hockerts 2006). But social entrepreneurship and social enterprises role(s) in solving wicked problems in society, or role(s) for citizen’s participation and governance of the public is still less problematized.

A number of the problems that social entrepreneurship and social enterprises are ascribed to address and even solve have for decades been identified as wicked problems – problems that is difficult or impossible to solve due to incomplete or even contradictory requirements that may be difficult to recognize and to which one solution often reveal or create another problem due to complex interdependencies (Churchman 1967; Rittel and Webber 1973). The question is then of course how current interest in and practices of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises address these types of problems and what role these initiatives have in solving these wicked problems.

Social entrepreneurship and social enterprises are, however, not homogenous. There are several different expressions (Hulgård 2010; Gawell 2013). Initially, attention will be given to four different versions of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises that are addressed in partly different literature that somewhat simplified can be described as; 1) ventures primarily resembling voice/advocacy organisations in civil society (Gawell 2006), 2) ventures with a primary aim to provide social services (Shaw and Carter 2007), 3) ventures/social enterprises primarily aiming to integrate long time unemployed and/or marginalized citizens in their activities and thereby in society (Borzaga and Defourney 2001, Spear et al. 2001, Nyssens 2006), and 4) social purpose businesses (Powell, Gammal and Simard 2006). Grounded in this typology of different models in this field, and analysis of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises role in solving wicked problems in society is conducted. The analysis is in this paper related to commodities and capacities (Sen 1999), and the governance of the common (Ostrom 1990).

The aim of this paper is to further the problematization of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises role(s) in addressing and solving wicked problems in society. It will be done through a conceptual discussion and analysis of empirical studies in this field. The analysis is based on primary data from Danish and Swedish studies of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises, as well as secondary data from international studies in the field. Methodologically, this paper is based on mixed methods in which conceptual analysis is combined with qualitative and quantitative data.

References


Rittel, H. and Webber, M (1973), Dilemmas in General Theory of Planning.

Sen, A. (1999), Commodities and Capabilities. OUP India.

