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Publisher Routledge

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Journal of Social Entrepreneurship

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t912620277>

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Online publication date: 20 September 2010

To cite this Article Steyaert, Chris and Dey, Pascal(2010) 'Nine Verbs to Keep the Social Entrepreneurship Research Agenda 'Dangerous'', Journal of Social Entrepreneurship, 1: 2, 231 – 254

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/19420676.2010.511817

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19420676.2010.511817>

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Nine Verbs to Keep the Social Entrepreneurship Research Agenda ‘Dangerous’

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ABSTRACT *This paper critiques and re-imagines current research approaches to the field of social entrepreneurship. Taking a theoretical view of research as ‘enactment’, this paper explores research as a constitutive act and explores a range of ways of relating with and constructing the subject of inquiry. Three models of enactive research are presented, each based on three verbs which denote the contours of a ‘dangerous’ research agenda for social entrepreneurship. These include: (a) ‘critiquing’ approaches to research through denaturalizing, critically performing and reflexivity; (b) ‘inheriting’ approaches through contextualizing, historicizing and connecting; and (c) ‘intervening’ approaches through participating, spatializing and minorizing.*

KEY WORDS: Social entrepreneurship, critique, context, intervention, research agenda, enactment

Introduction

As the field of social entrepreneurship is increasingly coming of age, several attempts have been made to advance its research agenda by giving emerging trends a more unitary direction, by solidifying its theoretical groundings or by questioning the ways in which research problems are typically presented (Steyaert and Hjorth 2006, Nicholls and Young 2008, Peattie and Morley 2008). Such efforts are congruent with other examples of new academic fields seeking to bolster their credibility by raising the quality of research performance, for instance by publishing in the top journals. Notwithstanding

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ISSN 1942-0676 Print/1942-0684 Online/10/020231–24 © 2010 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/19420676.2010.511817

occasional references toward the quality of empirical research, the rigor of theory building and the academic credibility of publications (Nicholls and Young 2008), there is a lack of accounts that concede that the process of researching social entrepreneurship brings it into being instead of merely representing it.

This paper aims to encourage the field of social entrepreneurship to undertake 'situated inquiries' (Law 2004), that is, research that creatively capitalizes on a co-productive relationship with the subject matter. By adopting a performative view of research as 'enactment' (Law and Urry 2004), this work poses the following questions:

- How is research on social entrepreneurship co-producing certain social realities while excluding other possibilities?
- How does the community of social entrepreneurship researchers operate as a selective apparatus of scientific production?
- How can the research agenda be changed by intervening into habitual research practices?

With these questions in mind, this paper tries to foster a debate about the different kind(s) of research practices of social entrepreneurship to experiment with academic disciplines and research practices that have thus far remained outside of this field of research. Research agendas are more than just negotiations that pinpoint potential directions for accommodating the careers of scholars; they can also be seen as political and ethical tools for considering other possible worlds. To initiate a new research agenda of social entrepreneurship, this paper discusses the conceptual politics of research that embraces ontological, epistemological, and politico-ethical concerns.

With respect to ontology, this paper aims to stimulate research that reflects upon the images of social entrepreneurship that are created through its research practices and that acknowledges that social entrepreneurship is not 'essentially there' before the act of research is carried out but is actually its very product. Epistemologically, this paper seeks to promote forms of research that simultaneously accept playing an active and constitutive role in the process of knowledge production and that take an interventionist stance towards research. If words and worlds form two sides of the same process of academic labor, the task is to actively experiment not only with styles of writing (Richardson 1994) but also with how researchers performatively relate to their subject of inquiry and how they actively enact the object of their research. The discussion of the conceptual politics of research also raises the politico-ethical question of which scientific perspectives, disciplines and theoretical traditions are prioritized, as well as which realities are disabled and enabled by research choices.

As a consequence, the objectives of this paper are:

1. To contribute to the analysis of research into social entrepreneurship as a process of enactment, drawing upon Law and Urry's (2004) idea that research enacts the social.

2. To argue for the importance of keeping the research agenda of social entrepreneurship 'dangerous' by aligning the interventionist possibilities of research with the social (change) ambitions of the field in which it participates.
3. To instigate and imagine different forms of research practice in social entrepreneurship which align its social and political interests by drawing upon a wide range of philosophical and social-theoretical resources.

To this end, this paper will first formulate reflections on, and interventions into, the possible practices of research agenda setting in the field of social entrepreneurship. The ensuing argument consists of three sections that describe and illustrate the research practices of 'critiquing', 'inheriting' and 'intervening' in the form of verbs. By way of conclusion, the paper indicates how these research practices 'reverberate' the social change agenda of social entrepreneurship more broadly in a way that keeps us aware of the challenges inherent in researching social entrepreneurship.

Setting a Research Agenda

First, this paper aims to reconsider the notion of 'research' in social entrepreneurship so that it is no longer seen as 'innocent or purely technical' (Law 2004, p. 143) but recast as a process of research creation (McCormack 2008). Irrespective of the methodological approach being taken toward research into social entrepreneurship (via teaching notes, case-studies, comparative empirical analyses or theoretical treatises), it is the case that all these research approaches to some degree create the reality of the object of which they speak. Conceptualizing research as enactment (Law 2004, Law and Urry 2004) entails that research is not solely situated on an epistemological but also on an ontological level: research enacts worlds. Importantly, this immediately brings to the forefront the ontological politics of inquiry (Mol 1999) in that some realities of social entrepreneurship become more 'real' than others precisely through the way research assembles and connects specific frames of understanding, data, people, journal writings, questionnaires and so on. According to Law (2004), research draws on more than theories, methods and data. It rather depends on a distinctive hinterland as well as on corresponding inscription devices, meaning that research is chiefly about the combination of 'tacit knowledge, computer software, language skills, management capacities, transport and communication systems, salary scales, flows of finance, the priorities of funding bodies, and overtly political and economic agendas' (Law 2004, p. 41).

Second, conceiving of social entrepreneurship as a means toward social change, it must be borne in mind that this image necessarily creates ethical and political consequences. By this is meant that researchers need to consider how they come to think and speak of social entrepreneurship in particular ways and highlight certain topics or themes above others. Thinking of research as complex 'assemblages' requires a better understanding of how

accounts of social entrepreneurship are constitutively based on traditions to which research relates itself, the forms through which research is materialized, the embodied practices that enact research and the sort of 'absences' upon which they are based (Law 2004).

Third, following Law and Urry (2004, p. 391, emphasis in original), '[i]f social investigation makes worlds, then it can, in some measure, think about the worlds it wants to *help* to make.' If social entrepreneurship research is to open up to new agendas, then it is necessary to displace accustomed modes of research and to change and experiment with the ways scholars conceive of or, more precisely, enact their research. The objective is to research social entrepreneurship by giving the 'othered' (Law 2004, p. 107) a chance to take shape. In this way, research can support the transformational agenda of social entrepreneurship and interfere into the ways social realities are produced: '[t]he good of making a difference will live alongside ... that of enacting the [novel] truth[s]' (Law 2004, p. 67).

By implication of the above, there is a need to render the research agenda of social entrepreneurship 'dangerous' so as to construe the field as a source of innovation (Mair and Martí 2006) and societal change (Swedberg 2009). Adding the prefix 'dangerous' to the research agenda of social entrepreneurship suggests that research should constantly call into question its self-justification and engage actively with 'the ever-present possibility of invention, reconfiguration or transformation in our existing, historically conditioned and contingent ways of understanding' (Patton 2003, p. 18). To plot a way forward toward such imaginative reformulations, this paper will draw inspiration from philosophy (Agamben, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Foucault) and social theory (Bourdieu, Laclau, Latour, Law, Lyotard, Mol, Pink, Thrift, Žižek).

While arguably performing an analytic tightrope dance between the 'belonging and the breakthrough' (Critchley 1999, p. 70), this paper will explore practices that allow for a reflexive and experimental enactment of social entrepreneurship research. This argument is framed by three groups of verbs that operate as metaphors for concrete (research) activities (Weick 1979). The first group of verbs focuses on 'critiquing' through practicing denaturalizing, critically performing and reflexivity. Critiquing aims at understanding how scientific research engenders and solidifies dominant forms of representation. A second group of verbs represents 'inheriting' and concentrates on how research into social entrepreneurship may be shaped through contextualizing, historicizing and connecting. Inheriting reflects upon how singular research enactments are linked to particular local and historical contexts and, by implication, how a change of the intertextuality of research practices coincides not only with novel insights but also with the creation of new worlds. A third group of verbs, labeled 'intervening', focuses on changing the social through activist, spatial and minor practices. Intervening considers how research practices can be transformed so as to actively co-enact the social change processes addressed by the social entrepreneurship projects studied.

This paper does not suggest that the research practices it presents are new, in the etymological sense of the term, for the field of social entrepreneurship. On the contrary, though the aim is to 'push off from the shore and conjugate

things for ourselves' (May 2005, p. 112), this paper uses existing academic research to provide illustrations of how within, or at the very margins of the field of social entrepreneurship there can be found accounts which already exemplify some of our propositions. Each of the following verbs comprises a stand-alone argument of how the research agenda of social entrepreneurship could be enlivened. Instead of conceiving the different verbs as forming a progressive step-by-step toolbox, this paper envisages them as loose couplings, as synergetic trains of thought which can be applied in distinct combinations.

Critiquing

The first group of verbs proposes studying social entrepreneurship in relation to critical approaches (Roper and Cheney 2005, Cho 2006, Nicholls and Cho 2006, Steyaert and Hjorth 2006). Critical analysis is well suited to a more critical focus in social entrepreneurship research (Ziegler 2009). It is a complex practice that allows the researcher to become more reflective and to question the research traditions and cultural repertoires to which the research community relates itself. Critique is arguably an indispensable step to embrace social entrepreneurship's 'otherness' as it stimulates an understanding of how research engenders particular forms of 'thisness' (McMahon 2005). Assuming an affirmative relationship between critique and (social) entrepreneurship (Weiskopf and Steyaert 2009),¹ the aim is to work creatively in and from (and hence not against) the structured field of social entrepreneurship studies. Based upon Fournier and Grey (2000), this paper approaches the critiquing of social entrepreneurship in three modes: by denaturalizing; by calling into question one of its most powerful signifiers, performativity; and by reflexivity.

Denaturalizing

Critique as denaturalizing operates on the basis of a linguistic paradigm (Deetz 2003) that conceives of social entrepreneurship as being the product of particular social or dialogical practices (Cho 2006). In line with Law's (2004) suggestion to embrace the constitutive (instead of the representational) aspect of method and research in general, denaturalizing allocates particular importance to the role of language. Starting with the recognition that the narratives, enunciations, speech acts and performances (of academics) operate as a preeminent mechanism for 'essencing' social entrepreneurship (Žižek 2008), denaturalizing acknowledges that such narratives 'help construct the subjectivity of those who accept (or draw upon) them, contrary to the commonsensical view that people construct the language they use' (Bennett and Edelman 1985, p. 161). By implication, denaturalizing seeks to disclose how talk about and text concerning social entrepreneurship 'produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault 1984, p. 205) and, most importantly, how 'particular representations come to be privileged and solidified' (Weiskopf and Willmott 1997, p. 7).

Construing social entrepreneurship as a discursive effect or textual achievement, denaturalizing entails asking how the 'making' of social

entrepreneurship works *in situ*. Based on the conviction that ‘it is not possible to separate out (a) the making of particular *realities*, (b) the making of particular *statements* about those realities, and (c) the creation of *instrumental, technical, and human configurations and practices*, the inscription devices that produce these realities and statements’ (Law 2004, p. 31, emphases in original), denaturalizing consists of bringing to light the processes and qualifying modalities that form the conditions of possibility for social entrepreneurship research. This requires examining the material and relational assemblages that constitute social entrepreneurship as a modern episteme. Though the relationship between academic inquiry and social entrepreneurship might at first glance appear simple – social entrepreneurship forming an objectively existing social reality which academics study and represent via their scholarly practices – the notion of assemblage scrutinizes the idea of one-directional causality by conceding that the subject matter is the result of a process of mutual negotiation involving policy makers, academics, social entrepreneurs, social venture competitions and other actors and actants.

For instance, Grenier (2009) noted the multifaceted operation of assemblages in her analysis of the contribution of public policy discourses to the co-construction of social entrepreneurship. Studying the interplay of think-tanks and policy makers, Grenier (2009, p. 182) brought to light how the former ‘drew on the policy discourses of the day to reinforce the importance of social entrepreneurship to issues such as “social capital” and “community cohesion”, thereby positioning social entrepreneurship as immediately relevant to government policy’. What is revealed here is that social entrepreneurship formed a fluid signifier that institutional actors invested in to render it a ‘mechanism for aligning certain novel ideas or interesting practices with policy agendas’ (Grenier 2009, p. 182).

However, denaturalizing also includes the possibility that even though a given assemblage never creates social entrepreneurship as a uniform ‘being’, discursive ruptures can nevertheless be overcome by a strategic connection of its heterogeneous parts. In concrete terms, by being incorporated in systems of thought such as Third Way politics (Grenier 2009), it becomes possible to stabilize the heterogeneity and amorphousness of the sign ‘social entrepreneurship’ to the point where it (at least temporarily) becomes possible to employ it as an instrument for policy-driven interventions.

Consequently, denaturalizing comprises a meticulous study of how particular assemblages and the discourses they impart engender a series of ‘shadow effects’ that conceal the ambivalences, paradoxes and instabilities of the field. Denaturalizing, in turn, implies researching social entrepreneurship not just as an atomistic entity but as simultaneously being the object of political interactions and power struggles and, at times, even ‘a means of control and a method of domination’ (Foucault 1984, p. 203).

Critically Performing

A second practice of critiquing is based on the notion of performativity (Lyotard 1984) within the legitimization of knowledge. Performativity entails

evaluative processes that determine respectively the usefulness or uselessness of knowledge according to the principle of optimal performance. One of the most important consequences of this shift is that knowledge ceases to be a valid end in itself and is instead 'assessed economically not by its truth-value, but by its exchange-value' (Case and Piñeiro 2009, p. 99).

Alvesson *et al.* (2009) see performativity as a special case of denaturalization that tests how the reality of social entrepreneurship is established by the normative needs of a given society. According to Guala (2006, p. 435) this suggests that governments 'must constantly intervene, but on society, rather than on the economy itself . . . by encouraging [social] entrepreneurship in all areas of life, including those areas that were traditionally alien to the economic way of thinking and acting'. By implication, performativity emphasizes that the role of government is to create active (social) entrepreneurs, to present them to society as both moral and desirable (even enforceable) actors, and to locate them within 'the market' rather than the other way around. Performativity stimulates an economic codification of social entrepreneurship, embedding it in a means–ends logic where it derives its value exclusively in terms of whether or not it is economically viable. The performativity of social entrepreneurship encompasses, for instance, aspects such as its financial self-sustainability (which can create savings of tax and private donations) or its ability to generate economic value by creating jobs, providing education and increasing national welfare at large.

This paper follows Alvesson *et al.* (2009) who oppose performativity 'only in the sense of being hostile to knowledge that has it [performativity] as an exclusive focus' (2009, p. 12). However, while social entrepreneurship may be thought of as an apt instrument for achieving practical ends such as increased efficiency, it is misleading to conceive of the subject as being *exclusively* a means for maximizing input–output relations. Studies that take a 'non-performative stance'² (Fournier and Grey 2000) toward social entrepreneurship would instead 'acknowledge that entrepreneurship is a society-creating force that enhances citizens' quality of life' and that invites us to 'see entrepreneurship as primarily belonging to society and not simply to the economy' (Hjorth 2009, p. 213).

Nicholls and Young (2008, p. xiv) contended that 'the discourse around social entrepreneurship has moved away from business school centred accounts that simply applied established neo-liberal economic models and strategic approaches from the commercial world to social problems'. Yet, until now studies that reinforce performativity in the discourses of social entrepreneurship outnumber those working from a more critical perspective. A first step toward counteracting this hegemonic 'productivizing' (Huczynski 1993) of social entrepreneurship would comprise studies that challenge prioritizing the 'pragmatic and result-oriented methods of a business entrepreneur' (Hsu 2005, p. 61). Moreover, studies that take a critically performative stance would analyze the value creation logics of social entrepreneurship 'in the pursuit of high social returns' (New York University 2009; quoted in van Putten II and Green 2009, p. 1) by acknowledging that the matter is not about the economic rejuvenation of national or global

economies alone and by studying and/or developing other kind of discourses (cf. 'minorizing' later).

Second, while seeking to avoid the hegemonic signification of social entrepreneurship as scalable business (Alvord *et al.* 2004) based on 'big ideas' (Light 2009), it can be noted that critically performing does not mean shying away from asking 'does social entrepreneurship work?'. Critically performative studies would, however, depart from a very particular understanding of 'impact', one that deems 'good' those performances that engender ends like equality or environmental protection. Young (2006), while depicting the impact of a fictional program for disadvantaged youth, provided a telling illustration of a people-based understanding of performativity. In concrete terms, Young (2006, p. 57) claimed that it is not enough to 'simply rely on traditional economic measures of income gained and employability: it also needs to reflect their own experiences, and whether they felt empowered or disempowered'. Spicer *et al.*'s (2009) notion of 'critical performativity' provides a conceptual anchor for construing micro-emancipation within a normative orientation and, thus, for envisioning a means–ends relation through which social entrepreneurship can make a positive difference for the people (and not just for the economy). On the face of it, 'critical performativity' entails reframing the notion of social value by putting prime emphasis on its dialogical particularities. To talk of social entrepreneurship's (critical) performativity, it is immediately necessary to 'start with some explicit discussion of values and which are relevant and why' (Young 2006, p. 58).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity forms a third practice for enriching the research agenda of social entrepreneurship by taking a critical stance toward research and by building upon the practices of denaturalization and anti-performativity (Fournier and Grey 2000). Reflexivity can be defined as 'conducting research in a way that turns back upon and takes account of itself' (Hardy and Clegg 2006, p. 769). This suggests that a reflexive research agenda for social entrepreneurship would connect to a longstanding historical debate that has kept the social sciences in general (Ashmore 1989), and organization and management studies in particular (Alvesson *et al.* 2008), in its grip for some time. For example, reflexivity is considered a central tenet of qualitative research (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000) and forms a crucial meta-methodological objective for researchers to test the taken-for-granted claims, assumptions and ideologies they employ in their academic work. Through reflexivity, researchers examine the ways in which their research acts on and enacts the world, and how the world retroactively acts on their research. Reflexivity aims at understanding the frameworks, conditions, assumptions and priorities scholars enact when exploring a particular research problem or pursuing a theoretical argument, and that guides them in alternating between traditions, questions and inventions.

Alvesson *et al.*'s (2008) distinction between deconstructive reflexivity and reconstructive reflexivity helps to further clarify these issues. Deconstructive

reflexivity comprises destabilizing and positioning practices and reveals a conceptual overlap with what was discussed above in relation to the denaturalizing mode of critique. As explained, deconstructive reflexivity allows for understanding what is left out and marginalized in any given account of reality. On the other hand, reconstructive reflexivity (with its multi-perspective and multi-voicing practices) entails practices of reconstructing and reframing which depend on the incorporation of issues from alternative paradigms, perspectives and political values. The two strands of reflexivity contain the potential to change the way social entrepreneurship research is produced and represented in significant ways.

Generally speaking, reflexivity implies that research endeavors are no longer presented as taking place in a neutral space of detached objectivism, but rather they are theorized as complex achievements within field theory (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) or actor-network theory (Latour 2005). Positioning the scholar in her broader field or assemblage means that researchers need to render visible the hinterland that engenders (political) priorities and omissions. In accord with this approach, Nicholls and Cho (2006) examined the field of social entrepreneurship through structuration theory and used critical theory to analyze the political dimension of sociality.

With regard to destabilizing practices, researchers scrutinize the conditions and consequences at work in their construction of a theory or a fact so as to point out excluded or suppressed alternatives. Dey and Steyaert (2010) illustrated this by using narrative theory to reconstruct the politics of how social entrepreneurship is narrated as a mixture of grand, counter and little narratives, ultimately aiming at 'weakening' the messianistic aura that is present in the more optimistic versions of social entrepreneurship. In addition, multi-voicing practices are reflected in studies that are not based on single interviews or questionnaires but which engage with social entrepreneurship's social complexity, for instance by reconstructing the entrepreneurial process and interweaving the voices, discourses and positions of the various actors directly or indirectly involved in the research object (Lindgren and Packendorff 2006). Multi-perspective practices could address the lack of social entrepreneurship's theoretical foundations (Nicholls and Cho 2006, Steyaert and Hjorth 2006) by involving various theoretical perspectives simultaneously. For example, researchers are increasingly using theories that are based on a social ontology, such as discourse theory (Parkinson and Howorth 2008). However, a whole range of theories remains yet to be applied and interwoven (Steyaert 2007).

In summary, while there are few explicit calls for reflexivity in social entrepreneurship studies (cf. however, Dey and Steyaert 2010), this does not exclude the possibility that scholars could work from a reflexive stance. For instance, Nicholls and Young (2008), at the occasion of the publication of the paperback version of their *Social entrepreneurship* book (Nicholls 2006), wrote a new and extensive introduction that took a critical and insightful perspective, thus engendering a different framework for the readers of the paperback version that not only showed the dynamics of this still young field but also enhanced the contested nature of the field in which they simultaneously participated in and to which they attempted to give direction.

Inheriting

While critiquing was presented as a model for detecting the existing borders by which social entrepreneurship is delineated, this paper now turns to inheriting that informs research practices in purposefully extending the contextual, historical and theoretical horizons of the existing 'production' of social entrepreneurship. Inheriting, first of all, requires putting to rest of the definitional struggles over the term social entrepreneurship. In this respect, Nicholls and Young (2008, p. xii) made an important point in stating that the 'search for a single definition [of social entrepreneurship] forms a sterile activity' and that 'a key part of what makes social entrepreneurship so successful is that it resists isomorphic pressures to conform to set types of action preferring instead to remain fluid and adaptable to fill institutional voids in environmental or social provision'. What is implicit here is that the various definitions of social entrepreneurship each represent political strategies. That is, definitions of social entrepreneurship presuppose selection (i.e. a distinction between 'this and not-this'; Lyotard 1993), hierarchies (i.e. binary oppositions in which one term always governs the other; Derrida 1981) and censorship (i.e. mechanisms by which elite groups get to refuse to discuss, and to label as uninteresting or vulgar, issues that are uncomfortable for them; van Maanen 1995). It follows that academia's ruling conventions and habits of enunciation need to be conceived of as the very limit of what can be expressed and hence imagined.

Expanding on this problematic side of definitions, inheriting points out how studies of social entrepreneurship all too often try to render the constitutive features of its writing invisible, thus attempting 'to conceal all traces of itself as a factory' (Barthes 1974, p. 244). Inheriting further demonstrates that even the seemingly unshakeable economy of presence/absence (Law 2004) is 'permeable' and can be opened up and extended by releasing differences, however intangible they might be, by dint of particular 'archeological' research practices. 'Archeology' as inheriting implies studying the available stock of knowledge of social entrepreneurship as cunning textual entanglements,³ thus conceding that the meaning of social entrepreneurship depends 'on our knowledge, ideas, theories, techniques, social relations' (Foucault 1996, p. 406). The following three verbs will render the transformative potential of the concept of inheriting more palpable, notably by sketching out how social entrepreneurship research might go about paying tribute to the rich contexts, historical conditions and multiple texts that are at work, or could be used in, the 'production' of social entrepreneurship.

Contextualizing

A first form of inheriting can be characterized in the practice of contextualizing that gives substance to the question of how to contextualize, localize and situate social entrepreneurship. The notion of 'context' represents a standard reference in the qualitative research literature where it is mostly used to delineate truth as a local or situational phenomenon and

not as an all-encompassing, transcendental possibility. If truth is contingent, that is context-dependent, it becomes helpful to follow Laclau (1993, p. 341) in studying the context of social entrepreneurship as a 'vast argumentative texture through which people construct their reality'. Despite the huge popularity of the image of social entrepreneurship as an individual bringing about change (e.g. Martin and Osberg 2007) or as a rational calculus which can be applied irrespective of local conditions of (im)possibility (Yunus 2007), 'context' signifies here that social entrepreneurship neither occurs in a vacuum nor are social entrepreneurs able to push their innovations through irrespective of the specific, both material and social, circumstances in which they operate (Swedberg 2009). This means that social entrepreneurs 'act in specific contexts of local and global norms that they fight for or struggle against' (Ziegler 2009, p. 2), and this further implies that the basic grammar used by social entrepreneurs consists of, and to a certain extent must be compatible with, locally intelligible repertoires, ideas, convictions, regimes of truth and so on.

Contextualizing requires that research takes into account the embeddedness of social entrepreneurship (Mair and Martí 2006). It provides a framework for explaining why certain socially entrepreneurial ideas enrich particular scenarios, while not unfolding their potential in other configurations of power-knowledge. Envisioning social change as being about the sensible reconfiguration of taken-for-granted ways of thinking,⁴ there is a need for research that approaches social entrepreneurship as interventions into local politics of truth and which studies whether these endeavors change the types of discourse that any given community or society 'accepts and makes function as true' (Foucault 1984, p. 73). Contextualizing thus emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between social entrepreneurship and its context. It suggests that although social entrepreneurs are always influenced (yet not fully codified) by the social space they inhabit, they too influence that very social space by actively incorporating and embodying a set of perceptual schemas of the field which, in turn, enables them to enact and gradually change symbolic orders (Bourdieu 2005).

Illustrative studies could not only look at those rare success stories associated with changes in global 'structures of political, discursive and business opportunities' (Vasi 2009, p. 166) but also at social entrepreneurial endeavors whose success is tied to specific local circumstances as well as at endeavors that might have failed precisely because not having been able 'to frame their activities such that they are perceived as legitimate' (Vasi 2009, p. 164). Studying social entrepreneurship in its distinct context(s), however, does not merely pay tribute to Vasi's (2009, p. 160) recognition that 'local groups possess the best knowledge about which issues are most important, and that local actors may solve many of their problems if they have access to more resources and better capacity to act'. It also goes further by researching the (economic) circumstances that respectively support or hinder the success of social entrepreneurship (e.g. the availability of financial resources, Achleitner *et al.* 2009; incubators, Friedman and Sharir 2009; reduction of public sector subsidies, Boschee 2006). Contextualizing means studying how

social entrepreneurs establish the legitimacy of their ventures or ideas (Sud *et al.* 2009) and how they are able to alter the canonical lexis and reality-scripting practices of which they are also a part.

Historicizing

A second practice of inheriting is historicizing which aims at countering the neophilia of social entrepreneurship: its fetish with newness. Boddice (2009, p. 133) noted this neophilia: '[j]udging by the historical perspective of contemporary scholars in the field, social entrepreneurship is an entirely new and unprecedented activity.' Resisting the claim that social entrepreneurship is a new phenomenon (Perrini 2006), historicizing is necessary for rendering comprehensible that the 'being' of social entrepreneurship derives its legitimacy from regimes of truth which preceded it: epistemic formations from the past which keep haunting us (Derrida 1994).

In opposition to contextualizing that provides a conceptual schema for understanding how social entrepreneurship interferes with concrete cultural presences, historicizing emphasizes the vertical axis of social entrepreneurship's contexts by pointing out that social entrepreneurship is necessarily saturated with the past and 'loaded with philosophical and ideological tensions' (Parkinson and Howorth 2008, p. 286). Boddice (2009, p. 134) suggested that social entrepreneurship, as a concept, has not yet been understood appropriately in terms of its 'origins, the traditions it draws on and the kinds of ideology employed, sometimes unconsciously, in its execution'. The task of historicizing, then, is to take a retrograde perspective so as to investigate how social entrepreneurship, while being a 'thing' of the present, is constantly influenced by its legacy⁵ (Poon *et al.* 2009).

Following Agamben (2009), this paper delineates historicizing as a 'ruinology' that seeks to research the fragments, partial objects and archetypes that inhabit and give form to current approaches to social entrepreneurship. It follows from this that historicizing is not solely a means for delegitimizing social entrepreneurship's claim to newness (Faltin 2008) by simply stating that social entrepreneurs 'have existed throughout history' (Bornstein 2004, p. 3). It is above all an 'archeological' practice that seeks to study social entrepreneurship as a paradoxical neologism, where the attribute paradoxical gives way to the realization that even though social entrepreneurship as a concept is undoubtedly new, there is value in studying its 'rootedness', most notably with respect to ideologies of the market (Cho 2006).

Practices of historicizing can be formed through accounts such as those by Shaw and Carter (2007) or Boddice (2009) who both use the notion of 'antecedents' to stress the need for emphasizing the historical/empirical and theoretical precursors of social entrepreneurship. What emerges from such an approach is an understanding that social entrepreneurship, though often simply represented as a set of technical innovations for social problems, is the effect of a given (yet always contestable) *Zeitgeist*. Consequently, envisioning social entrepreneurship as deliberate socio-ideological shaping (Shkul 2009) is evidently at odds with the view of social entrepreneurship being a non- or

post-ideological tool for solving social problems. The contrary seems to be true. Historicizing chiefly departs from the conviction that social entrepreneurship is presented through research as a neutral, pragmatic and benevolent field of practice or problem fixing: an image that then adds to the impression that it occurs outside the sphere of ideology. This reveals the reality of social entrepreneurship as a construct that is 'covered' by an ostensibly ideology-free façade (Žižek 1994), but that is particularly influenced by logics of managerialism (Desai and Imrie 1998) that may detract from its political-ideological function and operation (Cho 2006).

In his analysis of development aid, Dey (2007) indicated that social entrepreneurship was introduced at a very particular point in time, where it was employed to re-frame the trajectory of foreign aid and, most importantly, the role and identity of 'state-of-the-art' nongovernmental organizations. Thus social entrepreneurship represented a new mode of thinking about how to best leverage stagnating economies in 'Third World' countries (Rankin 2001). Dey's research further emphasized that this paradigm shift took some time. Historicizing social entrepreneurship in relation to 'Third World' development entails analyzing the field's antecedent contexts as well as the historical incidents through which ruling discourses were respectively perpetuated or problematized and hence altered. Dey (2007) traced development discourses back to President Truman's description of development in his inauguration speech in 1949 that brought about the linguistic segregation of developed and undeveloped populations. Historicizing then reveals that (social) entrepreneurship had a 'double entry' into the realm of development: the first in the 1980s in conjunction with 'the so-called neo-liberal counter-revolution in development theory' (Esteva 1992, p. 58); the second in the 1990s where it was linked with the idea of 'sustainable development' and used as a counter-measure to the 'failed' history of development (Buttel *et al.* 1990). This second entry was stimulated by the simultaneous problematization of nongovernmental organizations from the mid-1990s onwards. Thus, non-governmental organizations' crises of legitimacy engendered the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a more business-like approach to development and provided space for the idea of social entrepreneurship to flourish (Chand 2009). Historicizing provides the practical means for addressing Boddice's (2009, p. 135) warning:

if social entrepreneurs and their sponsoring organizations make no attempt to see which forces have produced and shaped themselves, if they refuse to concede that those forces have been driven by particular ideologies, then the tendentiousness of their activities will remain veiled.

Connecting

What contextualizing and historicizing have in common is that both verbs suggest that social entrepreneurship exhibits spatial and historical dimensions or 'origins'. Inheriting as connecting suggests how research practice gains legitimacy when the author and the meaning appointed to the concept under

scrutiny gets counter-signed and endowed with a novel ‘impression’ (Agamben 2009). Building on this, Law (2004, p. 10) contended that the concept of ‘methodology’ marks a set of short circuits that create the false impression of an approach that ‘links us in the best possible way with reality, and allows us to return more or less quickly from that reality to our place of study with findings that are reasonably secure’. Žižek (2006, p. ix) also used the notion of short-circuiting as a productive metaphor for critical inquiry drawing on the notion of connecting to ‘cross wires that do not usually touch’.

Notwithstanding the existence of some critical-theoretical research into social entrepreneurship (e.g. Cho 2006), much work in the field continues to synthesize the available – and still very limited – stock of knowledge (e.g. Roper and Cheney 2005) aiming, above all, at stabilizing the concept of social entrepreneurship. The practice of connecting in contrast calls for ‘new and interdisciplinary approaches that reflect the complexity and ambiguity that characterize activity in the social or community context’ (Parkinson and Howorth 2008, p. 286). Instead of engendering a closure of meaning (which is seen by many as a worthwhile endeavor, e.g. Weeranwardene and Mort 2006), connective research stimulates an opening of the field, allowing for ‘more disciplinary perspectives: sociology, anthropology, human geography, political science, ethics’ (Nicholls and Young 2008, p. xiv).

Opening boundaries for a broader set of disciplines, theories and paradigms brings along new forms of understanding and intelligibility. It further signifies a deeply politico-ethical gesture that invites new realities in. If connecting forms a practice of inheriting this is the case because it seeks to embrace not only those theoretical relations which are immediately palpable and obvious (cf. Short *et al.* 2009) but also those which allow us to imagine ‘what could have been or what should and maybe someday will be, but which is currently in a state of . . . a ruin’ (Agamben 2009, p. 102, own translation).⁶

Steyaert and Katz (2004) and Steyaert and Hjorth (2006) suggested how – and through which perspectives and in what dimensions – (social) entrepreneurship could or should be conceptualized. These papers prescribed multidisciplinary and multiparadigmatic experimentation and called for an approach to entrepreneurship that acknowledges its everydayness, playfulness and political, cultural, ecological and societal accentuations. This research made a case for more paralogical groundings of social entrepreneurship research (Dey 2006), to address opportunities for innovative framings of the subject where interpretations beyond *homo economicus* and technical rationality become possible.

Intervening

A third set of practices, summarized under the umbrella term ‘intervening’, complements the critical and situational research practices noted above. This section argues that if social entrepreneurship aims to counter social injustices, poverty, disasters or diseases at source, there is also a need to invent research practices that are able to ‘match’ this complexity, that are critical of the research process and that also consider how research can contribute to the

ongoing enactments of different social words to increase the interventionist dimension of enactive research.

What distinguishes research as ‘intervening’ from conventional research is that the former considers social change not solely as a ‘thing’ to be studied but also as a process to be initiated by researchers. Researchers-as-interventionists combine participation and involvement with taking distance and reflexivity. Such interventions in how the social is assembled can be shaped through participative, spatial and minor research practices, which respectively make possible grass root activism, new spatial assemblages and collective enunciations.

Casting research into social entrepreneurship as interventions into the social fabric itself follows Nicholls and Young (2008, p. xiii): ‘[m]ost social entrepreneurship is, in reality, not the product of single charismatic individuals but of ideas generated, propagated, and operationalised by groups, networks, and formal or informal organizations.’ This realization, together with empirical research highlighting the crucial importance of social enterprises’ social ties and enabling relationships (Sharir and Lerner 2006), embraces the processual ‘nature’ of innovation: the realization that innovation depends on the mobilization of the social context (comprising such diverse agents as employees, experts, customers, suppliers, investors, etc.; cf. Deutschmann 2003). If the role of social entrepreneurship is to reshape ‘social and cultural arrangements with participative structures and democratic processes’ (Nicholls and Young 2008, p. xiv), intervening calls for research practices that are able to accommodate this agenda for social change and that acknowledge that social entrepreneurship’s ‘challenge to extant institutional structures’ (Nicholls and Young 2008, p. xiv) deems research a deeply political practice.

Participating

According to Law and Urry (2004), research is always a form of participation even if participatory action is not explicitly inscribed into the research strategy. So the ‘easiest’ way of intervening through research is by reflecting on and experimenting with how researchers participate in the social through their research methodologies. If, as Nicholls and Young (2008, p. xv) indicated, at ‘its heart, social entrepreneurship is about disruptive social justice: a project that combines moral and political aims with practical implementation’, this requires approaches that are imaginative and practical, creative and provocative, engaging and inclusive.

First of all, on a practical level, this would imply that researchers of social entrepreneurship prioritize research methods developed in relation to action or participatory research. An example is offered by Friedman and Desivilya (2010) who use action science (an action research method for developing and testing theories of action) to study and engage with regional development in a divided society in the Middle East. In a complex design that interweaves social entrepreneurial projects with conflict engagement, the researchers set up artistically-oriented spaces for collaboration in the realm of regional

development. This approach is indicative of a prospective 'coalition' between action research (and other qualitative research methods such as ethnography) and aesthetic approaches that are used in other social science research (Pink 2007). Experiments with visual methodologies might prove most helpful in enhancing the social interventionist potential of social entrepreneurship research. For instance, applied visual anthropology could be employed as a problem-solving practice 'that involves collaborating with research participants and aims to bring about some form of change' (Pink 2007, pp. 11–12). These new methodologies can help to enact social entrepreneurship as an aesthetic-political process (Hjorth and Steyaert 2009).

Second, on a more political level, participating requires that scholars subscribe to an inventive and interventionist logic of research, a logic in which researchers are not supposed to accept the normative but to explore how they can support a world-becoming-different. This follows Foucault's idea of considering research as 'dangerous'. Foucault (1984, p. 343) underlined that his 'point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do.' Following this train of thought researchers indeed always have something to do, which brings a form of restlessness vis-a-vis the ways worlds are (said to be) made. This requires a research philosophy that is enacted through a form of hyper activism, which perpetually asks:

[a]re we all capable of having our self-evidences continually undermined, thinking what thought silently thinks so that we can think differently, endlessly transforming ourselves, forever seeking to escape from the confines of identity, always resisting the powers that be (no matter which they are), and, in a word, living a life of 'hyper- and pessimistic activism'? (Berard 1999, p. 222)

Needless to say this activism does not always follow the optimistic logic inscribed in some grand narratives of social entrepreneurship (Dey and Steyaert 2010) as any kind of intervention is open and risky and always unsure in terms of its (intended and unintended) outcomes. Research cannot predict how the world will look, yet it can imagine new possibilities.

Spatializing

The second practice of intervening is called spatializing. While various scholars emphasize the political dimension of social entrepreneurship (Cho 2006), spatializing adds the dimension of geo-politics. Any change of society cannot be done without changing the spatial relations between different parts of the world and without relating the local and global. It is in conjunction with a geo-political logic that social entrepreneurship can be considered an intervention toward a new social geography.

On a practical level, social entrepreneurship requires the enactment of new spaces of living, working and collaborating. Steyaert and Katz (2004) have argued in this respect that the analysis of entrepreneurship is a matter of considering the geographical, discursive and social spaces in which

entrepreneurship is enacted, and of indicating what other spaces for entrepreneurship can be imagined. The collective force social entrepreneurship entails is enacted through the formation of networks, communities, platforms and social arenas. These formations are often instigated by in-between or third spaces where new social relations can be tried out. As can be learned from the example of Friedman and Desivilya (2010), the conflicting spatial relationship between Israelis and Palestinians (and their related struggle for independent territories) is connected with the enactment of a studio, the creation of a micro-space for social creativity which can temporarily de-territorialize the conflict.

In this case researchers became facilitators enabling spaces for (critical) performances where new or different relations could be tried out. It is in this way that social entrepreneurship may become an intervention in the general field of entrepreneurship as it draws attention away from the usual and privileged spaces of research (for example into high technology, high growth firms and so on) while giving visibility to parts of the world which are usually kept out of the academic focus. For instance, the spatial selectivity that for years singled out attention for Silicon Valley or other so-called creative class regions can be turned around to a focus on unknown villages or temporary groups or to point at the homeless or minorities in such ostensibly 'successful' regions as Palo Alto (Steyaert and Katz 2004).

Second, on a theoretical level, research into social entrepreneurship could be increasingly based on spatial theories or theories that are able to theorize socio-spatial processes. For instance, actor-network theory suggests a methodology that encourages the researcher to study the range of connections between human and nonhuman actors (or actants), and to 'assemble' the social by continuously following these connections (Latour 2005). Such a perspective could offer an effective approach to studying social entrepreneurial projects which are often based on innovations and *bricolage*. Such theory is also useful for describing the translation processes that transform people's practices and relationships. Another theoretical framework that may offer researchers an opportunity to critically engage with the collective force of social entrepreneurship is found in spatial theories of affect (Thrift 2007). This approach could help analyze the impact and effects of social movements, grass root initiatives and political engagements which often form a key part of many socially entrepreneurial projects.

Minorizing

The final verb suggested here as an intervention into the enactment of social entrepreneurship is 'minorizing'. This concept draws upon Deleuze and Guattari's (1993) work on Kafka in which they use the notion 'minor' to indicate how language can lead the way in destabilizing stable relations of power and 'activating lines of continuous variation in ways that have previously been restricted and blocked' (Bogue 2005, p. 114). Research that seeks to render social entrepreneurship minor follows the epitome of deterritorialization since it detaches language from its clearly delineated,

regularly gridded, territory of rules and regulations (Bogue 2005). 'Becoming-minor' refers to changes that deviate from dominant (molar) identities that are the product of processes of subjectification and to the invention of new forms of collective life, consciousness and affectivity. 'Becoming-minor' can legitimately be seen as a resistance movement (Spicer and Böhm 2007) characterized by a use of language that allows individuals to play out contingency so that the 'official' language cannot fully embody them and 'alienate' them from themselves.

The application of a minorizing approach to social entrepreneurship can be demonstrated by challenging the conventional view of microcredit as an archetype of scalable social enterprise (Dey 2007). A research agenda that attempts to render microcredit minor would have to begin by focusing in on microcredit's testimonies of success and the selective narratives of female loan recipients which are used to encourage others to engage in similar programs. It would further encompass studying how the language employed in such testimonies territorializes the notion of participation to promote credit as the template for women's empowerment. This research approach would also involve studying the argumentative architecture of the 'official' language of microcredit to comprehend how it creates a synthetic narrative of women's liberation: namely, that via access to loan capital and business support women can satisfy their basis needs via continuous streams of revenues and thus become 'proper' citizens, defined as successful entrepreneurs and consumers (Ghodsee 2003).

These steps aim to disclose the various logics of microcredit's official language, that is, how microcredit's '[l]anguage simplifies the designated thing, reducing it to a single feature' and how it 'inserts the thing into a field of meaning which is ultimately external to it' (Žižek 2008, p. 61). Following this process of revelation and disclosure with respect to the official language of microcredit, minorizing calls for research that seeks an answer to how women can avoid being reduced to objects in the process of their own empowerment (Parmar 2002). The question to be asked by the researcher is how to actively and collectively 'create the opposite dream' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 27). This involves becoming closely connected to women's self-help groups to experience if and how they are able to disrupt 'traditional structures of expression' (Delaney 2001, p. 2).

Anthropological (Rahman 2001) or ethnographic studies (Ghodsee 2003) of microcredit would prove helpful in highlighting how (female) self-help groups operate as 'collective assemblages of enunciation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1993, p. 154) that may undermine the universalizing meaning of microcredit as denoted by the 'the language of masters' (Deleuze and Guattari 1993, p. 163). It is beyond the question that researching processes that deterritorialize and re-territorialize official language is a challenging task that goes beyond sending out online-questionnaires which can then be analyzed in the comfort of a researcher's office. Becoming-minor, since it is collectivist in very nature, means becoming part of the enunciative space of female microcredit in which language is used extensively to 'oppose the oppressed quality of ... language' and to 'resist becoming major' (Deleuze and Guattari 1993, p. 163). For example, Premchander *et al.*'s (2009) research

into women's collective interpretations of money in the context of microfinance stimulates further work into how people re-appropriate the language of microcredit initiatives. Using a participatory research approach, the authors revealed how women took an agentive stance in disrupting the official language, using a 'jarring cacophony that shocks' (2009, p. xv) to claim a space for themselves outside of the coordinates in which they were located by the implementers of the programs. Though only implied as a possibility in Premchander *et al.*, their inquiry conveys the promise of minor research into social entrepreneurship that constructs a 'people to come' by promoting 'new possibilities for the future formation of an active, self-determining collectivity' (Bogue 2005, p. 114).

Conclusion: Re-verb-erating the Research Agenda

This paper has explored various novel ways in which social entrepreneurship could be reconstructed as a field of research and what kind of research practices could provide support in producing a research agenda that experiments with how to enact the 'social' of social entrepreneurship in new ways. It has emphasized that enacting the social is, above all, a political endeavor. Indeed, all research always and necessarily prioritizes certain understandings, definitions, scientific methods and theories and, in this tradition, it has been proposed that the current approaches to researching social entrepreneurship render possible only certain kinds of reality. Research enactments not only make things possible, they also make other things impossible. One of the main aims of this paper has been to acknowledge the political ramifications of this field of research and to raise questions concerning how to use research as a medium to represent, involve and emancipate certain issues and people. Representation and research at large are, thus, not just academic matters of truth making, they are also mechanisms for favoring certain ways in which problems are presented and, by implication, for allowing for certain solutions. These observations are particularly important in the context of social entrepreneurship since – as a field – it avows to intervene into social reality aiming for systemic changes to alter social hierarchies, address market failures and fill institutional voids. By way of conclusion, this paper suggests that it is crucial to see whether the field of social entrepreneurship, in its attempt to fix social problems, can retain an auto-deconstructive stance that allows it to remain both critical and conscious of how it reconstructs problems and the implications of this for the solutions it sets out. It is the ambition of this paper that the various research practices presented in the form of the nine verbs above can re-verb-erate across a new social entrepreneurship research agenda that aims to be more critical, situated and interventionist.

Notes

1. This research uses the attribute 'affirmative' to signify that a critique is not inherently negative nor aims necessarily at re-stabilizing a situation governed by a new orthodoxy (Grant 1993). Rather it makes possible creativity in researching the field of social entrepreneurship.

2. Note that Fournier and Grey's (2000) call for anti-performativity has elicited mixed reactions in the realm of organization studies. The most noteworthy critical claim was that a nonperformative stance toward management would indeed be antithetical to practical knowledge and application.
3. The concept 'inheriting' approaches text not in the sense of some 'content enclosed in a book or its margins, but [as] a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces' (Derrida 2004, p. 69).
4. As indicated by the Latin 'con' of 'context' (meaning together), social entrepreneurship should be understood as socio-political performance that transforms common sense by relating it to other texts (hence con-texts).
5. It is important to note that historicizing as inheriting must be distinguished from standard approaches to history that seek to reveal the origin (and hence identity) of a given sign (cf. Agamben 2009). As with Foucault's (1994) genealogy, historicizing opposes the search for origins precisely because such endeavors imply the existence of a pre-ordained, true identity of a concept.
6. In the German version: 'was hätte sein können oder sollen und vielleicht eines Tages sein kann, aber vorläufig nur im Stadium von ... Ruinen vorhanden ist'.

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