

7. Social Entrepreneurship for Women's Rights

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The struggle for women's rights has taken many forms through history. Studies of social and political movements in various ways helped, and still help, give us valuable knowledge about the processes and mechanisms that affect inequality as well as equality. Studies on how so-called gender contracts are constructed and reconstructed in different types of organizations highlight several of the mechanisms that influence the design of the conditions attached to female/male roles (Hirdman, 1988; Ackermans & van Houten, 1992).

Social and political movements can be seen as a context for entrepreneurial initiatives – that is initiatives to act intertwined with the development of organizational structures to support undertaken activities (Gawell, 2006). The distinction between what we refer to as an organization of social movements and social movements is difficult to draw, but it is a dynamic interplay between the two (Della Porta & Diani, 1999). In this chapter, entrepreneurship, and more specifically social entrepreneurship, is highlighted. In addition to a review of current theoretical discussions on social entrepreneurship, four empirical examples are used as illustrative case studies.

The analysis highlights that social entrepreneurship both challenges existing structures and creates new structures. It relates to the process of an interplay between ideas, activities and acts of organizing. It furthermore relates to individuals and organizations embedded in social movements and societal structures. The organization is created through the entrepreneurial process form of platforms for the specific case – but also for other contemporary or future actors. Social entrepreneurship concerns ideas as well as concrete actions that both challenge and follow norms and values, and social entrepreneurship is thereby both social and political.

The role of social entrepreneurship for women's rights

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Social and political movements can be seen as contexts for entrepreneurial initiatives – that is initiatives to act intertwined with the development of organizational structures to support the undertaken activities (Spinoza, 1997; Gawell, 2006). The distinction between what we refer to as an organization and what we refer to as social movements is difficult to draw, it is rather a dynamic interplay between the two. The emerging form of organizing or organization is shaped by the nature and sustainability of the social movement. As suggested by Porta and Diani (1999), the emerging organization takes the form that serves the purpose and needs of the social movement. In this chapter, entrepreneurship, and more specifically social entrepreneurship, are highlighted with the aim to further our understanding of this interplay and to explore what different aspects of social entrepreneurship can mean. In addition to a review of current theoretical discussions on social entrepreneurship, four empirical examples are used as illustrative case studies.

Social entrepreneurship

The interest in and the understanding of social entrepreneurship have increased rapidly in recent decades, partly from a broadening of the understanding of small business and ‘regular’ business where social and social objectives could be an integral part of the business (see Johannisson & Nilsson, 1989; Sundin, 2009). A somewhat different stream of research that contributes to the field is a cooperative approach, not least the international influences on the development of social cooperatives, for example Italy (Borzaga & Defourney 2001; Nyssens, 2006). There are also other streams such as the development of social entrepreneurship based on non-profit activities and studies of the non-profit sector (Hisrich, Freeman, Standely, Youney & Young, 1997). Therefore, we can refer to different types, or versions, of social entrepreneurship with roots in different sectors and practices (see Gawell, Johannisson & Lundkvist, 2009; Gawell, 2014a; Gawell & Sundin, 2014).

The concepts of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises had not been extensively used until the 1990s and have since then grown in popularity in practice, policy as well as research (Gawell 2014a, 2015; Andersen, Gawell & Spear, 2016). Social entrepreneurship is an emerging research field so there does not yet exist any clear consensus on definitions. Instead, various dimensions are studied from different perspectives. This is challenging for those who want to quickly gain clarity. On the other hand, it shows the complexity that

most of us agree that social entrepreneurship entails. It also shows a wealth of approaches and thus their contribution to the understanding of social commitment, action and the organization of ventures – and the challenges to, which social entrepreneurship is trying to respond.

Social entrepreneurship as a concrete action in everyday life

What aspects of social entrepreneurship are then illustrated in this chapter? First, entrepreneurship is seen as having to do with 'newness', that is something that changes ...existing structures, status quo? (Schumpeter, 1934; Shore, 1999; Hjorth, Johannisson & Steyaert, 2003). It may involve radical changes but for the vast majority it is about incremental, often minor, changes that can collectively contribute to major changes in the long run even if it is mostly about much more modest effects (Shore, 1999). Traditionally, radical changes through entrepreneurship are related to technological innovation and market expansion. In the social sphere, it is at times difficult to identify concrete chains of action and effects as there are many different factors influencing development. Some are clear and can be observed while others are far more elusive and can only be perceived through the interpretations of, for example, people's stories (Steyaert & Hjorth, 2006).

Entrepreneurship is also about concrete actions conducted by individuals, that is someone or some people 'that do things' and at the same time organize these activities. A basic argument in the field of research is that the creation of a new organization is an expression of entrepreneurship (Gartner, 1988). The new organization becomes a materialization of a process that provides institutional support for activities and becomes a platform that allows for continued development beyond specific activities (Gawell, 2006).

Although attention is given to individuals, they are not seen as being isolated from each other or other people's thoughts and ideas (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bruner, 1990). Our identities and positions as well as our actions are grounded in an interaction with others through, for example, networks and discourses in society. Although most people tend to follow the prevailing norms and values, some change tracks – at least at times. Entrepreneurs tend to nurse anomalies, rather than avoiding them (Spinoza et al., 1997). To what extent this is due to perceived opportunities or because they perceive it necessary to act in another way differs from case to case (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Gartner et al., 2003; Gawell, 2013).

Despite the elusive aspects of social entrepreneurship, it is somehow transformed into action. It is, as expressed by Bengt Johannisson, about:

'creating something new in thought, word and deed' [author's translation], and it is done in a practical way in everyday life.

Entrepreneurship for social change

Entrepreneurship is usually linked to the discovery and exploitation of business opportunities and business start-ups (Johannisson & Lindmark, 1996). Social entrepreneurship puts this at least partly in a different context. Action and dynamic changes are not necessarily about products/services or markets. Whatever form of expression, it does, however, have something to do with people and people's lives – both in real living conditions and/or symbolically related to the perception of ourselves and each other (see, for example, Spinosa, Flores & Dreyfus, 1997; Gawell, 2006).

Social entrepreneurship is basically a social involvement combined with some type of entrepreneurial behaviour (Gawell, 2008) and the entrepreneurial conduct means a quest for some kind of novelty and changing dynamics. Social entrepreneurship is thus about entrepreneurship for social change. And even if a commercially oriented entrepreneurship can also lead to major social changes both in terms of changes in behaviour as a consequence of new product patterns, new consumption patterns or the like, I consider social change to be the most central issue as both means and ends in social entrepreneurship. This will be further illustrated in the empirical examples.

Illustrative examples

This chapter refers to four different examples of social entrepreneurship that are in various ways related to women's rights. They are selected out of many possible examples that are more or less known to the general public in Sweden and also internationally. The four examples are furthermore chosen because they reflect a historical development as well as different approaches to the topic of women's human rights and can thus serve as a basis for a reflective discussion. As we will see, there are also some connections between the cases. The information accounted for below is taken from the organizations' websites and complemented with interviews. References to personal aspects are based on published information. The first case takes us back in history, to a time when women's lives in Sweden were restricted in many ways. The organization is still relevant, however, and at times – still provocative.

A struggle for the right to education and planned parenthood

'I dream of the day when all new-born children are welcome, all men and women are equal and sexuality is an expression of intimacy, tenderness and pleasure.' These words come from Elise Ottesen-Jensen also called 'Ottar', who started the 'National Association for Sexuality Education' (RFSU) in Sweden in 1933 (RFSU, 2016). The right to an education on sexuality and health, planned parenthood as well as equality more generally were some of the questions that Ottar and her colleagues fought for. Some of their topics were more or less banned in Sweden in the 1930s. They engaged in debates, they also provided education and services. Furthermore, they engaged in building an organization. The organization grew and formed a platform for engagement and action. To finance their controversial activities, they formed a business that produced and sold condoms. Even today RFSU Ltd. is the largest source of funding for the non-profit organization RFSU, which means that they have financial resources and thus a significant independence from donors.

In the early phases, RFSU ran its struggle for enlightenment, justice and change against a strong resistance – even against the law. But eventually changes occurred in practices as well as institutionally, for example in changes of laws. In 1938, contraception was permitted and in 1955, sexuality education became a compulsory subject in Swedish schools. RFSU was not alone, but it constituted a strong force in this development. In 1952, Ottar co-founded the International Planned Parenthood Federation that consists of 165 organizations across the world that continue the struggle for human rights and health for women and children.

A struggle for women's right to protection against domestic violence

Despite the Swedish legislation prohibiting a husband to violate his wife, which has existed since 1864, the phenomenon still exists. During the 1970s, more formally organized activities to provide protection and support for women and their children affected by domestic violence emerged. The first women's shelters started already in 1914 but the modern kind of a 'women house' was launched in 1979. During the 1980s and 1990s, they grew in numbers and in 1984 the National Organization for Women's and Girls' Shelters in Sweden was founded (ROKS, 2016), and in 1996, the Swedish National Association of Women, nowadays Unizon, was founded (Unizon, 2016).

The vision that shelters communicate is an equal society free from violence. They see violence against women as an expression of a structural problem

caused by inequality. This can only be changed, they argue, by a changed view of the feminine and masculine influence on how we perceive ourselves as men and women (Women's Shelter, 2011). Today, there are some 160 shelters in Sweden largely run by volunteers although some public funding is available.

On an every-day basis, volunteers and some staff act for other women. They organize and build organizations to support the cause. Part of their activities is more or less hidden due to the security of the women seeking protection. But they also engage in the public debate based on experiences and knowledge from their every-day work. At times, they are also seen as provocative since they address issues that challenge values of human rights that are cherished in Swedish society.

A struggle for African women's rights in Sweden and Eastern Congo

Jeanne was born in the Congo in the 1970s and came to Sweden in the early 1990s. In parallel to becoming established in Sweden, she dedicated herself to support immigrant women from African countries. This involvement created networks and a foundation for an organizational platform, making other activities possible. Several initiatives eventually led to a collaboration with RFSU (the first case presented above) and a project aiming at helping women in Eastern Congo that had been victims of war and sexual violence in different ways. The project was extended and was followed by several others in the same or a similar framework.

Cooperation with other organizations in Sweden and Congo has been further developed and is now a platform for further collaboration and access to institutional resources combined with access to women in Sweden and different African countries, not the least a Congolese diaspora. What once began as a single project has now led to many years of cooperation with RFSU and other organizations in Sweden, Congo, and other African countries as well as international organizations working in this field (ASOV, 2016).

A struggle for women in and through urban music

Vanessa was born in Sweden in the 1980s and has had an interest in discussions and words since her childhood. During her adolescence, this interest was combined with an interest in hip-hop and other types of urban music. When it was time to choose a focus for post-secondary education, the choice fell on a programme in rhetoric at Södertörn University. In her thesis, she analysed female rappers' strategies to 'get around' in the male-dominated hip-hop sphere. Her

thesis was to provide a basis for a blog under the name 'Femtastic'. Together with other women in the urban music industry, she also organized a big party with female musicians, DJ, producers and organizers.

The network was then further developed and turned into a feminist cooperative, which was also named 'Femtastic' where several of Sweden's most prominent women in urban music are active (Femtastic, 2016). They are visible through music release, clubs and parties. They want to have fun, help each other in their professions as well as take a place in society and work together for structural change – for example, by starting and engaging in campaigns against violence in contemporary Swedish society (Fatta, 2016).

Social entrepreneurship both challenges and creates structures

The illustrative cases show examples of social entrepreneurship that challenge prevailing structures but also help create partly new structures in society. In this section, a discussion follows, which first relates to the ideas, activities and the organization. This is followed by a section focusing on the interaction between individuals, organizations and social movements, which finally connects to a discussion on service, mobilization and voice.

The short examples illustrate how some ideas have laid the basis for actual and specific activities and show that social entrepreneurship can take many different forms. At a general level, the ideas are very similar – to fight for respect, equality and freedom for all women (and men). But on the other hand, the cases relate to different contexts and take somewhat different forms. In these cases, it has been about the right to intimate relationships, protection from domestic violence, fundamental human rights and, finally, the right to be respected and recognized in an emerging cultural profession. Furthermore, the ideas have been expressed in very concrete action such as the arrangement of meetings, in debates, and in network contacts.

Organizations have emerged through the organizing of activities – long before what we normally refer to as an organization has been identified. These organizations show a reasonable picture of what is done and how it is shared. Even though the research has revealed that participants do not necessarily share the same objectives, the organization creates a notion to relate to a common mean that gradually leads to shared aims (Weick, 1979, 1995).

Social entrepreneurship is based on a combination of needs, perceived necessities, and opportunities to mobilize (Gawell, 2014a, 2016). From what Sarasvathy (2001) refers to as effectuation, a logic that entrepreneurs use to

manage decision-making under uncertainty, social entrepreneurs manage a process of emergence despite an uncertainty of what is possible.

Individuals, organizations and social movements

In any case, it seems clear that there has been, and is, a deep personal commitment to the issues at stake. The texts of Ottar do, for example, describe how a sister had to leave a child for adoption due to what at that time was perceived as an ‘inappropriate’ pregnancy and then suffered mental illness and died shortly thereafter. Even in the other cases there are clear personal impressions of individuals’ own experiences and/or experiences of relatives who have been affected. These experiences have most likely contributed to the identification of and the commitment to dealing with anomalies or maybe rather dealing with norms (although illegal but still existing) of society that have a negative impact on women. They have focused on the ‘problems’ and considered that it was necessary to do something about them.

These social entrepreneurs have been far from isolated from other people’s experiences. And society at large has not been totally resistant to these ideas – although provoked. Around the issues at stake, there have been social movements in society that, despite the opposition from strong interest groups, enabled the behavioural change and the emergence of the platforms that the entrepreneurs created. Social movements are difficult to concretely identify and delineate in time and place. However, they leave a footprint of individual and organizational acts and can thus be traced through discourses (Melucci, 1991; Thorn, 1997). It is possible to see clear links between the illustrative cases and humanism and social liberalism just to mention a few social movements in, which a clear position has been taken for freedom, equality and rights, which have had influences in the Swedish context.

Through social entrepreneurship, organizations have been formed, which, in turn, created platforms for others as they consolidated ideas and served as an institutional reference for others to relate to. They are formed as a distinctive sphere and part of a sector with similar objectives – but in slightly different ways.

Services, mobilization, and voice

The concrete action to educate, to protect, to provide support and to organize music clubs can be seen as services with a social purpose and content. At least part of the activities highlighted as examples in this chapter are statistically categorized just as social services. But the initiatives are much more than

services offered on a market. They also involve the development of ideas and the mobilization of people who take these ideas further in their networks and in their various works. Social entrepreneurship is a mobilizing dimension (Gawell, 2006; Gawell et al., 2009) that extends over time and space through ideas that sometimes even travel worldwide (Sevon & Czarniawska, 2005).

The mobilizing and advocacy aspects of social entrepreneurship are linked to a discussion of civil society's role as a voice in society, influencing practices as well as policies and legislation. In the case of RFSU, contraceptive counselling was not initially in accordance with the law. Political actors who had ideas in line with the RFSU positions at this time were considered radical. Associations of women's shelters have worked actively to influence both the public opinion and political decisions. For example, they promoted a re-classification of severe violation of women so that it came to fall under public prosecution and include a child perspective in public routines related to domestic violence.

The interaction between the different contexts is made clear in the example of the efforts of the African women's rights in Sweden and Eastern Congo where women's issues in the two countries differ in many ways. The ideas of fundamental human rights go beyond borders, and the struggle is global but with regional and local differences.

Social entrepreneurship is social and political – concluding remark

Although the illustrative examples can in different ways be seen as radical, especially the founding of RFSU challenged the prevailing norms and legislation, they all emerged and exist in a relatively favourable environment where freedom of speech has a long tradition (Freedom of the Press was passed in a first version in 1766). All cases were also founded during the periods, which can be characterized by the emergence and maturity of the modern Swedish welfare society where equality and well-being are highlighted.

The illustrative cases have also emerged in a time and context when and where it has been possible to mobilize resources in terms of people and funding. The latter, however, is a constant battle especially in areas that require comprehensive long-term work. The case of women's shelters and also the initiative to support vulnerable women in Eastern Congo are the examples that best illustrate this. In these examples, RFSU is a pure commercial activity of selling condoms, making it possible to act – also independent of grants. The feminist cooperative 'Femtastic' combines commercial activities that mainly go

to female artists in urban music, with different types of grants for their social activities.

As noted, these examples of social entrepreneurship for women's rights are taken from Sweden and during the surge and maturity of the Swedish welfare state, and it is, of course, difficult to compare with other regions. However, considering that the welfare state in Sweden has improved the protection of women in general and implemented a far-reaching legislation against domestic violence, for instance, this has not been enough to eradicate this bad social norm in society. The examples from Sweden, on the other hand, demonstrate that regardless of the context, it is possible to push changes through individual commitments that in some cases can be turned into social entrepreneurship.

Social entrepreneurship, where social engagement is combined with entrepreneurial action, has a social purpose, a social construction as well as social consequences. It concerns social thoughts and concrete action as well as influences norms and institutional structures that have a controlling effect on people's lives. This means, as also noted earlier by among others Gawell (2006, 2014b), that social entrepreneurship is both social and political.

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