

Societal Entrepreneurship – a Cross-Boundary Force for Regional and Local Development Cherished for Multiple Reasons

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Abstract

This paper is based on results from the findings in the cross-disciplinary project on societal entrepreneurship in sparsely populated areas (SESPA). Studies within this project that take their point of departure in the societal or community-based entrepreneurship literature demonstrate how different contextual aspects as well as different perspectives enhance the understanding of why societal entrepreneurship is important for regional and local surroundings and development. The analysis of the studies within the SESPA project reveals societal entrepreneurship as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon interrelated with the local context as well as with national and even global developments. It is a cross-boundary force for local and regional development. The sub studies emphasize different aspects in which societal entrepreneurship in conclusion can be understood as local responses to local challenges, the multiplication of organizational missions, as well as collective solutions to diverse goals. The analysis emphasizes an intertextual vision of a 'positive development' in which societal entrepreneurship combines entrepreneurial drives with societal aims. Furthermore, the analysis reveals different, even multiple, reasons why societal entrepreneurship is cherished by different actors engaged in or related to the development – in this case of a sparsely populated region.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship, innovation and economic aspects of development have been highlighted in studies of and politics for regional and local development in recent decades (Malecki, 1994; Bygrave & Minniti, 2005; Christensen & Kempinsky, 2004; Tödtling & Trippel, 2005; von Friedrichs & Boter, 2009; Arbutnott & von Friedrichs, 2012). In addition, aspects such as employment, functioning welfare, and attraction highlights have also been recognized (Andersson et al., 2008). The view on entrepreneurship has expanded and an interest in societal and social entrepreneurship has arisen (Dees, 2001; Mair, et al., 2006; Nicholls, 2006; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2006; Borzaga et al., 2008; Gawell et al., 2009; Berglund et al., 2012). This increased interest calls for reflections about the role, or roles,

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of societal and social entrepreneurship, in particular in relation to local development in which these concepts are increasingly being ascribed a ‘vital role’ for development (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004).

The purpose of this paper is to further the understanding of societal entrepreneurship from a perspective of a local and regional context as a primary setting. This paper will discuss the concept of societal entrepreneurship, and due to the state of conceptual use also social entrepreneurship, and continue to contextualize the phenomena in a Swedish local and regional setting. Discussions are based on a number of illustrating studies of local initiatives carried out in rural regions in central Sweden, Norway, and Iceland, all of which have been conducted as part of a research project at Mid Sweden University on the topic “Societal Entrepreneurship in Sparsely Populated Areas” (SESPA), which aims to combine contributions to academia, policy, and practitioners through cross-disciplinary empirically-based studies. This paper specifically addresses the question of how societal entrepreneurship is understood in relation to local and regional development in this particular setting. As Berglund et al. (2012) discusses, “the understanding of societal entrepreneurship signals that the shape it takes is sensitively dependent upon context”, which Welter (2011) also confirms by saying; “context matters”.

Firstly, this paper will discuss the concepts and practices of societal entrepreneurship. Secondly, the regional and local context of this study will be elaborated on. Thirdly, after a methodological account, empirically-based illustrations will be presented. Finally, an analysis of societal entrepreneurship as a cross-boundary force for regional and local development is presented.

Societal entrepreneurship – a concept among concepts

The concept of societal entrepreneurship is in focus in this paper. It does, however, to a large extent, overlap with the internationally more recognized concept of social entrepreneurship. *Social entrepreneurship* can be traced back to the foundation of the US-based organization Ashoka in the 1980s. Their approach, which has also been adopted by several other actors, has a focus on individual entrepreneurs as change makers and has since then had a strong influence on the international discourse in the field (Boschee, 1998; Austin, Stevenson, & Weiskiller, 2003; Mair & Marti, 2006; Nicholls, 2010). The number of publications on social entrepreneurship has increased significantly during the last decade and covers topics such as ‘a critical need to build sustainable organizations entailing economic, social, and environmental factors’, ‘local social ventures and clashes in community’, ‘poverty alleviation through micro financing’, etc. (Pierre et al., 2013a).

The term societal entrepreneurship was coined in the late 1980s in the Swedish discussion on local community development (Westin, 1987; Johannisson & Nilsson, 1989; Johannisson, 1990). This approach focused on collective processes “for the community” framed by an economic view of development. Later on, the meaning of societal entrepreneurship has been expanded and used as an um-

brella concept for different forms of entrepreneurship with societal aims (Gawell et al., 2009), or as a process in which “human beings invent ‘tools’ and organize in new ways to solve problems and create opportunities on the many arenas that contemporary societies offer” (Berglund et al., 2012, p 2). Together with the term ‘community-based entrepreneurship’, societal entrepreneurship thereby addresses topics such as ‘locality’, ‘innovation’, ‘the creation of new ventures’, ‘collectivism’, ‘social capital’, and ‘regional and economic development’, often with a focus on problems faced by small towns and rural areas (Pierre et al., 2013b).

Other ‘entrepreneurships’ that relate to similar phenomena, such as ‘civil/civic entrepreneurship’ or ‘activist entrepreneurship’, are used with references to civil society (Henton, et al. 1997; Banuri et al., 2002; Gawell, 2006). ‘Political entrepreneurship’ is used primarily with references to politicians’ entrepreneurial activities and the public sector (Buchanan & Badham, 1999; Harris & Kinney, 2004; Chatterjee & Lakshmanan, 2009; von Bergmann-Winberg & Whilborg, 2011), while ‘public entrepreneurship’ is related to transforming private initiatives to a broader public agenda (Hjorth & Bjerke, 2006), also contributing to the foundation of the studies that this paper draws on.

In spite of all these various terms and concepts, it is possible to conclude that *societal entrepreneurship* is about an engagement in and for the community, or more generally society, combined with an entrepreneurial action. The phenomenon involves individuals and groups and will influence organizations in various ways as it is found in different contexts. On the one hand, it makes societal entrepreneurship elusive, but on the other hand it is very concrete as ideas are transformed into actions.

Societal entrepreneurship, as with entrepreneurship in general, refers to at least a certain degree of newness – new products or services, new methods of organization, the use of new resources or new markets to borrow Schumpeter’s criteria (1934), but also to put innovations into action. For societal entrepreneurs, this means the creation of ideas for social meaningfulness in daily life (Bjerke & Karlsson, 2013). Societal entrepreneurship, as with all entrepreneurship, is always embedded in different contexts. Both structural and geographical embeddedness affect these phenomena and the processes these phenomena are part of (Smith & Stevens, 2010).

In relation to *the local* and the notion of *development*

By paying specific attention to the context of societal entrepreneurship that we commit ourselves to in this article, we relate to people’s lives, people’s livelihoods, and the organization of what is commonly referred to as society. The latter concept, at this stage in the paper, is used rather vaguely, in line with the current *state of the art* in the emerging field of societal entrepreneurship. To explore the notion of development on the “local” and “regional” level, we will review what has been addressed in the work concerning these notions here.

Local and regional developments do not differ specifically from development in general, but in the specific context a ‘condensate of society and development’ is enacted. The ‘different’ levels - local, regional, national, international, and even global are however not isolated from each other. In local activities for example, global discourses and global markets can be ‘felt’ i.e. in global processes (Johannisson, 2008). The development of a region is interrelated to the development of local communities as well as to national decisions and conditions and global processes. Global development is likewise dependent on what is happening in different regions. A focus on local and regional development does thus disclose the context of entrepreneurship in a concrete and specific way.

In search of growth and social cohesion

Entrepreneurship has commonly been related to economic aspects of development and specifically highlighted as a vehicle for growth (Reynolds et al., 1994;

Bygrave & Minniti, 2000). In recent decades, these aspects have been emphasized in politics both on national and regional levels as well as internationally, for example in the European Union (European commission, 2004). The focus on growth also meant that other aspects of development, such as social or political development, were more or less excluded from mainstream discussions.

Lately, however, the debate on sustainability has grown stronger (for example Weerawardena et al., 2010). References to ecological aspects of development have been put forward in the public debate and different considerations or solutions are being discussed in different forums all over the world. In addition, social sustainability has attracted a new (or renewed) interest and has been addressed more often together with growth, in contrast to earlier decades when growth and social cohesion were discussed in different forums. In the European Union, growth *in combination* with social cohesion is now emphasized and the development of a model that integrates economic growth and social cohesion is considered to be a major challenge (Bacra, 2009; European Union, 2014).

Societal entrepreneurship can be seen as the carrying out of initiatives in search for sustainable development in which a narrow focus on only economic growth is insufficient and therefore needs to be substituted with a more holistic view on development (see e.g. Dawson & Daniel, 2010). The concept contains a positive connotation of improvement, but it does not in itself imply anything else than some kind of change over time. Whether these changes are considered as positive, unavoidable, or negative is a question that needs evaluation criteria and at times normative standpoints (Gawell et al., 2009; Gawell, 2013a).

Societal entrepreneurship as a force for development

With the purpose to further the understanding of societal entrepreneurship specifically in relation to local and regional development, we use a basic definition of societal entrepreneurship, as societal engagement combined with entrepreneurial action. This definition facilitates a broad perception of its context, openness for different forms of organization, as well as a variety of perspectives in

analyses of this elusive phenomena that is ascribed a forceful role in development.

The emerging and partly ambiguous framework of societal entrepreneurship that draws both on economic growth orientation and a vision of a more holistic view on development raises questions of different forms of expressions and how societal entrepreneurship contributes to what might be a new type of development.

Methodology

This paper is primary based on a sample of empirical studies conducted within a project focusing on Societal Entrepreneurship in Sparsely Populated Areas, SESPA (www.miun.se/SESPA) in which exploration as well as a more systematic examination of societal entrepreneurship as a force for local and regional development has been facilitated. The different perspectives, theoretical frameworks, as well as empirical studies have facilitated analysis beyond a single sector in society and beyond a single level of analysis. The studies have been conducted by researchers from different disciplines (see table 1) and thus relay a variety of approaches that are further elaborated on in a Swedish anthology (von Friedrichs et al., 2014). The studies are first and foremost case studies with a focus on specific ventures, specific villages, or a region as such. In all the studies, both private and public actors are included even though focus on these types of actors varies. The SESPA project involved over 20 researchers at Mid Sweden University and was conducted 2010-2014. It was funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

The main objective of the SESPA project was to research how societal entrepreneurship can contribute to sustainable development and entrepreneurship in Sweden's sparsely populated areas. By investigating the social and societal effects of innovation using an interactive research approach, SESPA broadened the view on entrepreneurship to involve economic, human and social perspectives on concepts and models for local and regional development. In particular, the project focused on how entrepreneurship acts as a driving force for sustainable local and regional development in sparsely populated areas. In doing so, the project adapted the Swedish concept of societal entrepreneurship with a focus on engagement in and for the community, or more generally society, combined with an entrepreneurial action. Following this concept the societal entrepreneur could be an entrepreneur that pursues a social mission in connection to some economic activity as well in order for the organisation to survive and develop, i.e. a commercial basis with reinvestment of possible profit in the venture. This approach does not exclude non-profit initiatives but in SESPA the concept of societal entrepreneurship often implies a mixture of commercial and public funding as well in order to secure sustainability of the initiative.

Societal entrepreneurship could occur in various contexts and on different levels in society, which the different studies illustrate (see table 1). The common contexts, in addition to the ones mentioned in the table below, for the cases are

Sweden and rural areas with the exception of “creating local branding”, which encompasses Norway and Iceland as well. All studies but three have adopted an interactive research approach.

Table 1. Overview - cases of societal entrepreneurship in the SESPA project

Cases	Context	Actors involved	Method/Perspective
Local business entrepreneurs as local societal developers	Local challenges and local responses	Local residents and entrepreneurs	Interactive research approach Survey and observations Business administration
Creative people's societal entrepreneurship - an inspiring business model for local development	Local challenges and local responses	Immigrated local residents in a non-profit creative sector	Interactive research approach Interviews and observations Business administration
Hybrid and lifestyle entrepreneurs - also societal entrepreneurs?	Local challenges and local responses	Hybrid entrepreneurs in the creative sector	Interactive research approach Survey and focus groups Business administration
Societal entrepreneurship - model for regional renewal? The case of a table tennis club as social bricoleur	Multiplying (organizational) missions	Public sector, local residents and a sports club	Interactive research approach Interview, document study and observations Business administration
Social farming as a business concept in societal entrepreneurship	Multiplying (organizational) missions	Public sector and local farmers	Interactive research approach Interviews and observations Business administration
Is Generation Y a societal entrepreneurial generation?	Multiplying (organizational) missions	Young people	Interviews and observations Psychology
How can higher education contribute to societal entrepreneurship on the site of education?	Collective solutions for diverse goals	Public sector (university students)	Interactive research approach Participating study Business administration
The knowledge economy and regional development	Collective solutions for diverse goals	Public sector (higher education system)	Conceptual Pedagogy
Creating local branding	Collective solutions for diverse goals	Public sector (municipalities) in Sweden, Norway and Iceland)	Comparative analysis Political science
Successful leadership within a societal venture	Collective solutions for diverse goals	Public sector (manager and staff at a municipality pre-school)	Interactive research approach Survey, interviews, observations, documents Quality technology

The different cases have used different data and interviews as their primary sources, but also documents, observations, and survey data have been used. In the description and analysis that follows, references to what type of data and by what methodology findings have been generated are specified in order to contribute to clarity.

The analysis in this paper is based on an interpretative approach with the aim to critically reflect and analyze societal entrepreneurship related to (local and regional) development. The diversity among the studies is on the one hand challenging but on the other hand provides a rich contribution to the emerging field of societal entrepreneurship elaborating both on social, political, and economical aspects. Furthermore, the cases serve to explore and illustrate the complexity of the field of societal entrepreneurship as it appears in various contexts and at different levels of society.

The Swedish context

There is a long tradition of structured development work in Sweden. Predecessors to the County Administrative Boards were founded in the 17th century with a mission to develop the whole country. In the 19th century, county councils and municipalities were founded to manage, among other things, health care, education, housing, infrastructure and (regional) planning. During the 20th century, Sweden developed into a welfare society with strong socio-democratic influences. This development prevailed, and still today it characterizes national, regional, and local levels to a large extent. In recent history, during the 1980s and 1990s, roles in Swedish society were reconsidered (see e.g. Trägårdh, 2007). There was a renewed discussion about decentralization. Growth was highlighted and the role of the public sector was discussed (Gawell & Westlund, 2014). The term *regional planning* was replaced by the term *regional development* and during the mid-1990s by *regional growth*. In 1998, so-called regional growth agreements were established as tools to coordinate regional strategies to increase competitiveness and growth with national initiatives with the same aim.

This overview of actors and processes reveals some of the many interfaces in policy development that can be related to the emerging field to which the above-mentioned conceptualizations are included. But in spite of past and current efforts to facilitate conditions for people to live in rural and sparsely populated areas, there is currently a trend of depopulation and a decline in public services in these regions. A demand for higher education and access to a more diverse labour market combined with cut backs in public services are some of the factors that can explain this development (von Bergmann-Winberg, 2014). There are hopes that societal entrepreneurship can be a force to counteract this development. There is, however, still a lack of knowledge about societal entrepreneurship's potential for local and regional development in sparsely populated areas (see e.g. Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004).

The specific context of the studies this paper draws upon is a region in the middle of Sweden, consisting of the counties Jämtland and Västernorrland. In one of the studies some areas in neighbouring Norway and Iceland are also included. Spatially, these regions consist of vast areas (Jämtland is almost 50 000 square kilometres, Västernorrland is almost 22 000 square kilometres, Trøndelag is 41 260 square kilometres, Nordland is 38 461 square kilometres, and Iceland is 103 000 square kilometres). In Jämtland, Sweden, there are 2.6 inhabitants per

square kilometre, in Västernorrland, Sweden, 11.2, in Trøndelag, Norway, 9.9, in Nordland, Norway, 6, and in Iceland 3.1 inhabitants per square kilometre. Even if these areas are in general sparsely populated, they also contain sizable cities such as Östersund and Sundsvall in Sweden with respectively almost 60 000 and 96 000 inhabitants, Trondheim in Norway, with 165 000 inhabitants, and Reykjavik in Iceland with 120 000 inhabitants¹.

The region has faced challenges such as declining population and difficulties in maintaining levels of services for the population, especially in the rural areas. However, this does not mean that there is a lack of prosperity in general. Population centres such as Östersund, Sundsvall, and Trondheim are the home of public authorities and universities as well as industrial enterprises. In the west of Jämtland, one of the most prominent alpine areas in Sweden attracts tourists and commerce and some rural areas have high levels of entrepreneurial activity.

Empirical illustrations

As the studies of societal entrepreneurship in this region conducted within the SESPA project were concluded, it was noticeable that they had elaborated on societal entrepreneurship as one of the following three categories: ‘local challenges and local responses’, how organizations ‘multiplied their missions’ as a response to what people perceive as needs in society, or as ‘collective solutions’ to what seemed to be diverse goals. These basic categories are here used to structure the presentation of the empirical illustrations.

Local challenges and local responses

In studies of societal entrepreneurship in a specific region, it is not surprising to see several examples of local responses to local challenges. It is in line with expectations of entrepreneurs to act upon opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), or upon perceived necessities (Gawell, 2013a), and within a specific context (Arbuthnott & von Friedrichs, 2012). In one of the studies of a rural community that has struggled with poor economic prosperity due to its rural position for a long time, Bois (2014) highlights how local business entrepreneurs play an important role for local development. Their engagement has, at least in part, been influenced by more positive opportunity structures caused by infrastructural improvements. A survey indicates that these local entrepreneurs are involved in the development of the community beyond the interest of their immediate business and therefore these (commercial) entrepreneurs can also be seen as societal entrepreneurs. However, the study highlights the fact that there are a number of important questions that also have to be asked, such as the meaning of community development (Bois, 2014). The study also raises, we argue, further questions about the outcome of different types of initiatives when it comes to democratic, social, and political aspects of development. Results indicate that even though an area is in a positive spiral, there might be unwanted consequences due to development, which societal entrepreneurship can act upon (Bois, 2014).

From a slightly different perspective, Sjödin (2014) describes and analyzes how people with an alternative lifestyle who have immigrated to the region can be an asset for a stagnated rural industrial community (Swedish: *bruksort*) through bringing creativity and entrepreneurial action to the local community. In this type of societal entrepreneurship, an interest in old style handicrafts is combined with a collaborative community engagement. It is, in this study, argued that these societal entrepreneurs, who to a certain extent live on the periphery of society, are crucial for a positive sustainable local development and therefore should be appreciated by policy makers in rural communities due to their function as “glue” between people, but also in terms of social capital. Results, based on a case study with in-depth interviews, show that there is a stronger need for people in rural areas to collaborate, develop creative ideas, and not be limited in their thinking due to set norms in society.

Individual entrepreneurs are even more distinct in Nordström’s (2014) study of people that combine part-time employment with the development of entrepreneurial initiatives. The study, based on a questionnaire sent out to all entrepreneurs in the creative industry in the region, show that this type of combination is at times seen as a necessity when businesses do not allow a full scale supply of resources. The study reveals, however, that this combination is both common and is at times chosen for other reasons such as to combine security and self-fulfilment. The results presented also indicate that these combined entrepreneurs are active networkers that do not let sector borders hinder their actions.

Multiplying (organizational) missions

In some of the studies within the SESPA project, there are people working in specific organizations with networks and structures that, in various ways, multiply the organizational mission to respond to opportunities or to what they perceive to be necessary. von Friedrichs and Wahlberg (2014) highlight a table tennis club in the small coastal village of Docksta, located approximately 500 km north of Stockholm, which has been an important key for the mobilization of societal engagement in the community. They describe how this table tennis club has engaged in a variety of other ventures in the community, such as building premises for their own sport, other community activities as well as local industries. Later on, they also engaged in elderly care and the local school. The study analyses how the table tennis club restructured the local community in regards to human, social, and financial capital – as a cross-boundary force for community development. It is shown how a sports club in the societal embedding has the credibility required to take over several obligations previously managed by the public sector. Furthermore, its geographical proximity, i.e. strong local embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985), has made the club a society bricoleur (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Di Domenico et al., 2010) and a hybrid organization where commercial and social activities are combined and where resources are mobilized. Here, it can be noticed that in order to meet a social transformation that affected economic and population growth negatively in many sparsely populated and geographically outlying rural communities, volunteer and non-profit organiza-

tions had to take over activities previously managed by the public sector. The empirical basis of the study consists of documents from Docksta Table Tennis Club's website in 2011 and 2012, documents conveyed by one of the driving forces of the club who was also interviewed.

The multiplication of the organizational mission is not only being done within sports. Pierre (2014b) analyzes how farmers can expand their work with livestock, crops and forestry and incorporate social services such as rehabilitation and work training for, among others, long time unemployed people and/or people with different types of health issues. In this so-called "social farming", the 'nursing' character of farming would benefit others by cutting public costs in the long run and at the same time being an opportunity for farmers to diversify their income structures. She further raises the issues of problematic collaboration processes when a traditional public service in Sweden becomes privatized. One can here conclude that innovative societal entrepreneurship ventures are often encouraged in rural areas, but often regulations and authorities hinder successful deployment processes and efficient operations. This paper is based on a project carried out by the farmers' federation, LRF, as well as a review of previous studies in Sweden and current international trends in 'social farming'.

The multiplication of (organizational) missions leads to questions whether to highlight hybridity as aberrant from the 'ordinary', which challenges a traditional view on organizations as well as on the way society is organized or to view it as an ordinary practice of societal entrepreneurship. The younger generations, however, seem to be familiar with more hybrid organizational solutions through intense and diverse connections through the new media and ICT technology. Danielsson (2014) analyzes how young people's habits can be understood as entrepreneurial capabilities and how this can be related to opening a discussion on societal entrepreneurial solutions and innovations in society reaching beyond sectorial divisions. This study highlights both a potential for the future and raises concerns about how these sought-after ITC habits also seem to have negative health consequences, such as various stress-related conditions. Results show that individuals learn through stimulating and challenging local and global activities, which spark their curiosity and creativity and this happens in the spirit of societal entrepreneurship. On the basis of such reasoning it is possible to discern a focus on the core elements of the societal entrepreneur's learning process, which is reflection, collaboration, communication, and context.

Collective solutions for diverse goals

The third category of results of studies conducted in the SESPA project can be characterized as societal entrepreneurship in which collective solutions are developed – at times for diverse goals. One subject that is addressed in two studies is higher education. Sörensson (2014) analyses if higher education can contribute to societal entrepreneurship in a community. She elaborates on how an entrepreneurship course run by the regional university was linked to entrepreneurial activities in a local community and furthermore how people that have participated in this course have engaged in the community for their own benefit and if

they contributed to local development. This particular study concludes that higher education can contribute to societal entrepreneurship in the location where the education takes place. It was noticed that it is important for the education programme to have a clear profile towards the clusters that exist in businesses. Another conclusion reveals that collaboration between leading actors in the local region and the education programme can teach the students to practice entrepreneurship instead of just learning about entrepreneurship theoretically.

From and Olofsson (2014) also show how a regional university not only raises the level of knowledge for the individual student but it also engages in developing networks in the local community and how such networks contribute positively to the development beyond the knowledge itself. In their study, the university's role in activities outside the academy is highlighted for its contribution to development both in the sense of knowledge transfer but also, and increasingly so, the role of innovative interaction with other actors in the community. In conclusion, it can be said that a continued investment in regional universities is probably the most effective regional policy measure for economic growth in areas outside the metropolitan regions. This conceptual chapter is a review of today's research on the knowledge economy's role in regional development and relates it to the outlined background.

From another perspective, von Bergmann-Winberg (2014) elaborates on how marketization and increased competition between regions affect the governance of local communities. She highlights the role of political entrepreneurship, which interlinks with societal entrepreneurship and at the same time emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship, also in political structures. The study indicates that strong networks and entrepreneurial behaviour can contribute to improve the image and through using, for example, branding of the community, a negative development can be changed for the better. Results show that there is a need for denser network structures and the importance of actors who dare to pursue new opportunities. Furthermore, a new form of societal entrepreneurship has emerged over time: a response to the need to muster and distinguish oneself more clearly to break negative trends. Based on theories of branding, political and societal entrepreneurship, four small municipalities' brand building strategies were analyzed.

In the same vein, Bäckström and Åslund (2014) elaborate on the importance of entrepreneurial leadership within and for societal entrepreneurship to meet challenges such as increased demands on creativity and innovation. They claim that entrepreneurial leadership in the public sector that involves social benefits will lead to organizational efficiency, pro-societal attitudes as well as to increased health for people in the organization and for well-being in society. In conclusion, the study shows that it is important for leaders in the public sector to be clear in their missions and pass this on efficiently, to lead by example, be brave, and show engagement by challenging existing bureaucratic frameworks, just as many societal entrepreneurs in fact do. This study was based on the practice of a manager at a council-run pre-school.

Discussion and research implications

The studies demonstrate the breadth of the concept of societal entrepreneurship depending on the perspective and the issues addressed. There are, however, certain issues and discussions that appear as central. Firstly, these studies reveal an intertextual vision of development in which entrepreneurial efforts are combined with responsible and caring virtues. Secondly, the studies emphasize complex dynamics between the entrepreneurial initiatives and structural changes that reach beyond individual efforts. This relationship is partly ‘shadowed’ by the intertextual vision of development yet possible to sense through investigating this relationship in the different studies. Thirdly, based on the analysis of the studies within the SESPA project, different reasons behind the cherishing of societal entrepreneurship are detected and elaborated on. Finally, a discussion on research implications of the analysis of societal entrepreneurship’s role in rural local and regional development follows.

An intertextual vision of development

There are obvious similarities between discussions on development and societal entrepreneurship, between how societal entrepreneurship is presented in (research) literature and policy discussions, as well as between the analytical results and the view of development as a ‘nice’ development. This can be a sign of a close connection between specific actors with influence on the discourse (Nicholls, 2010; Gawell, 2013b) and the initial aim of the SESPA project to explore the potential in this emerging field. The examples given in this paper reveal in several ways how societal entrepreneurship can contribute to create value for individuals (e.g. Nordström, 2014; Pierre, 2014; Sjödin, 2014), groups in society (Bois, 2014, von Friedrichs & Wahlberg, 2014), the community, and in some cases the public sector (von Bergmann-Winberg, 2014; From & Olsson, 2014; Sörensson, 2014). The studies ascribe societal entrepreneurship as having potential for and part of a ‘good life’ and a ‘good society’ constituted on a combination of economic and social sustainable prosperity. This approach acknowledges the individual’s intentions, engagement, and drives to develop initiatives into ventures that contribute towards meeting people’s needs, the community, and the development of society as a whole. It highlights societal entrepreneurship as a cross-boundary force for local development – here specifically contextualized in a rural setting. This means coherence between policy makers, practitioners, as well as researchers. Since the field of knowledge is still young and fragmented we rather relate this to a kind of intertextuality in which the shaping of texts are influenced by other texts (Kristeva, 1966). Looking closely at the wording of the different studies, we also find intertextual resemblance to other texts that most likely refer to other types of entrepreneurship or arguments from what Andersson et al. (2013) call the paradoxical debate on innovation and growth, or studies of, for example, entrepreneurship and clusters’ role for regional economic development (Karlsson et al., 2014). In the field of societal entrepreneurship these types of arguments seem to be combined with

the, at times ambiguous, discussions that are presented in the policy documents of the European Regional and Social Funds respectively.

Societal entrepreneurship can thereby be seen as an arena in which the ambiguity between the growth-focused discourse and societal/social aspects of development can meet. According to the different studies within the SESPA project, public sector actors relate different policy fields to societal entrepreneurship. Explicitly, a variety of policies related to rural development in which municipalities, regional counties, national policies, and European Union policies interrelate. In the rural setting, a broad understanding of entrepreneurship, here referred to as societal entrepreneurship, has been emphasized explicitly for almost a decade while in national policy entrepreneurship and innovation policies have been more growth-focused until the revision of the national strategy for innovation was published in late 2012 (Ministry of Enterprise, 2012). In this strategy, the government integrated societal entrepreneurship, social enterprises, and not in the least, references to civil society in general and other traditional variables of growth.

The studies within the SESPA project provide empirically-based illustrations of how societal entrepreneurship is facilitating engagement for a positive development of rural communities. The studies do not, however, elaborate extensively on how the notion of considerate societal engagement relates to initiatives in general, or how different groups in society perceive these initiatives differently. The current understanding of societal entrepreneurship does therefore not seem to relate to more critical problematization that has emerged within discussions focused on social entrepreneurship or roles of social enterprises in relation to public policies (Peredo & McLean, 2006; Ridlev-Duff & Southcombe, 2011; Teasdale et al., 2012).

The studies show an intertextual vision of ‘a good development’ which indicates that a problematization of societal entrepreneurship’s role and the consequences for the people involved in or targeted by the different initiatives do not come automatically. Therefore, there is a need to deliberately add critical perspectives to the analyses within this emerging field. We therefore continue to look further into the relationship between societal entrepreneurship and structural changes from a more critical point of view.

Societal entrepreneurship in the backwash of structural changes?

In several of these studies, societal entrepreneurship is revealed as a force that interplays with structures, but that crosses different types of boundaries. The rural contextualization of many of the studies highlight societal entrepreneurship as a response to structural changes such as increased competition, decreased population as well as a changing role of the public sector (von Bergmann-Winberg, 2014; von Friedrichs & Wahlberg, 2014; Nordström, 2014; Pierre, 2014; Sjödin, 2014). This indicates that societal entrepreneurship, just like Drucker (1985) argued entrepreneurship in more general terms, is often understood as a local response to local needs in the backwash of partly general and partly specific contextual structural changes.

On the other hand, the studied initiatives appear to be forceful and partly changing structures (von Bergmann-Winberg, 2014; Bois, 2014; Bäckström & Åslund, 2014; von Friedrichs & Wahlberg, 2014; From & Olofsson, 2014; Nordström, 2014; Pierre, 2014; Sjödin, 2014; Sörensson, 2014). Societal entrepreneurship is then a cross-boundary and more or less innovative force for local development in the context of Swedish society. In this way, structural changes could be influenced by societal entrepreneurship initiatives – at least if there are numerous initiatives.

It would of course be of great interest to be able to confirm whether or to what extent societal entrepreneurship initiatives in general are responses to structural changes or if they are actually driving structural changes. That is, in theoretical terms primarily related to Kirzner's (1973) approach or Schumpeter's (1934) approach to entrepreneurship. There are, however, indications that this connection is more complex and that entrepreneurial initiatives to a high degree act as adjustable followers, and only partly provide innovative challenges to established practices (Gawell, 2013b). The studies within this project, together with other studies of the same or similar phenomena, thereby contribute to nuance an intrinsic relationship and highlight a dual role of societal entrepreneurship.

Regardless of whether societal entrepreneurship is driven by structural changes or causes structural changes, it is noticeable that societal entrepreneurial initiatives have a mediating role between interests and resources. First and foremost, entrepreneurs' interests are visible through their actions. In the different cases, their own interests, the interest of others in the community, as well as the interest of 'society' at large are highlighted in the different studies reported above. These interests are then matched with resources, at times from new creative sources and at times rather as a struggle of scares or even non-existing resources. The mediation is not always explicit and it is at least partly disguised by the intertextual vision of 'good development'. In this paper, the mediation is related to market opportunities in a rural or even sparsely populated region in the middle of Sweden and Norway. It is also related to the relationship and social contract between the individuals, businesses, civil society, and the public sector, especially for the responsibility and funding of social services (von Friedrichs & Wahlberg, 2014; Nordström, 2014; Pierre, 2014), or the relationship between different groups of individuals in society (Sjödin, 2014). Societal entrepreneurship is, in this setting, therefore closely connected to the transformation of the public sector in Sweden which includes exploring and promoting private alternatives to the provision of services that has been channelled through the public sector organization (Trägårdh, 2007; Lundström & Sundin, 2008). Regardless, in all of the studied projects there has been at least some public funding through the municipalities, county councils, or in many cases the European Union's structural funds. This funding is, in these cases, primarily project based and therefore limited in time and future funding is currently not known.

In the studies, societal entrepreneurship is first and foremost expressed in positive terms in which individuals and local communities forcefully respond to

needs and structural changes – even if combined with certain caution related primarily to the underlying structural changes. In one study, however, the analyses relate characteristics of societal entrepreneurship to young people that at least partly show the same or similar characteristics, not only with positive outcomes (Danielsson, 2014). Here, the surpassingly positive match is also related to what appears to have a negative effect on young people's health as for example extensive flexibility seems to lead to stress and even undesirable illness (Danielsson, 2014).

Societal entrepreneurship cherished for multiple reasons

The studies conducted within the SESPA project reveal societal entrepreneurship as local responses to local problems coloured by an intertextual vision of a positive development. They contribute to the empirical based knowledge on societal entrepreneurship and its relationship to the dynamic complex processes related to structural changes. The analysis indicates that the relationship is multifaceted and maybe even beyond causal clarity. Even though the project has its limitations, the cross-disciplinary approach contributes to the understanding of different dimensions and thereby different reasons to cherishing the concept.

The complex relationships related to societal entrepreneurship that appear in the studies call for caution. The structural changes that are interrelated to societal entrepreneurship are, in spite of facilitating increased interest and execution of societal entrepreneurship, not necessarily positive for local or regional development, for groups of people or individuals. Societal entrepreneurship might even be used as a *hostage* by politicians in favour of decreased public engagement or other actors advocating for market solutions. This means that there is not only an intertextual vision of development but also an intertextual wish for societal entrepreneurship to be a panacea for sparsely populated areas' so-called wicked problems (Churchman, 1967; Rittel & Webber, 1973). And even if societal entrepreneurship is ascribed to provide forceful initiatives in that direction, the studies within the SESPA project indicate that societal entrepreneurship initiatives cannot by themselves provide solutions. They can, however, take an important part in a cross-sectorial collaboration for societal development – especially in sparsely populated areas.

For public decision makers, societal entrepreneurship is, in these studies, partly used with references to a phenomenon that can replace some of the decreased publically provided local service. For market-based advocates, societal entrepreneurship is partly referred to as actors that can provide services in spite of the lack of commercial outreach. Societal entrepreneurship is therefore embraced and cherished as a development facilitator in both these lines of argumentation.

Furthermore, most studies emphasize and ascribe individuals a forceful, even heroic (societal) entrepreneurial role while politicians are described as naïve or cynical and public servants are described as bureaucratic and non-engaged. This is in line with earlier findings within the entrepreneurship discourse (Ahl, 2002; Pettersson, 2002; Berglund, 2007). Commercially-based

enterprises are presented as irresponsible and short sighted while societal entrepreneurs are described as caring, creative, forceful, and sustainable. These arguments differ from mainstream literature on growth in which commercial entrepreneurs, as a part of market forces, are ascribed a crucial role for growth and development in, for example, different policy strategies.

Furthermore, in all the studies, societal entrepreneurship is cherished as a cross-boundary phenomenon, which indicates a perceived problematic separation between different sectors, different groups in society, as well as different aspects of development. The different studies thereby strengthen the idea that societal entrepreneurship can facilitate and even drive a more holistic approach to development than the current established sectorial divided approach as also emphasized by Berglund et al. (2012). Some of the studies do, however, highlight difficulties with the cross-sectorial collaboration (e.g. Bois, 2014; Bäckström & Åslund, 2014; Pierre, 2014). These difficulties can even be considered as identification of a major challenge for the different actors that are involved in development processes. The understanding of societal entrepreneurship and the experiences from different societal entrepreneurship initiatives can therefore contribute to the understanding of how to facilitate development in which both economic, social, and political aspects are recognized.

The studies in the SESPA project show that the understanding of different reasons to cherish societal entrepreneurship for the different actors trying to meet the challenges facing rural and sparsely populated regions need further studies and analysis. The studies, however, indicate that the bricolage is fragile. At times, underlying constituents are fused in a constructive way. Other times cracks remain, or even deepen. They also reveal that societal entrepreneurship can be a cross-boundary force for development in a rural sparsely populated region and its local communities. However, it is not enough to set hopes only to societal entrepreneurship – societal entrepreneurship depends on collaboration with and between actors from different sectors in society.

Implications of research

To conclude, the primary implications of this research is that societal entrepreneurship can be and is a cross-boundary force for regional and local development also in rural areas. There is, however, a lack of critical problematization of societal entrepreneurship's relationship to different types of structural changes – not the least in regards to possible disadvantages in certain areas or for certain groups that are vulnerable for different reasons. There is therefore still a need for research and evaluation of, for example, policies being implemented.

Even if the findings support the inclusion of societal entrepreneurship in different types of policies aiming for the development of rural areas, the studies caution against undue reliance on societal entrepreneurship's possibilities to cope with so-called wicked problems. Societal entrepreneurship can be a cross-boundary force - but can hardly be seen as the single solution as problems call for multifaceted collaboration beyond the scope of individual initiatives. It can therefore not replace the responsibility of public actors in relation to citizens.

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Note

¹ Information regarding population density and size of areas are taken from the following sources: www.lansstyrelsen.se/jamtland, www.lansstyrelsen.se/vasternorrland, www.ntfk.no, www.stfk.no, and www.iceland.is.