

Social entrepreneurship and migrants' integration: developing a conceptual framework

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Motivation and aims

Recent years have been characterized by an increase in migration flows worldwide, and consequently the issue of migrants' inclusion in their destination countries has become a matter of public concern (IOM, 2020). Such challenge involves a wide array of actors, from communities to public authorities, and it requires the development of new policies and organizational practices able to support such inclusion (GUO et al., 2020), which encompasses "*achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups within the community; and structural barriers to such connection related to language, culture and the local environment*" (Ager & Strang, 2008; p. 166). However, it has been argued that migrants are likely to be subject to systemic barriers that prevent them to be fully integrated into the local communities (Lee et al., 2020), leaving them in a marginalized position within the society.

In this context, Social Enterprises (SE) are expected to operate as support organizations in the process of integration (Lee et al., 2020), since their *raison d'être* lays in the use of business logics to improve the situation of segments of the population that are excluded or marginalized (Saebi et al., 2019). SE can be either for-profit or non-profit entities (Gupta et al., 2020) and are characterized by the element of *hybridity*, since they combine a business organizational form with a social mission, therefore seeking to reach both financial sustainability and a social purpose (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty et al., 2014). Besides, thanks to their ability to create social value and their embeddedness in the local context, SE are seen as privileged actors for the implementation of new practices aimed at responding to unmet social needs or societal grand challenges (Grimm et al., 2013; Markman et al., 2019), among which we can find the integration of migrants and refugees in the host countries.

Despite the pressing need of understanding how migrants' integration can be successfully promoted and the potential displayed by SE in this field, academic research addressing the role that SEs can play in contributing to solving the issue is still fragmented and lacks conceptual clarity.

In order to understand what the state of the art is in this field of studies, we reviewed extant literature related to migrants' integration and Social Enterprises. Overall, the review has brought out the scarcity of research in this field and a series of boundary conditions that influence how the topic is approached. What also emerged, is a lack of critical perspectives about how the process of integration is planned and implemented and the mechanisms of power imbalances that could be reproduced inside the organizations. The purpose of this paper is to suggest the development of this kind of perspectives when analysing how SEs can contribute to migrants' integration.

Methodology

The first step of our literature review involved a query on Scopus and Web Of Science, aimed at identifying all the academic articles related to the topic. The query included keywords related to the topic of migration ("*migrant**"; "*refugee**"; "*asyl**") matched with keywords pertaining to the field of social entrepreneurship ("*social entrepr**"; "*social business**"; "*social enterpris**") and limited to academic articles written in English. The results of the query consisted in a total of 64 records in Scopus and 66 records on Web Of Science: once the duplicates were removed, the sample featured 70 records.

Then, we reviewed the articles' abstracts in order to drop from the sample the articles that did not address our topic of inquiry. These cases encompassed: the use of keywords in a different context than international migration (e.g., "*asylum*" used in psychotherapy); teaching case studies; articles

focusing on SEs which do not have migrants as target beneficiaries; articles dealing with internal migrants or displaced people; articles dealing with entrepreneurship by refugees in general and not specifically on social entrepreneurship; interventions not consisting in SEs (e.g., governmental integration programmes); articles where social entrepreneurship is not the core of the paper or is used in a different sense than business. This screening reduced the sample to 42 articles.

The following step involved a careful reading of all the selected articles, which brought to the exclusion of 12 more articles from the sample because dealing with issues related to ethnicity or immigration from other regions without specifying whether they were related to international migration; and using SE working with migrants only as a research context and not as the object of the study. The final sample thus consisted of 31 academic articles.

Once the sample was established, we proceeded by coding the papers according to several aspects (research questions; theory employed; method; sample; home/host countries; definitions; etc.).

Results

This work brought to the identification of the main features of the research stream related to SEs and migrants' integration. In particular, three kinds of boundary conditions emerged, which are detailed below:

- i. **Different kinds of Social Enterprise.** The first aspect that emerged is the existence of two different kinds of SE when it comes to migrants' integration: (i) Social Enterprises created *for* migrants/refugees by local social entrepreneurs that want to provide means for integration, usually through employment; and (ii) Social Enterprises created *by* migrants/refugees, who want to generate an impact in their home or host country. The sample is almost equally split between these two categories, with the 51% relating to SE for migrants/refugees; 39% relating to SE by migrants/refugees; and the remaining 9% referring to both
- ii. **Different targets.** Another important distinction that emerged as relevant for this field of research is the specific target to which the action of the SE is directed. In fact, SEs display different integration objectives and tools according to different categories of actors, namely migrants or refugees. Whereas international *migrants* include persons moving away from their place of usual residence, "*across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons*" (IOM, 2019; p. 132), refugees are those ones who "*owing to a well-founded fear of persecution (...) is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling (...) return to it*" (IOM, 2019; p. 171). Such distinction is relevant in defining the needs of the target beneficiaries and thus how to promote their integration in the host country, given the different motivations, entry routes, preparedness to migrate, and prospects for stay in the host country or return to the home country that characterize different groups (Ager & Strang, 2008; Cassarino, 2004).
- iii. **Different aspects of integration.** Integration is a multi-faceted concept, which encompasses different dimensions of immigrants' resettlement experience. In particular, according to Ager & Strang (2008), the involved dimensions are: employment; housing; education; and health. Our review of the literature shows that SEs are active in all these fields, but particular attention has been devoted to the employment activities. Integration through employment is in fact one of the main concerns for both policymakers and organizations, which are looking for successful practices to implement.

Contribution: a critical perspective

The literature review has pointed out the complexity of the topic and the several boundary conditions that must be considered when trying to understand the role that SEs can play for migrants' integration. Another feature that emerged is that, despite their focus, the majority of the analysed articles aims at understanding how the activities of SEs created by local entrepreneurs *for* migrants can have an impact on their wellbeing in a broader sense.

What we perceive as missing in this kind of analysis is a critical perspective on *how* the activities aimed at migrants' integration are designed and brought about in social enterprises. Prior critical studies in the field of management have already shown that organizations aiming at including migrants through employment can sometimes unconsciously reproduce the same mechanisms of marginalization that are present in society (Ortlieb et al., 2021; Romani et al., 2019; Schaubroeck et al., 2021). This kind of marginalization stems from unequal social relationships, where one group dominates the other and adopts a paternalistic approach that prevent a real empowering of the segment of the population to which the activities are targeted.

In this paper, we suggest to apply this perspective also in the context of SEs, to better understand how privilege shapes social entrepreneurship for/by migrants. Privilege is commonly defined as accrued and unearned structural benefits ascribed to both individuals and groups (Johnson, 2005), which originate in social systems of categorization and power (Crenshaw, 1989). In this paper we focus on migration status and race as a "categorizing" characteristic influencing migrants' advantages and disadvantages in terms of transnational positioning and their self-employment outcomes (e.g. Webster & Haandrikman, 2020). We draw on the conceptualization of organizations as "racialized" to acknowledge that organizations are racial structures that reproduce (and challenge) racialization (Ray, 2019). Racialization is the process of "attributing racial meaning to people's identity and, in particular, as they relate to social structures and institutional systems" (Yee, 2008, p. 1111) and is used to explore "ongoing practices that attach racial meanings to people" (Gonzalez-Sobrino & Goss, 2019, p. 507). Due to the salience of international migration all around the world, it is urgent to understand how social enterprises are affected by racialization in their capacity to become a site and tool of migrants' integration in the host societies.

We develop a theoretical contribution to the literature on social entrepreneurship and migrant entrepreneurship by examining how racialization can affect social enterprises by/for migrants in shaping individual agency, legitimating the unequal distribution of resources, providing credentials privileging Whiteness and decoupling formal commitment to equity, access, and inclusion from policies and practices that reinforce or do not challenge existing racial hierarchies. We suggest how internal and external actions can alter the patterns of racialization in organizations and highlight theoretical insights from stakeholder engagement and participatory management to move forward our understanding of these issues.

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