

Social entrepreneurship and the ‘New Spirit of the Third Sector’

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurship in the third sector is largely represented as an indispensable response to declines in government subsidies and private donations. This contribution uses ideology critique to turn this logic on its head: summoning the heroic and monumental, iconic representations conceal that social entrepreneurship might be less a “necessity” than an ideological justification of a post-welfarist regime of the third sector. Probing the margins of this ‘New Spirit of the Third Sector’, a discourse analysis of Swiss non-profit practitioners gets presented that pinpoints the cleavage between the fantasy of social entrepreneurship and the disruptive potential of local meaning making practices. It gets argued that interpretive research in general and discourse analysis in particular offer distinctive insights into how the ideology of social entrepreneurship gets “consumed” and transgressed by practitioners, which is why it should get to play a more significant role in prospective research endeavors.

Keywords

Social entrepreneurship, third sector, discourse analysis, ideology (critique), Boltanski and Chiapello

[...] to attempt explanations without reference to the meanings [...] held by actors, and without regard to their underpinning symbolic codes, is to provide a very thin account of reality. (Freeman & Rustin, 1999, p. 18)

Introduction

The term ‘social entrepreneurship’ means different things to different people, and for a long time only made sense to a small circle of adepts. Though still radiating a sense of the new and unprecedented (Dey & Steyaert, 2010), social entrepreneurship is no longer an insider’s game as it has been rapidly integrated into business school curricula, academic conference programs, and translated into policy statements in both developing and industrialized nations. In view of recurring claims that social entrepreneurship is still an under-researched (Hjorth & Bjerke, 2006) and under-theorized concept (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey, 2010), it is indeed striking how critical scholars have already become (e.g. Goss et al., 2011; Humphries & Grant, 2006; Latham, Jones & Betta, 2009; Ziegler, 2009). A pre-eminent critique of social entrepreneurship comprises the marketization and commercialization of non-profit organizations (Brainard & Siplon, 2004; Eikenberry, 2009; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Nickel & Eikenberry, 2009; Trexler, 2008). For instance, Meyer (2009) asks how much “market” civil society and its organizations can reasonably endure, while Bull (2008) addresses the “costs” related with the “push for the third sector to become more “entrepreneurial” (p. 269). Others like Troxler (2008) pinpoint the instrumentalization of social entrepreneurship, positing that “social enterprise reflects the recurring tendency of the charitable community to engage in strategic symbiotic mimesis, adapting by adopting what it believes to be the traits desired by potential supporters” (pp. 66-67). Nicholls (2010) in turn emphasizes that research on social entrepreneurship has been over-relying on celebrity cases being identified by ‘field building actors’, thus missing out on creating genuine data sets (and theory). This list, which is far from complete, should be complemented with studies that take

issue with some of the root assumptions of social entrepreneurship scholarship. Key among those “reality tests” are Kerlin and Pollak (2010) as well as Child (2010) who make a strong point in demonstrating that the ostensible proliferation of social entrepreneurship (read earned income strategies) in the third sector stands on shaky empirical ground. For instance, Kerlin and Pollak (2010) make two surprising observations in the US context: based on their analysis of official income statistics of non-profit organizations, they claim a) that the rise of commercial revenue of non-profits has been smaller than assumed and b) that the data did not support the “nonprofit literature that argues an increase in nonprofit commercial revenue was spurred on by cuts in government grants and private contributions”. Child (2010), while reviewing the empirical literature on the commercialization of the non-profit sector, comes to the conclusion that the “commercial turn” of non-profit organizations is but a chimera. With these brief illustrations as a backdrop, there are two points worth noting. First, both studies suggest that social entrepreneurship might be imbued with excessive or ungrounded credibility. On the other hand, and complementary with the first point, they point at the antinomy between popular representations of social entrepreneurship and reality, that is, at the fundamental level of ideology (Žižek, 1994). Granted, claiming that social entrepreneurship is an ideological creation is counter-intuitive. Yet, speaking of ideology does not necessarily mean that social entrepreneurship does not exist. Conceiving of social entrepreneurship as an ideology simply means that it is part of a work of imagination that tries to shape the reality of the third sector according to a certain image. It is thus less important whether this image (already) corresponds to the truth but whether people in the third sector get to act *as if* the image was representing the truth.

Social entrepreneurship’s ideological *as if* takes center stage in the present contribution, thus placing particular attention on whether and how non-profit practitioners endorse its spirit. It is clear, however, that framing social entrepreneurship in terms of ideology needs immediate qualification, especially because the concept is usually construed

as a mistake, that is, as something that is at odds with knowledge (Chiapello, 2003). Consequently, the next paragraph will elaborate on the concept of ideology, using Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) seminal 'New Spirit of Capitalism' to establish an understanding of how social entrepreneurship qua ideology works to justify current reforms of the third sector (Curtis, 2008). Following the ideological reading of social entrepreneurship, a discourse analysis of Swiss non-profit organizations gets provided which probes whether the social enterprise ideology "impinges" upon practitioners' local meaning making practices. The results of the discourse analysis suggest that the ideology of social entrepreneurship does not work as an iron cage. However, the results do not pinpoint a space beyond ideology, that is, a space of the authentic and autonomous self either (Weiskopf, 2002). Instead, they are indicative of how non-profit practitioners use language to performatively transgress (yet never fully overcome) the entrepreneurial spirit that surrounds them. The contribution concludes by reflecting the potential of discourse analysis as a means of ideology critique.

An ideological reading of social entrepreneurship

The 'New Spirit of the Third Sector' (NSTS)

The notion of ideology is not entirely new to the field of social entrepreneurship. Apart from inquires which frame social entrepreneurship in terms of ideology (e.g. Boddice, 2009; Curtis, 2008; Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Dacin, Dacin & Tracey, 2011; Eikenberry, 2009; Jones, Latham & Betta, 2008), there are others which, though not making explicit use of the concept, pinpoint social enterprise' ideological function, that is, how it exploits, eludes or disciplines individuals (e.g. Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Levander, 2010; Trexler, 2008). In all those instances 'ideology' gets used in its negative association, which largely goes back to the Marxist' interpretation of ideology as false consciousness (Chiapello, 2003). To this day, there are no studies in social entrepreneurship which have used a positive theory of

‘ideology’, that is, one that looks at how ideology creates new realities and subjects. It is for this reason that Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2005) seminal ‘The New Spirit of Capitalism’ gets used.

In a nutshell, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) are perplexed by the observation that capitalism (conceived of as the accumulation of capital), respectively the momentous changes in the social and economic conditions in France, caused so little resistance. Conceiving of capitalism as an “absurd system” (Chiapello, 2003, p. 163), not least because only few gain a substantial advantage from participating in it, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) denote ideology’s function in relation to assigning meaning to an otherwise irrational experience and, by implication, to securing people’s commitment to capitalism. What the authors, owing to Max Weber’s (1930) treatise of the protestant ethics, call the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ designates a relatively stable set of arguments which models a sense of justice: “We call the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism ‘spirit of capitalism’” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 8). Paying particular heed to how the spirit impels managers (i.e. those particularly important in keeping capitalism alive) to believe in the rightfulness of capitalism, Boltanski and Chiapello illustrate, based on the analysis of popular French management texts, how ideology changes over time. Arguing that management discourse forms the par excellence manifestation of ideology, they interpret changes in the analyzed bodies of text (from the 1960s to the 1990s) as being indicative of how older forms of capitalism are contested and how capitalism in turn incarnates critique while adapting to it.

Applying Boltanski and Chiapello’s theory of ideology to the analysis of social entrepreneurship, I would like to begin by saying that recent interventions into the third sector such as the privatization of social goods and services (Ziegler, 2008), the introduction of performance-based contracting (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004) or of managerialism at large (Curtis, 2008) have not gone unnoticed and indeed caused considerable discord. To be able to create a sense of justice, interventions into the third sector need to be justified ideologically.

What henceforth gets referred to as the New Spirit of the Third Sector (NSTS) represents the ideological justification of the new, post-welfarist regime of the third sector in which social entrepreneurship gets to play a pivotal role. The NSTS promotes social entrepreneurship as a way out of the third sector's current stalemate while offering individuals an exciting model of their own potential and a moral justification of their role within the third sector.

General features of the 'New Spirit of the Third Sector'

Conceived of as an ideological justification, social entrepreneurship problematizes traditional practices and values of the third sector so as to create space for a social reality that construes the post-welfarist regime of the third sector as "necessary". In what follows I will trace, based on a close reading of academic texts on social entrepreneurship published within the last decade¹ (i.e. 2000 – 2010), how the critique of the third sector (Chand, 2009) and non-profit organizations (Dart, 2004) in advanced liberal societies have paved the way for an entirely new spirit of the social.

Problematization

Critiques of the third sector are variegated and multifaceted. Where more radical critiques detect "the need for a change in attitude, approach, behaviour and, ultimately, culture, in the voluntary sector" (Grenier, 2009, p. 198), the important question in the present context is how the third sector got problematized in the first place. Two relatively stable sets of arguments can be detected, one operating on the systemic level (notably the welfare state) and the other on the institutional level (i.e. non-profit organizations). In the first perspective, what gets problematized are publicly supported welfare networks, government-led social services or the western welfare model quite generally (Peredo, forthcoming). Where the reasons provided for the welfare state's failure vary from author to author, there is a certain consensus that government spending and involvement in social service delivery is declining (Cook, Dodds &

Mitchell, 2003). The welfare state is construed as an outdated model as illustrated by Latham (2001) who claims that it is “based more on the old world than the new. This is why its original goals are no longer being met” (p. 115). This is emblematic for how the NSTS challenges the welfare state in its ability to solve contemporary social issues while preparing the ground to introduce social entrepreneurship as the “new deal” (cf. below).

The second problematization which has been instrumental in the rise of social entrepreneurship concerns non-profit organizations. Though non-profit organizations’ crises of legitimacy today is a self-evident truism, it should be noted that a decade ago they were the “darlings” of the welfare state (Trexler, 2008). Where non-profit organizations were once lauded for occupying a space in which the market logic had no say, today’s critique *inter alia* holds that they are inefficient, ineffective, intransparent, and, by implication, untenable. Critiques often rely on resource scarcity or resource mobilization theories (Arthur et al. 2009) to suggest that only the fittest (read enterprising non-profits) will survive the increased competition over scarce public and private money. Another important critique pinpoints non-profit organizations’ lack of accountability which according to Lounsbury and Strang (2009) “coincided with the devolution of federal governmental responsibilities to states and localities, privatization of services at all levels of government, and a reduction in funding for some key social programs” (p. 75). The logic behind this parallel evolution is that the privatization of social service delivery has spurred the view that non-profit organization’s use of public money should be monitored more closely, and indeed that a performance-based ethos should be embedded in contracts between non-profit organizations and public institutions. In essence, the critique holds that “[g]one [...] are the days of easy money from government and foundation grants, for which results and accountability were rarely required or reinforced” (Dees & Economy, 2001, p. 12)

Solution

The crucial question during the interregnum of the third sector was who “should, and indeed can, take responsibility for the needs of civil society [...]?” (Chand, 2009, p. 148). The NSTS created the space for rejuvenating more market-oriented interventions into the social. Lasprogata and Cotton (2003) convincingly argue that in the “current political and economic environment, the reality for many nonprofit organizations is that sustainability means contemplating some level of commercial enterprise” (p. 74). The obvious assumption is that “bringing business expertise and market-based skills to the non-profit sector [...] [can] help this sector become more efficient in providing and delivering these services” (Johnson, 2000, p. 6). However, given that the logic of the market was largely alien to the third sector, further justification was needed. Normalizing the view that the welfare state model had become obsolete was hence instrumental for justifying the logic which saw ‘quasi’ or ‘artificial’ markets as an apt solution for overcoming the excessive expenditure, rigidity and bureaucracy of public welfare provision. The state did not disappear from the matrix but was assigned a novel role. Its main responsibility was the formulation of social policies and, importantly, the identification and supporting of social entrepreneurs whose role was to transform the welfarist social service model into (quasi) markets. As Graefe (2005) eloquently puts it, there is “a hope that this will allow social entrepreneurs to mobilize otherwise untapped resources [...], and in the process meet social needs that are too expensive for public provision, and unprofitable for for-profit provision” (pp. 12-13).

The introduction of social entrepreneurship to the third sector has had momentous consequences. First, it entails a breaching of older divisions between the state and civil society. The paradigmatic case of this is the entrepreneurial figure who uses her/his entrepreneurial spark in the quest for the common good (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Mair & Marti, 2006). Second, it simultaneously depends on and strengthens the discourse of self-reliance and individual responsibility, both of which being an essential ingredient of late capitalism (Kuratko, 2005). Third, positioning social entrepreneurship as a

remedy for the welfare state's lack of financial resources and meager performance quite generally, this in turn obliges non-profit organizations "to employ the tools and tropes of business to fashion novel approaches to social change (Lounsbury & Strang, 2009, p. 76). In other words, social entrepreneurship makes a strong point that non-profit organizations can increase their performance insofar as they are willing to endorse state-of-the-art management practices such as 'competitive strategy', 'mission', 'human resource management', 'investor-relations' or 'customer relationship management' (Dees, Emerson & Economy, 2002). The promise of performance (Martin, 2004) combined with the call that good things could be done better, gives some indication of how social entrepreneurship got legitimated as a prolific provider of social services. The next section highlights how the NSTSS tries to persuade non-profit practitioners to become social entrepreneurs.

Mobilizing changemakers

Following Boltanski and Chiapello's understanding of ideology, the NSTS is to be viewed as inventive and integrative in the sense that it unites people by offering them a deeply moralized style of existence. Hence, what makes this culturalist conception of ideology particularly appealing for the purpose at hand is that it conceives of the NSTS as a hailing "that can provide attractive, exciting life prospects, while supplying guarantees of security and moral reasons for people to do what they do" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, pp. 24-25). The following paragraphs will make it clear how the NSTS impels individuals to become responsible and caring subjects by rendering social entrepreneurship an attractive option for the third sector (excitement dimension) while at the same time accounting for how such an engagement can secure people's insurance (security dimension) as well as society's moral integrity (fairness dimension).

Excitement dimension

The first dimension of the NSTS comprises what is exciting about social entrepreneurship. Where the notion of “superior performance” undoubtedly represents a “powerful element in the case for social entrepreneurship” (Martin, 2004, p. 14), the excitement surrounding social entrepreneurship is generally related with a “normative and moralizing literature that talks of a marvelous world which no one has ever really encountered” (Chiapello, 2003, p. 169) but which social entrepreneurs can possibly bring about. The analysis of academic texts thus shows that social entrepreneurship is often illustrated through a small number of charismatic individuals (Vasi, 2009). This success-story model, which is constantly reenacted through award ceremonies such as those by Ashoka (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey, 2011), signal to the ordinary person what actually constitutes a successful social entrepreneur or a responsible citizen quite generally. To begin with, representations of social entrepreneurship invoke the figure of the hero entrepreneur to delineate social change as being the result of “bold, individual initiative” (Lounsbury & Strang, 2009). While this ‘journey of the hero’ format is typically found in autobiographies (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010) and journalistic accounts (Bornstein, 2004), academic representations’ sense of excitement reveals three further justifications. First, it is by juxtaposing social entrepreneurship with traditional business entrepreneurship (Christie & Honig, 2006; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Peredo & McLean, 2006) that the former is endowed with a “more than profit” logic (Ridley-Duff, 2008), respectively with a logic that gives relative priority of social versus economic wealth creation (Mair, Seelos & Borwankar, 2005). In essence, social enterprises and entrepreneurs – contrary to their profit-seeking counterparts – understand that market behavior becomes virtuous only if being employed to benefit society. The second justification enacts the excitement of social entrepreneurship against the backdrop of the backwardness of the third sector (cf. above). For instance, suggesting that the third sector has “largely operated under conditions of limited performance reporting with few accounting conventions and the minimum of regulation around disclosure” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 758), social entrepreneurship gets justified based on the

argument that they are both able and willing to disclose to their stakeholders what they are doing and how well they are doing it. A further, and more important distinction from the conventional third sector concerns the magnitude of change social enterprises are supposed to bring about. Illustrative in this respect are Bloom and Chatterji (2009) who discuss how local successes of social enterprises can be replicated and transformed into scaleable endeavors. Zahra et al. (2009) on the other hand develop a typology of the social entrepreneur ranging from the ‘social bricoleur’ who addresses small-scale local social needs to the ‘social engineer’ who introduces revolutionary change. What unites those seemingly disparate inquiries is that both construe size and scale as essential ingredients of social entrepreneurship, thus adding an unprecedented ‘big is beautiful’ logic to the third sector. The third justification of social entrepreneurship is rooted in an emancipatory promise. That is, it is by framing social entrepreneurship in terms of, for instance, integrity, empathy, spirituality, compassion or honesty (e.g. Mort, Weerawardena & Carnegie, 2003) that the matter gets presented as a higher purpose rather than a mere profession, and hence as an activity that can bring peace to the individual’s mind.

Security dimension

The second dimension deals with security, conceived of in conjunction with how those getting involved in social entrepreneurship can be protected from looming risks. Where it hardly goes without saying that capitalism is replete with risks, it might be somewhat less obvious what risks are associated with social entrepreneurship. Though having no ambition to provide an exhaustive list here, it should be noted that social entrepreneurship has been criticized on the basis of its (potentially) long working hours, low wages (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010), the distortive pressures associated with performance-based contracting or the market imperative at large (Eikenberry & Kløver, 2004). While analyzing texts on social entrepreneurship, it quickly becomes obvious that little direct attention is directed toward how social

entrepreneurs can be protected or are supposed to protect themselves from the above-mentioned risks. Though social entrepreneurship is said to add a moral dimension to individuals who work in the third sector, the analyzed texts exhibit a clear tendency to stress the concept's promise rather than its potential backsides (Dey & Steyaert, 2010). Despite this, it must remain clear that the NSTS does in fact comprise a security dimension, though one which does not address the above-mentioned risks of the individual. Quite the contrary, individualizing the provisions of social service by shifting political responsibilities from the state to the community, the NSTS locates security issue at the level of the individual too. While security is rendered the responsibility of the individual, the NSTS appeases the individual by suggesting that everyone in the third sector is capable to accept that the best way forward as a non-profit manager, social leader, community activist, etc. is to believe in the ideas of management and business entrepreneurship (Dees, Emerson & Economy, 2002). In view of Ashoka's slogan "everyone a changemaker" (Drayton, 2006), it becomes clear that the NSTS not only inculcates individuals with a desire to become social entrepreneurs (i.e. excitement dimension) but actively seeks to convince them that security issues (notably financial viability) leave no other option. What distinguishes security-oriented from, say, less responsible individuals is that the former "realize they must increasingly depend on themselves to ensure their survival [...] and that has led them naturally to the world of entrepreneurship" (Boschee & McClurg, 2003, p. 3). Bluntly put, the academic literature construes security issues in conjunction with non-profit organizations' financial self-sufficiency, thus positioning earned-income strategies as the remedy for rendering those organizations "viable" (Anderson, Dees & Emerson, 2002). It is in this way that the security dimension is tied to the question of the market in the sense that earned-income strategies secure those organizations from donor and government dependency. It is by rendering financial self-sufficiency the sine qua non of security that individuals are not simply well advised to use the tenets of business entrepreneurship but obliged to do so.

Fairness dimension

The last dimension involves the notion of fairness. The important point to note in conjunction with the NSTS is that its fairness dimension (i.e. how it is supposed to contribute to the common good) is not a justification in the conciliatory sense of the term. In contrast to the spirit of capitalism which, due to capitalism's inherently "absurd" effects, evidently needs to explain to its members what fairness means in the face of unfair wages, alienation, etc., the NSTS is not confronted with such legitimization pressures precisely because fairness is not an addendum but the very essence of social entrepreneurship. In other words, since social entrepreneurship is essentially entrepreneurship with a human face, there is obviously no need to account for it. Though the notion of 'fairness' can be interpreted in various ways, arguably the most common signification of fairness invokes social entrepreneurship's hybrid or sector-bending qualities (Dees & Anderson, 2003). Though it might appear self-evident that hybridity (conceived as non-profit in purpose, for-profit in approach) forms an inseparable part of social entrepreneurship, one must not forget that a) it is widely acknowledged that hybridity leads to complex and difficult issues on the organizational level as well as on the level of identity (Tracey & Philipps, 2007) and that b) the coalescence of the two terms 'social' and 'entrepreneurship' until recently would have qualified as an oxymoron (Bull, 2008). It is thus helpful to turn to Hervieux, Gedajlovic and Turcotte (2010) who, relying on Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) work on justification, state that social entrepreneurship derives its legitimacy primarily from bridging the contradictory logics of civicness and the market: "Discourses on SE [social entrepreneurship] thus legitimize the use of means that operate under what was previously seen as a contradictory logic – by seeing market and business means not exclusively as aimed at generating profits in the traditional sense, but more as generating profits for the social mission and autonomy for the organization" (p. 60). As is evident from this, the excitement and fairness dimension of social entrepreneurship are

literally inseparable as the idea of hybridity reconciles formerly oppositional logics, even representing them as synergetic.

Though it can be reasonably assumed that ideological representations of social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs do in fact have an influence on how the third sector is governed, the ultimate litmus test of the NSTS is whether it actually inscribes the logic of social entrepreneurship into the symbolic universe of non-profit practitioners. This will be elaborated through the ensuing discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis of Swiss non-profit practitioners

To probe whether the “theatre” of ideology actually mobilizes individuals in third sector or whether it remains an inconsequential dreamworld, I opted to carry out an analysis of Swiss non-profit practitioners’ discursive practices. Before discussing the results of the analysis, I would like to briefly reflect on the nexus between ideology and discourse analysis.

Ideology (critique) and discourse analysis

Contrary to the common misperception of ideology as ‘muscular discourse’ (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000), ideologies are addressed here as inherently contested social representations (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). While this view sees ideologies as alterable, the truly interesting question is how ideology’s “contestation is played out at the level of [...] practice” (Teasdale, forthcoming). While the present contribution quite generally aims at provoking the NSTS, I have opted for a discursive account to illuminate the cleavage between non-profit practitioners’ meaning making practices and the ideological representation of social entrepreneurship. In my assessment, discourse analysis is apt for pinpointing the margins (yet not the outside) of the social entrepreneurship ideology as it brings to light how practitioners are affected by it but also affect it. Discourse analysis hence offers an empirical critique of ideology by emphasizing the many dilemmas, inconsistencies or ambivalences which are

necessarily absent from ideological representations. Furthermore, and related with the previous point, discourse analysis forms a promising approach for studying processes of ideological dis/identification, that is, how non-profit practitioners respectively endorse or transgress the spirit that surrounds them.

Given that discourse analysis has become an umbrella term embodying a vast array of different, and at times incompatible paradigmatic orientations, I will use the follow section to explicate the analytic procedure used in the present context.

Discourse analysis: Some conceptual and analytical considerations

Where discursive approaches range from those focusing exclusively on author-less epistemic formations to those studying the minutiae of people's linguistic practices, the present contribution takes a middle ground. Using Potter and Wetherell's (1987) theory of interpretive repertoiresⁱⁱ (cf. also Wetherell and Potter, 1988), discourse is conceived of as the "range of linguistic resources that can be drawn upon and utilized in the course of everyday social interaction" (Edley, 2001, p. 198). Inspired by ethnomethodology, speech act theory as well as semiology, Potter and Wetherell see interpretive repertoires as the condition of possibility for constituting realities and identities. Evidently, in this understanding of discourse the individual is granted a certain degree of freedom in defining her/his path of life, notably because she/he can rhetorically arrange interpretive repertoires to produce particular truth and reality effects. At the same time, however, it is the stock of available knowledge, ideology if you will, that imposes essential limits upon what can be said and thought. It is in view of discourse's "Janus face" that the analysis of interpretive repertoires chiefly equals inquiring how individuals, based on the use of language, endorse or transgress respectively the ideology of which they are part. The question of identity is important here because what any given individual can think of herself/himself as a person depends upon the symbolic conventions offered to her/him by discourse. Given that the NSTS seeks to produce enterprising subjects

(cf. above), a key purpose of the following discourse analysis is to reveal the discursive identities of non-profit practitioners or, more precisely, the subject positions rendered available to individuals by specific ways of talking (Edley, 2001).

Case description and analytic procedure

The discourse analysis of Swiss non-profit practitioners formed the empirical part of my doctoral thesis (XXX). The inquiry was based on 30 interviews conducted in 12 Swiss non-profit organizations. All organizations were accredited by ZEWO, an independent foundation which provides a seal of approval for national non-profit organizations. Most organizations were involved in providing social services (notably in the domain of health and education). The sample mainly consisted of small and mid-sized organizations, with only two organizations employing more than one hundred people (both paid staff and volunteers). 14 women and 16 men took part in the study. The study included people from different hierarchical levels, comprising office administrators, project administrators and assistants, head of projects, volunteers as well as directors, managers and founders.

Each interview lasted between one and two hours, and was guided by a list of preordained questions. The focus of those questions was to establish a 'field of visibility' with regard to non-profit organizations' main activities, purposes or *raison d'être*, crucial challenges and success factors. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The subsequent paper-and-pencil analysis contained three steps. The first analytic step comprised an iterative reading of the transcripts while taking notes of recurring topics and frequently used words. The second analytic step aggregated singular utterances and sentences on the level of interpretive repertoires, thus pinpointing "relatively internally consistent, bounded language units" (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p.171) that constitute a particular view of non-profit organizations. In the third analytic step the interpretive repertoires were specified with regard to their respective focus (how are non-profit organizations discursively represented?),

their protagonist (what are the main characters of the discursive account?) and subject position (what 'location' of the self is discursively produced?). The discourse analysis revealed three interpretive repertoires which are discussed below. The excerpts used to illustrate the repertoires have been translated from the (Swiss) German transcripts.

Findings

Benevolence repertoire: "Being among equals"

The first repertoire is called benevolence because it strongly, and at times exclusively associates non-profit work with the organizations' stated purpose. Making frequent use of terms such as "helping", "supporting" or "identification", the benevolence repertoire portrays non-profit organizations as being chiefly concerned with the well-being of beneficiaries. Practitioners who mobilize the benevolence repertoire get to delineate the work of non-profit organizations as "useful" and "much needed". The analysis revealed that the benevolence repertoire's positive evaluative accent largely derives from lauding the importance of human relations (P1: "[...] and that's why it probably worked out in my case [...] because the factor 'man' was pivotal, that is, the connection with human fate [...]"). It must be noted that the category 'man' for the most part encompasses the perspective of beneficiaries, respectively their relationship with non-profit practitioners. The benevolence repertoire conveys detailed and normative descriptions pertaining to how beneficiaries should be treated by practitioners or the non-profit organization quite generally. While the relative emphasis of the different accounts varied considerably, practitioners relying on the benevolence repertoire usually used words such as "sensitive", "understanding", "commitment" or "empathy" to delineate the proper mindset of non-profit practitioners (P7: "we decided to make those children in Y [name of country] our target group (hmm) that's when we began to commit and identify ourselves"). Moreover, the benevolence repertoire uses terms such as "partnership", "cooperation" and "trust" to pinpoint the relational side of non-profit work, which is usually

depicted as something which requires time, patience and dedication. At base of the benevolence repertoire is the conviction that beneficiaries can be “empowered” or “emancipated”. The support offered by the non-profit organization is mostly seen as temporary, as many accounts stress the principle of “help for self-help”. The sense of fulfillment associated with non-profit work derives from accounts which delineate encounters with beneficiaries as sites of mutual “learning” and “growth” (P11: “[...] we then went over to F [name of region] [...] I then realized that we could start an exchange [...] meaning that we could learn from each other”). It is hence by acknowledging that the helper and the help recipient both profit from the encounters that the benevolence repertoire gets to defy a hierarchical pedagogy of help. Though non-profit organizations are associated with terms such as “emancipation”, it is conspicuous that the benevolence repertoire retains a decisively pragmatic spirit. Instead of using, for instance, political slogans to justify their accounts, practitioners using the benevolence repertoire engender a pragmatic vision of non-profit organizations by providing detailed descriptions of concrete projects. Such elaborate reports of projects on the one hand stress the everydayness of non-profit work. On the other hand, they discursively legitimate the speaker by purporting that she/he is “in touch with” or “close to” the field. Being close with beneficiaries thus forms a rhetorical trope for justifying that what the organization or practitioners respective do is grounded in concrete experiences and knowledge. A last, and important point which is characteristic of the benevolence repertoire is that it emphasizes “equality” between non-profit practitioners and beneficiaries (P23: “[...] for instance [...] our approach in development work is based on the premise that one is among equals (hmmm) [...]”). The notion of “equality” and “equals” is employed to delineate the work of non-profit organizations as non-oppressive. Furthermore, it is by positioning normative ideals such as equality and sameness as a proxy for justice that the benevolence repertoire works to rule out possibilities of control, patronage or unequal relations of power at large.

What concerns the subject position offered by the benevolence repertoire, it follows from the analysis that the ideal-type helper is supportive, upright and non-dominant. An interesting point to mention here is that the beneficiary repertoire does not engender images of self-sacrifice. Though stressing activities such as “supporting” or “helping”, the helper is usually not construed as a person who subordinates her/his own interests to those of beneficiaries. Instead, working with beneficiaries is portrayed as an activity that is equally fulfilling for the helper and the help recipient. Helpers are assumed to understand that “equality” forms a higher good which has to be constantly worked on and protected. Helpers thus simultaneously treat “equality” as a pre-condition of successful non-profit work as well as an end in itself. It is this latter aspect which renders the helper a subject for whom the journey (and not necessarily the journey’s outcome) forms the reward. Though a genuine interest for beneficiaries is one of their key characteristics, helpers are not naïve idealists with high-flying dreams. In fact, the analysis revealed ‘show confessions’ (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999) through which speakers acknowledged that official claims about non-profit organizations’ transformative potential are up for critique. Instead of envisioning landslide changes, the helper is someone who remains in the “here and now”, thus focusing on the everyday challenges associated with non-profit work.

Professionalism repertoire: “Doing the small things right”

Practitioners who enact the professionalism repertoire get to emphasize the crucial importance of donors and the role of administrative practices. At base, the professionalism repertoire construes non-profit organizations as being largely about “good management”. Yet, professionalism is not a rendition of the kind of businessing that has been popularized in conjunction with the ‘entrepreneurial new wave management’ (du Gay, 2000). Instead, the professionalism repertoire interweaves terms such as “liability”, “reasonableness” or “sincerity” in praising the ethos of bureaucracy. Conceiving of non-profit organizations as a

bundle of well coordinated yet divisible administrative practices, the yardstick of good management is “doing one’s job right”, that is, focusing on one’s immediate task without necessarily taking into account the “big picture” (P14: “[...] the only thing which he [the director] asks me about is when he wants to make payments and that’s when I can say yes or no [...] other than that I don’t influence the decisions of the organization [...]”). On the face of it, stressing the view that the success of non-profit organizations is a matter of clearly defined roles and responsibilities, the professionalism repertoire gets to connect practitioners’ liabilities to their immediate realm of specialization. That is, responsibilities and duties are defined and thus limited by the role, position or function a given individual holds within the organization. While this might be taken as an indication that professionals are people who are disinterested and who have no virtues, it should be noted that values are in fact enacted through this repertoire. Yet, in contrast to, for instance, the benevolence repertoire which is based on a strong moral foundation (read “equality”), the professionalism repertoire mainly envisions values in relation with efficiency. In doing so, it promotes the idea that good things become possible only if each and every member of the organization fulfills her/his personal duties in the best possible way, that is, efficiently. What is of particular interest here is that efficiency functions as a dividing practice that distinguishes between admissible and inadmissible non-profit organizations; legitimate non-profit organizations obviously being those who are efficient (P9: “[...] what distinguishes us from others is our efficiency (hm) [...]”). On the other hand, legitimacy is also built by associating efficiency with the broader responsibility of non-profit organization. Hence, legitimate non-profit organizations are not just those who are efficient but which measure their efficiency and which transparently communicate their performance to their donors (read accountability). Essentially, where the benevolence repertoire positions “being close to beneficiaries” as both a moral imperative and a source of fulfillment, the professionalism repertoire construes the ethos of non-profit organizations in relation to “being close to donors”. Relations with donors are thus positioned

in a business-case logic, meaning that practices of transparency and accountability are evaluated according to whether or not they increase the non-profit organization's reputation and, ultimately, whether they secure donors' financial support.

The professionalism repertoire's subject position construes non-profit practitioners as down-to-earth professionals who pursue their work in an unagitated and logical manner. Professionals are construed as prudent problem-solvers who rely on their expertise and knowledge. Practitioners who use this repertoire clearly do not radiate the sense of excitement one finds in the subject position of the helper (cf. above). Yet, this does not mean that professionals are not committed to their work. Rather, professionals convey a work ethos that construes responsibility in relation with expertise and efficiency. As a result, professionals act responsibly if they efficiently carry out their work in their respective field of specialization, thus explicitly not assuming responsibility beyond their designated institutional role. Professionals are deeply moral subjects to the extent that they accept that the success of non-profit organizations depends on the contribution of each and every individual and, consequently, that people must remain reliable, transparent and efficient.

Enterprising repertoire: "Enduring hardship to become free"

The third repertoire, which is called enterprising, is clearly less palpable in practitioners' accounts. In fact, the enterprising repertoire has only been identified in accounts uttered by founders of non-profit organizations. In contrast to the benevolence repertoire (which focuses on beneficiaries) or the professionalism repertoire (which focuses on donors), the enterprising repertoire puts the perspective of non-profit practitioners center stage. Apart from construing non-profit work as being based on individual attributes such as "innovativeness", "perseverance" or "endurance", the enterprising repertoire also stresses relational practices such as "collaborating" and "dialogue" (P19: "I (hm) [...] it would not have been possible to start L [name of organization] without [...] without leading discussions [...] without people

with whom I was able to have discussions and whom I could ask things”). It needs to be borne in mind that this creates a tension with the extant literature claiming that non-profit organizations, due to increasingly scarce resources, are facing stiff competition (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey, 2011). An further point to be mentioned is that the enterprising repertoire *prima facie* seems to create a good fit with the benevolence repertoire as both employ attributes such as “involvement”, “commitment” or “passion”. However, there are subtleties which clearly distinguish the two repertoires. In contrast to the benevolence repertoire which relates the affective qualities of non-profit work with the beneficiaries and, by doing so, depicts them as ends in themselves, the enterprising repertoire uses those qualities in a more instrumental way. That is, practitioners who enact the enterprising repertoire suggest that affective qualities such as passion are necessary to endure the “hardship” related with non-profit work. The notion of “hardship” is thus endowed with two distinct meanings. On the one hand, individual “hardship” is exemplified through the daily hassles and obstacles of everyday life, and thus denoted as an inevitable “side-effect” in the pursuit of the organization’s mission. On the other hand, and more poetically, “hardship” gets conceived as a rite of passage in the quest toward being free. That is, where non-profit work is conceived as offering individuals an autonomous and free style of existence, “hardship” becomes the materialization of the person’s transformation (P2: “of course we earn less than others (hmhm) but that doesn’t bother me much [...] all that counts today (hmm) is that I’m free to do what I please”). A last point worth noting concerns the enterprising repertoire’ emphasis on “being small” and “being innovative”. Juxtaposing small and big organization, the enterprising repertoire gets to defy bureaucratic organizations based on the argument that they are not innovative. Innovativeness is thus located within an economic logic as small organizations are delineated as compensating their relative lack of financial resources by being innovative (P30: “[...] there are a lot of good [...] organizations which do not need that much money because they largely depend on people’s innovativeness (hm) [...]).

A striking aspect of the enterprising repertoire is that it produces its subject position (read the entrepreneur) without actually using the term “entrepreneur” or “enterprising”. Though clearly surprising, this does not strike a general paradox because the repertoire does produce the subject position of the entrepreneur based on attributes which are seen as typical of entrepreneurs. That is, interweaving attributes such “self-made”, “perseverant” or “risk-taking”, the entrepreneur gets discursively produced as someone who approaches work in an enterprising fashion. It needs to be mentioned, however, that attributes such as “risk-taking”, though seemingly forming part of the individual’s innate personality, are discursively created as contingent behaviors. That is, the analysis showed that “risk-taking” is construed as a behavior which is made necessary due to the non-profit sector’s “open” or “insecure” prospect. While construing “risk-taking” as a necessary consequence in the face of an uncertain environment rather than an innate quality of the person clearly challenges the idea of possessive individualism which sees the social entrepreneur as a free agent who owns herself/himself completely. Furthermore, the entrepreneur is not delineated as a larger-than-life figure but as a hard-working, at times creative person and, most importantly, as someone who wants to be autonomous and free. At core, the entrepreneur is someone who ‘sacrifices’ a normal life for a career which offers her/him freedom and individual self-fulfillment. Though representing entrepreneurs as people who “go against the grain”, the enterprising repertoire does not invoke the image of the isolated maverick. Instead, it produces a logic which sees “being different” as the entrepreneur’s primary drive to become free in the first place.

Tracing cracks in the NSTS

The main objective of the discourse analysis was to probe whether or not non-profit practitioners endorse the fantasy of social entrepreneurship by using the language provided to

them by the NSTS. A unanimous answer is clearly out of the question as the results revealed both convergences and divergences between non-profit practitioners' talk and the NSTS. To begin with, there is a notable commonality between the benevolence repertoire and the excitement dimension of the NSTS as both construe work in the third sector as genuinely fulfilling. Moreover, there is an ostensible overlap between the professionalism repertoire and the NSTS in that both stress the role of business practices in non-profit organizations. The enterprising repertoire in turn accords with the NSTS's view of social entrepreneurship being an inherently passionate endeavor. In view of these brief illustrations, it is still safe to claim that measuring convergences against divergences would not amount to a zero-sum game for the simple reason that divergences are clearly prevailing. For instance, while the NSTS hails bigness (scale, replication), the benevolence and the enterprising repertoire both cherish smallness. Furthermore, the enterprising repertoire, though conveying a sense of mastery and individual agency, lacks the heroism associated with the NSTS. Ideological representations of social entrepreneurship differ from practitioners' talk as they repudiate the ambivalent, problematic and paradoxical aspects of the social while favoring what is discrete, linear and positive. The accounts of non-profit practitioners hence literally form the 'outside' of the NSTS as they host a multiplicity of ideologies (Chand, 2009) which often cause irreconcilable ambivalences on the level of local meaning making. In clear contrast to the NSTS which contains a linear logic of social change (Dey & Steyaert, 2010), the analysis of interpretive repertoires showed that practitioners invoke different and at times contrasting logics to justify their respective positions. Indeed, all three repertoires entailed 'ideological dilemmas' (Billig et al., 1988), that is, tensions between common-sense belief systems. For instance, practitioners who invoked the benevolence repertoire often had to balance and rhetorically justify the oppositional logics of "equality" (i.e. beneficiaries are treated as equals; cf. above) versus "command" (i.e. the non-profit organization must have the last word; e.g. P2: "I mean one always remains friendly (hm) but we [...] work on the basis of the principle 'who pays

commands' or [...] 'who pays gives friendly orders' (laughter)"). Though the analysis showed that practitioners were able to solve ideological dilemmas temporarily by applying certain rhetorical strategies (Edley, 2001), tensions usually flared up again as the oppositional logics could not be disbanded once and for all. In effect, practitioners' reality accounts and discursive identities remained highly contested and irreconcilable (Bull, 2008).

Taken together, it seems that the excitement revolving around popular representations of social entrepreneur tends "to draw a veil over the [...] variety of motives and ideologies carried by social entrepreneurs themselves" (Boddice, 2009, p. 133). Consequently, rather than seeing the third sector as an incrementally progressing order in which newer worldviews (e.g. managerialism, performance-based contracting, etc.) brush away as illegitimate older ones, there are good reasons to conceive of the third sector as a heterotopia (Foucault, 1986), that is, a space that contains more variegated meanings or 'lived ideologies' than would be expected from the ideological reading of social entrepreneurship. It is if looked at in this way that the cleavage between the ideology of social entrepreneurship and the reality of non-profit practitioners becomes an awakening call which reminds us that the NSTS represents social entrepreneurship "as more than itself" (Laclau, 1997, p. 303) and, by implication, that we must look for ways to critique and hence re-articulate social entrepreneurship. To this end, the concluding section gets to review language-based studies on social entrepreneurship, thus aiming at intensifying the role of discourse analysis in its relation to ideology critique.

Concluding reflections

Social entrepreneurship: A failing operation?

Though the results of the discourse analysis are exemplary and singular rather than universal and representative, they nevertheless echo recent interpretive research on social entrepreneurship which has shown that 'social entrepreneurship' designates a discursive identity which practitioners do not necessarily endorse. For instance, Howorth, Parkinson and McDonald (forthcoming) show that the language of business and entrepreneurship being used by policy-makers, funders and support agencies to project the way forward for social entrepreneurship becomes the source of discursive tensions of social enterprise organizations and individuals. By the same token, Baines, Bull and Woolrych (2010), studying initiatives aimed at advancing entrepreneurial and business-like approaches in the realm of public service delivery, show that government authorities and third sector organizations often face difficulties in relating to the other party's world view and assumptions. Conducting interviews with participants of a social enterprise network leads Seanor and Meaton (2007) to conclude that most interviewees come to reject the prevailing image of the heroic leader and at times even deny wanting to become social entrepreneurs. Parkinson and Howorth (2008), inquiring the use of language by individuals involved in social entrepreneurship, provide evidence that practitioners' language conventions differ both from those of business entrepreneurs and UK social enterprise policies. Using discourse analysis to inquire the degree to which social entrepreneurs actually perceive the enterprise discourse as being meaningful for their own work, the results suggest that even though social entrepreneurs used business terms they often associate them with negative attributes such "as 'dirty', 'ruthless', 'ogres', 'exploiting the black economy', 'wealth and empire building' and 'treating people as second class'" (pp. 300-301). Importantly, being asked whether they saw themselves as social entrepreneurs, interviewees got to dismiss the concept by saying "'it's amusing!'", 'it's ridiculous!', 'too posh [...] I'm working class'" (p. 301). This leads Parkinson and Howorth (2008) to conclude that

social entrepreneurs' articulations are incompatible with UK social enterprise policies, which rely on a managerially defined rhetoric of enterprise that promotes efficiency, business discipline and financial independence. Froggett and Chamberlayne (2004) use a biographical to illuminate the one-sidedness of New Labour discourses of community development. In doing so, they take issue with the individualistic, consumerist and modernization-oriented focus of New Labour discourse, claiming that it represses stories that see change as emerging from dependency, vulnerability and silence.

Generally speaking, what these studies show is that there is a certain sense of discontent with dominant representations of social entrepreneurship. More importantly, the insights create an inherently destabilizing tension by hinting at processes of resistance. Resistance is a complicated issue, thus an issue which requires further deliberation. To begin with, the above studies represent the third sector as a deeply contested space of meaning. Where practitioners are constantly bound to make choices between competing 'lived ideologies', and to account for their choices by negotiating "their own understanding within their own particular worlds" (Cohen & Musson, 2000, p. 44), this illustrates that ideology does not fall from the sky, so to speak; it is enacted and produced, but also resisted in very concrete ways. It needs to remain clear, however, that resistance, if conceived from the vantage point of ideology, does not necessarily take the form of overt antagonism ("no I won't") but of transgressive performances. Practitioners' "failure" to fully adopt the NSTS's subject position (i.e. the social entrepreneur) can be read as an instance of resistance to the extent that the interpretive repertoires being used by practitioners deviate from ideological representations in important ways. As illustrated above, practitioners used language in ways that punctuated the ideology of social entrepreneurship, thus sensing its very limit. Yet, this might still be far away from the point where the ideology of social entrepreneurship becomes "so strained that it starts to stutter, or to murmur or to stammer", that is, the point where "language in its entirety reaches the limit" (Deleuze, 1997, p. 113). Consequently, talking

about resistance, it must be borne in mind that being part of ideology is not related to resistance in the sense of an opposite (cf. also Jones, Latham & Betta, 2008). Instead, the relationship between resistance and ideology “takes the form of a spiral that no simple infraction can exhaust” (Foucault, 1998, pp. 73-74). Where resistance does not signal a space beyond ideology, we need to reconsider the role of critique in its relation to ideology, especially what concerns discursive research on social entrepreneurship.

Tentative suggestions for future research

Following Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), an important aspect of today’s world is that critiques of ideology are incorporated by newer ideologies, sometimes up to the point where there is no more room for critique. For Boltanski and Chiapello the main reason why capitalism was not heavily objected during the 1990s was precisely because its ‘new spirit’ was able to immunize itself against critique by adapting its justifications to the critiques of 1968. What this implies in the present context is that we must become more vocal in addressing the ideological features and aspects of social entrepreneurship. This does not imply doing away with social entrepreneurship (based on the argument that it is merely ideological). If Laclau (1997) is correct that ideology “is a dimension which belongs to the structure of all possible experience” (p. 311), critique cannot be but practiced from within the boundaries of ideology (for the simple reason that there is no extra-ideological space). Critique of ideology is hence no abstract, intellectual exercise but a “commitment to the analysis of concrete situations” (Goss et al., 2011, p. 223). As this contribution has tried to demonstrate, critique of ideology is most effective if it achieves to illuminate the rupture between what is strategically defined and what could be possible but which is not articulated (Boltanski, 2011). Hervieux, Gedajlovic and Turcotte (2010) make an important point by claiming that “[f]urther research is needed in order to gather data on micro discourses in SE [social entrepreneurship], those of social entrepreneurs. Such research will provide a better

understanding of how social entrepreneurs define themselves and will show whether the discourses of social entrepreneurs are consistent with those of the actors that study, fund and teach them” (p. 61). It might be no coincidence that many critical studies of social entrepreneurship (i.e. those which provoke grand narratives, dominant discourse, hegemonic stories, etc.) have relied on language-based methodologies. Indeed, I believe that discursive analysis forms an ideal candidate for the critical research agenda of social entrepreneurship (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey, 2011). At heart, the analysis of practitioners’ discursive practices becomes ideology critique when it achieves to “query the significance of what is [ideologically] excluded, ignored or repressed” (Froggett & Chamberlayne, 2004, p. 71). Discourse analysis hence represents a fertile approach for capturing “the voices of those most often assumed to be the object of, rather than a subject in the production of, the discourse of which they form the centre” (Parkinson & Howorth, 2008, p. 305), and for making room for “alternative views which are often in conflict with the wave of euphoria and optimism that is driving current theoretical development in the field of social enterprise and entrepreneurship” (Bull, 2008, p. 272). Following Buck-Morss’ (2000) telling claim that “once a [...] plan enters the interactive world of the everyday, its uses should be allowed and indeed encouraged to transcend the constraints of the creator’s intent” (p. 65), discursive inquiries raise some interesting issues about the political operation of language and about how practitioners’ local talk undermines dominant forms of knowledge without actually opposing them head-on. Discourse analysis of practitioners’ is an important means of ideology critique not only because it renders visible the various micro-practices through which ideologies “take hold” of the individual. More than anything, studying how ideology gets contested through practitioners’ discursive practices opens up a path toward re-politicizing social entrepreneurship by allowing new ideas to take shape. Undoubtedly, “[i]deas do not rule the world. But it is because the world has ideas [...] that it is not passively ruled by those who

are its leaders or those who would like to teach it, once and for all, what it must think” (Foucault, 1991, p. 282).

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Endnotes

i It needs to be noted that my selection process deviates from Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) in the sense that I did not restrict my analysis to texts produced in Switzerland (for the simple reason that the empirical material would have been too meager, quantitatively speaking).

ii Potter and Wetherell talk of 'interpretive repertoire' instead of 'discourse' to distinguish their discursive approach from Foucauldian-inspired analysis which study discourse as a regulated system of statements that is relatively independent from specific, local conversations.