


Chapter 4

Sustainability and Innovation Perspectives in Social Enterprises: A Comparative Analysis Across Asia and Europe

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ABSTRACT

Social challenges require new forms of entrepreneurship to respond to the evolution of demand. In this scenario, social enterprises emerge as they pursue multiple objectives combining the economic and the social component. This study aims to shed light on the drivers of social entrepreneurship in two different contexts of social entrepreneurship, namely European and Asian. A qualitative content analysis on international reports highlighted two drivers to compare (a) sustainability and (b)

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innovation, aimed at outlining the prevailing model(s). An analysis of companies is run to compare the drivers of social entrepreneurship arising from policy and context. The results demonstrate the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon which responds to specific inputs depending on the institutional solidity, still with contextual differences making different the alignment between macro-level and business level. The evidence obtained offers a series of theoretical and practical implications to be considered in improving the community well-being pursued through social entrepreneurship.

1 - INTRODUCTION: SUSTAINABILITY & INNOVATION IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

Societal challenges are increasingly relevant due to the side effects of progress, as mirrored in the SDGs set by the United Nations; indeed, society is at risk, due to a multiplicity of issues affecting human beings health, the soil, the air, and the seas, and more in the general environment, just to cite some of the most pressing issues.

Calls for wiser approaches and more carefully planned actions have been addressed during the last decades by a multitude of entities, both at supranational and national levels, thus stimulating firms' interest in changing their ways of doing business (George et al., 2016). Thus, not only businesses but also business scholars started investigating the ongoing changes as well as the ones to be stimulated to deal with the societal challenges; scholars focused on multiple paths to be set and run to achieve better conditions, but two topics emerged more than others in management debate, namely sustainability, and innovation. Indeed, sustainability is a trending topic in management debate and has a crucial role in defining how societal challenges should be addressed by infusing the principles of sustainability in business actions (e.g., Elliot, 2013), still via facing complexity (Sebhatu et al., 2021). Innovation is part of change; thus, it is the way to frame the efforts firms performed and should further perform to achieve beneficial results for society (e.g., Pless et al., 2021), even at multiple levels (Fagerberg and Hutschenreiter, 2020).

In line with the two topics mentioned above, their interplay proved to be particularly effective in paving the way towards novel solutions dealing with societal challenges, namely sustainability innovation supported companies in performing activities in light of the goal of building a more sustainable future (Purtik and Arenas, 2019). Therefore, sustainability innovation entails creating and putting into practice solutions that address social, economic, and environmental challenges (Bent & Le Grand, 2012; Odriozola-Fernández et al., 2019). Consequently, intentionally altering an organization's philosophies, attitudes, procedures, practices, or products to generate and achieve social and environmental value in addition to the

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