Book reviews

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Seymour, R.G. (ed.) (2012) *Handbook of research methods on social entrepreneurship*. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham. 288pp. ISBN : 978-1-8484-4965-7, £99.95 (hbk).

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Social entrepreneurship has become a buzz-word in the business and political arenas, as well as in the academic world. With this handbook, Seymour aims to raise some critical issues regarding research methods and design in the social entrepreneurship field. In particular, he aims to fill a gap by addressing questions relating to philosophy of the sciences and by providing an overview of the variety of research methods that may be applied to research in social entrepreneurship.

The book is divided in four parts. First, general questions about social entrepreneurship research are touched upon in order to pique the readers' curiosity. In the second part, three research approaches are reviewed. In part three, three examples of data gathering and research methods are presented. Finally, an overview of the extant literature in the field is provided along with the challenges faced by researchers working within it.

The first chapter intends to provide a working definition of social entrepreneurship drawing on extant literature. Seymour describes distinguishing features of the social entrepreneur, social entrepreneuring activity and social entrepreneurship as compared to commercial counterparts. In the second chapter, he addresses philosophy of sciences issues and explains how they impact on social entrepreneurship research. Specifically, he highlights the strengths and the weaknesses of objectivist and subjectivist approaches with regard to the different levels of analysis.

In chapter three, the first of the research approaches, listening to narratives, is considered. Presenting their contribution as a conversation between a PhD-student and his supervisor, Steyaert and Bachmann discuss how narrative approaches can be employed in social entrepreneurship research. The philosophical assumptions underpinning such an approach, as well as the generation and the analysis of narrative data in a social entrepreneurship context are considered. In the fourth chapter, using a research project, which they conducted in Ecuador as an example, Tasker and Westberg along with Seymour consider the efficacy of action research in the domain of social entrepreneurship. They conclude that this approach is productive and pragmatic for investigating issues in this domain due to the emphasis placed on the collective development of solutions to problems identified by the participants, which is at the heart of the social entrepreneurship process. In contrast, they warn of the potential of over-subjectivity, which may also lead to conflict between the researcher and the participants, as well as the possible time implications of conducting action research. In chapter five, Kumar and Ormiston review the role of the case study as a research strategy which they consider to be valuable in investigating issues in social entrepreneurship due to the theoretical under-development of the field. An example of a

case study design is presented in addition to a useful checklist and very practical advice for best practice.

In chapter six (Part Three) Salignac presents the case for the adoption of discourse analysis in a social entrepreneurship setting and argues that this method is particularly relevant for exploring the construction of new social phenomena as well as the creation of social value. However, she also acknowledges that discourse analysis can be a time-consuming endeavour. Using examples drawn from the Fair Trade sector guidelines for undertaking discourse analysis are presented. In chapter seven, drawing on Schwab and Skoll Foundations' networks, Webster and Ruskin discuss social network analysis techniques. They present three network theories that may prove insightful for social entrepreneurship: the strength of weak ties, the small-world phenomenon, and the concept of embeddedness. The efficacy of employing different types of survey in social entrepreneurship, as well as their limitations, are considered by D'Alessandro and Winzar in chapter eight. Helpfully, the reader is not only guided step-by-step through the design of measurements and of a questionnaire, but also several techniques for the analysis of survey data are described. In chapter nine, Seymour introduces the logic of drawing and verifying conclusions, which he considers to be a widely misunderstood component of research. Three means of drawing inferences are presented (deduction, induction, and abduction) and, focusing on inductive and abductive research, different types of validity are also reviewed.

Part four of the book comprises one chapter (chapter 10). In this McKenny, Short, and Payne provide an overview of the extant social entrepreneurship literature in top-tier management and entrepreneurship journals and make a plea for the use of more quantitative methods and deductivist approaches to studying social entrepreneurship in order to give legitimacy to the field. Consequently, they briefly present some statistical techniques that may be used to address problems and issues in this domain.

As it is often the case in an edited book, the quality of contributions is not homogeneous. Nonetheless, Seymour introduces and links the various parts of the handbook to make it coherent and fluent for the reader. In addition, most contributions are presented in an easy-to-read fashion and are accessible to all readers, whether they are already familiar with the research issue/method under consideration or not. Hence, Seymour's handbook has the potential to trigger mixed methods research projects by potentially piquing qualitative researchers' curiosity to explore quantitative methods, and vice versa. However, the choice for accessibility may also be perceived as a weakness of the handbook, as several contributions were quite superficial or very generalist. Some of the exemplars employed were disappointing as they were not always exploited in depth.

This book is a very useful text for Master- and PhD-students starting a dissertation on social entrepreneurship. In particular, it challenges readers to ask themselves questions about their philosophical positioning, which is too often disregarded in entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship studies. In addition, it may help students and researchers not familiar with the methods/techniques presented to broaden the scope of the perspectives and methods employed in their research. Indeed, the book provides new perspectives to social entrepreneurship by suggesting a variety of methods rarely applied in this context. Finally, critical issues with regard to doing research in general, and in social entrepreneurship specifically, are highlighted. Overall, this handbook is a practical guide and the checklists that are provided should prove useful in helping researchers to avoid making common mistakes. Seymour succeeds well in leading the reader through the journey of conducting research of quality in the emerging field of social entrepreneurship.