

Social Entrepreneurs by Chance:

How environmentalists provide a favorable context for social entrepreneurial action

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Abstract

How, why, and under what conditions can social movements contribute to the development of social entrepreneurial process developed by embedded actors? Social entrepreneurship scholars are increasingly adopting social movement theories to explain how individual entrepreneurs develop their social ventures. Despite the synergies achieved when combining social movement with social entrepreneurship literature, social entrepreneurial outcomes are still mostly explained by the efforts of atomistic actors. In this paper we offer an embedded perspective on social entrepreneurship and social movement, which enables us to examine their complementary features in a sustainable development project in a Dutch region. While contentious activity did not produce the desired effect in our case, we found that the various stages of social entrepreneurship processes (opportunity identification, evaluation, formalization, and exploitation) through which embedded actors develop their ventures were especially enhanced by joint knowledge creation between movements and embedded actors, the construction of producer identities, and direct business support. This study contributes to the social movement literature by showing how movements can bring about change by providing embedded actors with producers' identities and hands-on support. The literature on social entrepreneurship is also complemented, as we show how motives and behaviors to engage in social entrepreneurship are shaped by social movements, in combination with changes in the degree of embeddedness.

Key words: social entrepreneurship processes, social movement activities, regional sustainable development, collective change.

Introduction

Social entrepreneurs tackle social problems by achieving social innovations in systems that are ignored or overlooked by companies and government bodies. Examples of social problems are poor labor conditions and poverty or environmental issues, such as pollution and deforestation. While the literature on social entrepreneurship is still in exploring its boundaries (e.g. Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010; Hill, Kothari, & Shea, 2010; Martin & Osberg, 2007; Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009), a majority of papers on social entrepreneurship draw on purpose-oriented theories; they tend to explain success or failure in terms of contextual and individual-level characteristics. Such accounts adhere to the idea that intentional individuals, as primary change agents, act on social opportunities (see Martin & Osberg, 2007; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009; Zahra, Rawhouser, Bhawe, Neubaum, & Hayton, 2008). This line of thinking is very similar to conceptions of business entrepreneurship, which consider entrepreneurial success as a function of the entrepreneurs' individual skills and capabilities, which are utilized to discover, act on, and exploit opportunities for profit (i.e. Eckhardt & Shane, 2003; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Zahra, 2008).

However, it seems that social entrepreneurs face different challenges than business entrepreneurs. First, because social entrepreneurs often deliberately locate their activities in areas where markets function poorly and for that reason often have to deal with resource scarcity as they develop their social venture (Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010). Second, in contrast to business entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs typically deal with public goods (everybody benefits from a cleaner environment, low employment rates, better working conditions, etc.). Consequently, following Olson's argument, when benefits are collective but costs are individual, free-rider effects occur (Olsen, 1965). Scholars have examined and conceptualized how social entrepreneurs, in overcoming inaction and breaking institutional patterns, can increasingly adopt social movement tactics to develop their social ventures (Broek, Ehrenhard, Langley, & Groen, 2012; Jones, Latham, & Betta, 2008; Mair & Martí, 2006; Martin & Osberg, 2007; Nicholls, 2010; Simms & Robinson, 2009). There are certainly good reasons for social entrepreneurs to adopt specific tactics, such as developing collective action frames and political opportunity structures, and engage in contentious activity (e.g.

Benford & Snow, 2000; King & Pearce, 2010; Kriesi, 2004; Rao, 2009) to develop their social ventures.

Nevertheless, despite attempts to harmonize the literature on social movement with that on social entrepreneurship, there is still some potential for biased accounts if one seeks to explain social entrepreneurial outcomes in terms of the efforts of individual actors. Furthermore, there are significant differences between the activities and processes through which activist and social entrepreneurs attempt to bring about social change. Activists are usually associated with those who seek to promote radical change by naming, shaming, and praising (King & Pearce, 2010) and by doing so attempt to break existing rules, logics, practices, and regulations by promoting alternatives. Furthermore, activists organize their activities in groups or formal organizations (i.e. Greenpeace), thus attempting to change institutions collectively from “outside” the institutions they wish to change (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009). Next, activists often operate on a large scale, tackling national or regional issues or target an entire institutional field. Some work has examined how social movements encourage entrepreneurial activity in sustainable markets (Sine & Lee, 2009; Weber, Heinze, & DeSoucey, 2008) which is particularly of interests for our paper.

Social entrepreneurs, on the other hand, are interested in changing their operating environments (Guclu, Dees, & Anderson, 2002) by pursuing a social mission (Dees, 1998). In contrast to activists, social entrepreneurs focus on particular social needs and develop exploitative solutions to fulfill them. It is commonly agreed that they do this through processes identified as opportunity identification, evaluation, formalization, exploitation, and scaling up of social entrepreneurial activity (Perrini & Fazzolari, 2006). As embedded agents, the behaviors, motivations, and decision making of social entrepreneurs is affected by concrete, enduring relationships (Dacin, Ventresca, & Beal, 1999; Granovetter, 1985; Smith & Stevens, 2010). Furthermore, social entrepreneurs face different challenges in developing their social ventures, often with limited resources (Di Domenico et al., 2010). Therefore, social entrepreneurs rely on support from local government and the private sector to bring about social change in their operating environments. Catford (1998), for instance, explicitly assumes that social entrepreneurs will only flourish if they are supported in the right environment.

Thus, despite some overlaps, we can discern significant differences between social movements and social entrepreneurs in terms of their scope, goals, context, impact,

organization, and means through which change is induced. Because of these differences, we suggest that activists and social entrepreneurs can benefit from each other when they collectively attempt to bring about change. In this paper we illustrate empirically how these differences come into play in practice, showing how synergies are attained when social movements collaborate with embedded actors in the pursuit of sustainable development and jointly work out their ideas to develop solutions to a problem. The research question guiding our efforts is therefore, “How, why, and under what conditions can social movements contribute to the development of social entrepreneurial process developed by embedded actors in terms of opportunity identification, evaluation, formalization, and exploitation?”

In an empirical study we show how environmentalist and agricultural associations, both concerned with the preservation of the natural environment (landscape elements), started to collaborate in a region in the eastern part of The Netherlands. The members of the agricultural associations are farmers and their main activity is maintaining local landscape elements on a not-for-profit basis. The environmentalists are members of a cross-border project group that seeks to conserve the natural environment by promoting biomass energy as an alternative energy source. As in almost every European country, finding sustainable solutions for energy consumption – such as windmills, biomass, solar -- was accorded priority by policy makers, but countries vary in the way support is provided for entrepreneurial initiatives and market development in that area (Jacobsson & Bergek, 2004). The Netherlands is a special case because sustainable biomass initiatives are struggling to find acceptance, because natural gas and its institutionalized infrastructure is still the dominant energy source. This points to the importance of learning processes, network building, external regimes, and changes in niche expectations (Geels & Raven, 2006) and thus poses challenges and opportunities for social entrepreneurs.

Our involvement in this research project stretched over two years. We used several data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews, observations during symposia, and project meetings. We documented how environmentalists and agricultural associations found each other, started to collaborate and engaged in collective action. Our empirical data gave us the opportunity to analyze in depth how and under what circumstances the activities and tactics deployed by these environmentalists led to the development of a process of social entrepreneurship.

We have structured this paper as follows: we first discuss the social movement literature on the development of alternative market arrangements, followed by a section on that conceptualizes social entrepreneurship and its core processes and activities. After presenting our comparison, we go on to identify key differences between both streams. Next, we introduce the method used and the case study, showing how and why these differences help to fuel social entrepreneurial process. In the final section we address the main findings, stated as a contribution to literature, and present conclusions.

How social movements provide a supportive environment for entrepreneurial activity

Finding solutions to social issues (such as environmental problems, poor working conditions, etc.) involves different challenges to actors than those that are recognized in business markets (Medlin, 2006; Ritvala & Salmi, 2010; Ritvala & Salmi, 2011). One challenge relates to the public good character of social issues. It can be difficult to solve them because the benefits are collective while costs are individual, thus leading to free-rider effects (Olson, 1965). A second challenge is that social issues often require substantial changes to institutionalized rules, logics, practices, and regulations (Ritvala & Salmi, 2010).

The social movement literature is primarily concerned with how activists or environmentalists deal with these challenges by establishing frames for collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000). Activists develop “hot causes” and exploit “cool mobilization” tactics to persuade others to embark on collective action (Rao, 2009). Social movement scholars have examined the processes and attributes of collective action, such as framing, identifying political opportunity structures, and resource mobilization. Framing calls for the development of a shared understanding of and emotions related to the problem, and the discursive practices needed to make new solution more relevant, as opposed to alternatives (e.g. Rao, 2009; Snow et al., 1986). Identifying political opportunities refers to the activities involved in analyzing constraints and drivers in the political context (e.g. Kriesi, 2004). Resource mobilization concerns the formation of a collective identity by spreading the cause using formal and informal structures (Rao, 2009). This is why social movements are usually associated with large-scale operations and engage in dialectic processes, emphasizing the role of power, politics, and protest, which are considered repertoires of contention when seeking to bring about institutional change (King & Pearce, 2010; McAdam et al., 1996).

However, the interventions and discursive practices deployed by activists reach much further. Some studies have shown how activists create enabling conditions and provide a favorable context for the development of new firms and sustainable markets. Examples include Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch (2003) in the recycling industry, Weber et al. (2008) in the meat and dairy products movement, Sine & Lee (2009) in the wind power industry, and van Bommel & Spicer (2011) in the slow food movement. This suggests that it is not only through contestation and grievance that activists attempt to bring about change; they also engage in helping to institutionalize new practices. For instance, activists can cooperate with corporations by forming social alliances, setting up alternative business systems, and establishing new norms and standards (De Bakker & Den Hond, 2008). Weber et al. (2008) illustrates how the grassroots coalition movement mobilize cultural codes to change the meaning structure of grass-fattened meat and dairy products by representing them as authentic, sustainable, and natural whereas conventional products were denoted as manipulated, exploitative and artificial. Their study shows how movements can spur the emergence of new markets through attracting entrepreneurial producers, developing producer identities, and establishing exchange between producers and users. In this way, movements frequently mobilize to contest particular beliefs, identities, and values (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008), to replace them by new ones, which they then help to implement. In the case of developing a market for wind energy, Sine & Lee (2009) found that the activities of environmental groups had a greater effect on entrepreneurial activity than the availability of land and beneficial winds. Some of these activities are a development of collective action frames that helped entrepreneurs to recognize opportunities and activities aimed at changing the norms and beliefs underlying individuals' economic activity. Their study also draws attention to the transformation of the resource environment that is, moderating the effect of supply, demand, technology, and the industry's structure (Scott, Ruef, Mendel, & Caronna, 2006), thereby influencing entrepreneurial activity. These studies suggest that, besides being disruptors of existing practices and advocates of new ones, social movements can provide a supportive environment for entrepreneurial activity. Such activities can include developing collective action frames through which entrepreneurs recognize opportunities, provide individual support, create producer identities, and acquire and mobilize resources that help entrepreneurs to develop entrepreneurial practices. Nevertheless, following a remark by van Bommel & Spicer (2011), only a handful accounts deal with the role of the activist in shaping new market arrangements, while even fewer studies investigate the micro-processes that link

social movements with entrepreneurial activities on an individual level (Sine & Lee, 2009; Weber et al., 2008).

Social entrepreneurs as embedded actors

As well as activists, social entrepreneurs also focus on social problems, albeit with some differences regarding the process and the nature of action needed to achieve social transformation. In their purest form, the social entrepreneur takes direct action while the nature of the social activist is to influence others to do so (Martin & Osberg, 2007), as we have touched on in the previous section. Furthermore, in contrast to activists, social entrepreneurs identify social problems, recognize opportunities, and exploit solutions to these problems by applying business principles (Zahra et al., 2009). Perrini & Fazzolari (2006), for instance, propose a process model in which social ventures are established as successions of the following activities: opportunity identification, evaluation, formalization, exploitation and up-scaling. Thus, each of these successive steps requires a different set of activities that are usually performed by the social entrepreneur as initiator and champion of the social project (Thompson, 2002). Guclu et al. (2002), for instance, emphasize the importance of effective idea generation and the development of promising ideas into attractive opportunities.

In doing so, the social entrepreneur needs to mobilize resources. In this regard, Dees, Anderson, & Wei-Skillern (2004) emphasize the importance of resource planning (time, people, money, etc.) in the exploitation and up-scaling stage. Others have examined how these activities relate to the ability to mobilize ideas, capacities, resources, and social arrangements (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004), but also the ability to assemble and combine the necessary resources for developing products and services and further resource mobilization for scaling up (Dees et al., 2004; Mair & Martí, 2006; Tracey & Jarvis, 2007). However, the ability to acquire resources and create successful resource combinations also depends on the degree of embeddedness (i.e. network position, identity, relationships) of social entrepreneurs (Granovetter, 1985). The embeddedness and change of network position is also discussed in the business entrepreneurship literature (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Thus, incorporating the concept of embeddedness into the social entrepreneurship literature may tell us something about how the degree of embeddedness inhibits various stages of social entrepreneurship, such as the intention formation stage, start-up stage, growth stage, etc. (Mair & Martí, 2006)

Furthermore, it seems that there are differences among social entrepreneurs in how they view their mission, discover social needs, acquire resources, pursue opportunities, and the impact they achieve (Zahra et al., 2009). Based on their analyses, Zahra and colleagues distinguish three types of social entrepreneurs, namely, social bricoleur, social constructionist, and social engineer, each with its own characteristic activity patterns, scale, and timing, and resource availability, as well as degree of embeddedness and geographic scope (Smith & Stevens, 2010).

Recognizing these differences is important because social entrepreneurs face different challenges and conditions in their operating environments than those faced by business entrepreneurs. According to Guclu et al. (2002), the operating environments consist of markets (including not only intended users but also third-party payers, sponsors, volunteers), industry structure (i.e. alternative providers, potential collaborations, and key suppliers), the political environment (regulatory requirements and public support or resistance), and culture (local customs, norms and values of communities). Furthermore, both businesses and social entrepreneurs are both challenged by resource scarcity. However, social entrepreneurs pursue their social or environmental activities in operating environments where there is a lack of resources or, as Di Domenico et al. (2010) argue, “social entrepreneurs face a specific set of challenges because they purposely locate their activities in areas where markets function poorly” (p. 683). For example, the Plan Puebla project in Mexico was set up to improve crop production and income for small farmers by focusing on small-farmer cooperatives and providing special support to these farmers (Alvord et al., 2004; Redclift, 1983). However, the farmers were operating in precarious growing conditions and were exposed to difficult political and economic conditions. Thus, it can be reasonably assumed that social entrepreneurs face challenges and resource constraints in their operating environments that are to a certain extent different than those with which business entrepreneurs are confronted. The notion of resource scarcity and coping with local circumstances draws attention to the work of those scholars who have investigated social entrepreneurs as embedded social bricoleurs (e.g. Di Domenico et al., 2010; Gundry, Kickul, Griffiths, & Bacq, 2011). Social bricoleurs typically “act on locally discovered opportunities with locally available resources” (Zahra, et al, 2009 p. 524).

Having outlined the activities and processes of social movements and social entrepreneurs, we note several key differences in both streams with respect to the nature of

action, scope, degree of embeddedness, organization, availability of resources and competences, the process/activities involved, and the desired outcome (see table 1). Many of these key variables reveal opposing differences between social movements and social entrepreneurs (i.e. directly/indirectly, large-scale/small-scale, outsider/insider, knowledge to develop to a large-scale) and suggest that there are opposing differences between both streams. These differences can potentially be valuable complementary assets for both actor types if they engage in collaboration, that is, in practice.

	Social Movements	Social Entrepreneurs
Nature of action	Indirect (influence others to engage in social transformation) (Martin & Osberg, 2007)	Direct (initiator and establisher of social transformation) (Martin & Osberg, 2007)
Scope	Large scale, transformation of industries and fields (Rao, 2009; van Bommel & Spicer, 2011)	Can be large scale but also small scale (local concerns) See typologies of Zahra, et al., (2009)
Degree of embeddedness	Usually not embedded agents but “outsiders” (Battilana et al., 2009)	Can be embedded agents, “insiders”, local operating agents, not heralded as entrepreneurs, especially social bricoleurs (Di Domenico et al., 2010; Mair & Martí, 2006)
Organization	Operate in groups or formal organizations (i.e. Greenpeace). Actions are distributed and coordinated in groups. “Agency is distributed” (Ritvala & Salmi, 2010)	Operate mostly as a socially conscious individual (they are the inventors and champions of their social project) “The social entrepreneur is the change agent” (Dacin et al., 2010; Sharir & Lerner, 2006; Thompson, 2002)
Availability of specific resources and competences	Some degree of funding or support to promote activities. Some highly institutionalized (i.e. Oxfam Novib, Greenpeace) Social movements (SMo) are assumed to have the knowledge to develop large-scale operations necessary to change norms and standards. (De Bakker & Den Hond, 2008; King & Pearce, 2010)	Usually located (and for that reason) in markets that work poorly and thus cope with resource scarcity using their expertise Social entrepreneurs (SE) often possess intimate specific local and contextual knowledge of operating environment (about market, industry, policy, culture) (Alvord et al., 2004; Guclu et al., 2002)

Process/activities	Processes are often dialectical in nature. They are oriented towards framing problems, identifying political opportunities, identity formation, transforming resource environment, and providing support (knowledge, network access) to “like-minded” entrepreneurs (De Bakker & Den Hond, 2008; King & Pearce, 2010; Sine & Lee, 2009; Weber et al., 2008)	Processes are teleological in nature and oriented towards recognizing opportunities, and exploit solutions in light of social/environmental problems by applying business principles (Perrini & Fazzolari, 2006; Zahra et al., 2009)
Desired outcome	Raising awareness of problem, redressing social problems, promoting sustainable change (but rarely intended to become a market party) (Rao, 2009)	Delivering sustainable products/services with social impact, intended to become a market party. (Zahra et al., 2009)

Table 1: Characteristics of social movements and social entrepreneurs.

Our research question is, “How, why, and under what conditions can social movements contribute to the development of social entrepreneurial process developed by embedded actors in terms of opportunity identification, evaluation, formalization, and exploitation?”

In this paper we focus on the different characteristics of social movements and social entrepreneurs and examine how they relate to each other in an empirical study that we introduce in the next section. In our case, we focus on how embeddedness and the operating environment matter to actors as they recognize and evaluate social entrepreneurial opportunities (Perrini & Fazzolari, 2006). We also focus on how the degree of embeddedness (network position, resource availability, identity) of actors informs their intention to engage in social entrepreneurial processes (Mair & Martí, 2006). In general, we examine how environmentalists frame their issue, develop political opportunity structures, and mobilize resources (e.g McAdam et al., 1996) to provide a favorable context for embedded actors. More specifically, we focus on the activities of environmentalists that create producer identities for embedded actors (Sine & Lee, 2009; Weber et al., 2008). In addition, we examine how local support and resources provided by environmentalists shape the intentions of individual embedded actors and how this support enables embedded actors to develop social entrepreneurial processes.

Method

We draw on a single case study. Case studies provide a unique means for developing theory by utilizing in-depth insights of empirical phenomena, in their contexts (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Our empirical study draws on a longitudinal, single

case study that concentrates on the collaboration between environmentalists, concerned with the preservation of unique landscape elements by promoting sustainable energy, and three agricultural associations concerned to maintain local landscape elements (hedgerows) in a region located in the eastern part of the Netherlands. This region, called the “Achterhoek”, is a rural area characterized by its rich coppices and hedgerows, which constitute unique landscape elements; they are culturally important to this region and the Netherlands as a whole.

The representatives of social movements in our case are environmentalists who are temporary members of a cross-border project. This project was established and funded by INTEREG-A, a European initiative established to promote collaboration between European countries with a common border. The project is called “Energiequelle-Wallhecke/Stoken op Streekhout” (See <http://www.energiequelle-wallhecke.de/nl/start>). It was set up in September 2009. The role of these environmentalists is to promote sustainable growth in the region by using regional natural resources (wood chips as biomass) as an alternative to traditional energy sources. One of the aims is to develop relationships between communities and possible market parties engaged in the development of a sustainable market for biomass.

The key embedded actors in our case are three agricultural associations. These associations are non-commercial and are responsible for the condition of the unique cultural landscape elements. Agricultural associations are appointed by the local communities to take responsibility for the landscape and to organize landscaping activities. In total, there are seven agricultural associations in this region and each association is funded by government and European community subsidies. Altogether, with 2000 members (mostly farmers), these associations maintain 27 % of the regional coppices and hedgerows. Despite their important role in the region, due to budget cuts these associations are increasingly exploiting the residues from landscape maintenance activities to cover the costs of operations.

Our involvement in this collaboration started in August 2009 and is still ongoing. We used several data collection techniques. The main source of data was in depth- interviews used to gain in-depth insights and to interpret our impressions. We interviewed and followed spokespersons for the three agricultural associations, the CEO of their umbrella organization, local policy makers, and the two environmentalists during the course of our involvement. We audiotaped and transcribed each interview verbatim. In addition we studied documents such as project agendas and the minutes of monthly meetings of agricultural organizations and

minutes of meetings between members of the agricultural associations and environmentalists. Moreover, we attended several regular meetings of the agricultural organizations and a symposium organized by the environmentalists and the three associations to promote their activities to the communities and policy makers. Finally, we had several feedback sessions with our informants to verify our interpretations.

We decomposed the data into three successive phases by following a temporal bracketing strategy (Langley, 1999). The decomposition of data into phases enables us to be explicit on how actions in one phase lead to changes in the context that affect actions in the subsequent period. Furthermore, decomposing data into phases enabled us to develop comparable units of analysis, which was helpful in making sense of each successive phase. In analyzing data, we developed codes and sub-codes (table 2), which are structured as follows: activities of environmentalists, responses from the operating environment, degree of embeddedness, entrepreneurial process development. ATLAS.ti. 6.2 was used to document codes and assign causal relationships between them within and between each phase.

Codes used for activities of environmentalist	Codes used for responses of the operational environment	Codes used for network position and changes of identity of embedded actors (degree of embeddedness)	Codes used to indicate the various stages of social entrepreneurial process developed by embedded actors
Sub-codes: Framing, political opportunity structures, mobilize resources, creating producer identities, and business support.	Sub-codes: Responses of political actors, communities, and third parties and industry structure	Sub-codes: Intentions, Identity, network position, clustering	Sub-codes: Opportunity, evaluation, formalization, exploitation.

In the next section we describe how the interplay between environmentalists and agricultural organizations results in the development of social entrepreneurship in a sequence of three successive phases. We start by describing the operating environment and the embeddedness of these agricultural associations prior to their engagement with environmentalists. In the second phase we describe how these associations start to collaborate with the environmentalists in an interregional project and how specific activities of these environmentalists helped the associations recognize and evaluate new opportunities. In the third phase we describe the conditions under which environmentalists and the associations

amended their repertoire due to the resistance they encountered in their operating environment, and engaged in the development of social entrepreneurial practices.

Phase 1: Problems and opportunities.

An agricultural organization normally consists of many farmers and landowners with an interest in the preservation of the local natural environment and the pursuit of landscape maintenance activities. Agricultural organizations used to receive subsidies for their activities from the Dutch government and the European Union. However, the money streams had been shrinking over the previous five years, making it difficult for them to pursue their activities.

Meanwhile, due to these changes in political regulations, some agricultural organizations started to investigate alternative solutions so as to become less dependent on government subsidies, such as “t Onderholt” (<http://www.onderholt.nl/>). During the period between 2005 and 2009, some small initiatives were developed by members of “t Onderholt” to exploit the residues from harvesting in an attempt to increase their economic independence. One idea was to sell these residues (wood chips from plant and wood material) as biomass to local energy generators. However, wood chips are considered waste and are difficult to sell at a price that covers the cost of processing. Besides, natural gas is the dominant energy source for space heating in this region, as it is everywhere in the Netherlands. Therefore, there are no regulated arrangements for alternative energy sources. The few users that exist are mostly farmers and members of agricultural organizations who use wood chips to heat their livestock barns. Hence, large-scale exploitation was not achieved in that period. This was not just because there is no regulated market, but also because members of the associations did not see themselves as a full market party that could exploit wood chips for profit. Most of the agricultural associations were looking for alternative activities to become less dependent on government subsidies. Despite financial pressures and attempts to explore alternative solutions, the associations primarily believed that their role in the community is to practice sound landscaping activities locally, to preserve the natural environment.

Phase 2: Engagement with environmentalists: from local concerns to regional opportunities

In 2009, environmentalists approached three agricultural organizations, including “t Onderholt”, to interest them in participating in an interregional project called, “Stoken op Streekhout”. The reason the environmentalists targeted the associations is that together they

control and maintain a substantial part of the coppices and hedgerows in the region and, as such, they store a huge amount of potentially exploitable biomass material. In the face of decreasing subsidies, all three agricultural organizations believed it might be an opportunity to participate in this project, for several reasons. First, because participating in the project fits in with their philosophy of sustainable landscape development and protection of biodiversity. Second, by embarking on a regional project, they could increase the number of opportunities for exploiting wood material.



Picture 1: Project start in 2009. (Environmentalists & key members of the three agricultural associations.)

Another benefit from becoming a member of the project was that they received money for research and time spent on the project for the coming years. The other agricultural organizations joined this regional project for the same reasons, as they were all looking for viable projects to make them less dependent on subsidies.

Between 2009 and October 2011, the environmentalists and members of the three agricultural organizations conducted in several studies funded by project money. These studies were oriented to clarify the potential availability of renewable biomass material in the region, including the cost of harvesting. The agricultural associations' local knowledge was very helpful in these studies, helping to make realistic estimations of the annual quantities of exploitable biomass and the cost of harvesting and distribution to future customers. The study was supported by a Dutch Agricultural University, which helped with data collection and analysis, and provided scientific legitimation supported this study. Furthermore, after exchanging knowledge with project members on the German side, the environmentalists and agricultural associations acquired knowledge about quality standards for biomass material and technical and logistic issues, such as necessary drying capacity, etc. However, they soon

discovered that the Germans were working in a different operating environment where a biomass market has already emerged and policy makers are more open to sustainable development and social entrepreneurial solutions in dealing with regional problems.

Nevertheless, the outcome of all these interactions was that the agricultural associations themselves started to share knowledge with each other and began to see the benefits of working closely together and coordinating their existing activities. At the same time, the environmentalists started to raise awareness for the project among communities and local authorities. As yet, though, the local authorities and communities did not consider wood chips a valuable energy source but as mere waste. In an attempt to make wood chips more valuable, the environmentalists and agricultural associations organized open-days in the region, especially on user sites where interested people could see how the technology works in practice. Several stakeholders were invited, such as local and provincial authorities, technology producers, entrepreneurs, potential users, other agricultural organizations, and members of their umbrella organizations. In doing this, the organizers believed they were in a better position to convince policy makers and other interested parties, and perhaps find somebody who could further their ideas by commercializing them.

Phase 3: Setbacks, reflections, and emergence of social entrepreneurial practices.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the activities, the project stalled in the subsequent months because no further commitments to the project were forthcoming from business and political actors at that time. Local authorities, for instance, were willing to support new initiatives as long they relate to regional sustainable development. However, they reported that there is no uniform regulation for biomass technology at this time and that is something the national government should take care of.

So far, the agricultural organizations considered themselves harvesters, responsible for local harvesting activities, including this project. Despite their contribution in helping to conceive of how a regional market for biomass could emerge, coupled with their role as harvesters, it never occurred to them to see themselves as the entity responsible for all the supply and commercial activities involved. In the face of ever-declining subsidies and further budget cuts, the need to re-think their role in the project became more obvious. Consequently, they changed their orientation. The ongoing collaboration with the other associations in this project in the previous two years had been beneficial for them: it helped them shape their

ideas about the future function of an agricultural association. Encouraged by the environmentalists, they adopted the idea to study whether they could organize commercial and distribution activities within a cluster of three associations, and thus themselves develop entrepreneurial activities to establish a sustainable market for biomass. The environmentalists supported the agricultural associations in several ways. First, they start to collaborate with the University of Twente to investigate possible market scenarios together with the associations. In developing these scenarios, it was necessary to understand the users' preferences and their willingness to adopt biomass technology in the near future. It was also important to understand the resources involved in connecting suppliers and users. Besides regulation, it was important to investigate the availability of drying capacity and transportation and storage costs. Secondary data were collected about price developments for competing energy sources, such as natural gas compared to biomass energy. Furthermore, they collected more knowledge about regulations and allowances for storing and utilizing biomass technology. They consider this knowledge essential for comparison with competing energy sources; it could also be used for promotion material. So, making calculations about biomass and its technology available was considered a necessity for comparison, as well as for transforming the meaning of the material into a more valuable one. Nevertheless, communities and local authorities still considered the agricultural associations as a group of farmers responsible for landscape activities. The environmentalists recognized this problem; they had to start reframing the role of the associations as "sustainable energy providers". They started using this expression during promotion campaigns in the region. The key members especially, who were involved in the project early on, were able to image that their role and function would genuinely change in the near future. They began to view themselves as energy providers with the potential to operate at a regional level. However, this was not too clear to all the members of the associations. There is a risk to some of them for engaging in such enterprises. Many of them believed that their primary function should remain local landscape maintenance rather than becoming "an energy provider". Nowadays, key members of these associations have started to organize meetings with members to convince them of the need for these changes.

A recent development is that three more associations have joined the cluster. With six collaborating associations, they can present themselves to bordering communities and policy makers as one regional actor, but they also save costs of their landscaping activities by efficient coordination. While the project "Stoken op Streekhout" is still ongoing, this new organization is in a better position to develop entrepreneurial activities and contribute to

regional sustainable development. With the amount of exploitable biomass material potentially available, they are now able to impress local policy makers and communities with the potential amount of energy from the crops released by their harvesting activities. Members consider that this new organization could be the vehicle that will allow them to further their role as a sustainable energy provider. They believe that this organization has the potential to develop a niche for biomass energy and as such to contribute to sustainable regional development in several ways. First, by helping regional policy makers to fulfill the emission rate targets set by the government; and second, by creating jobs in the region for several activities necessary to establish a niche (harvesting activities, installation and maintenance etc.).

Case analysis

This section aims to answer the question, “How, why, and under what conditions can social movements contribute to the development of social entrepreneurial process developed by embedded actors in terms of opportunity identification, evaluation, formalization, and exploitation?”

Operating environment, social context, and intentions

In phase 1, we saw that the agricultural associations were struggling, looking for exploitable opportunities to make them less dependent on government subsidies. Although they had recognized that possibility of exploiting wood chips as heating energy to local users, the operating environment had a constraining effect for there was no favorable political opportunity structure. In other words, the operating environment was not prepared for such an activity and can be regarded as opaque, which is taken by institutional theorists to indicate that a field is highly institutionalized (Dorado, 2005). In such environments “opportunities will be almost absent since the ability to identify and introduce new combinations and gain access to resources to support them will be almost impossible” (Dorado, 2005 p 349). Because of that, there was neither support from within the communities or from local policy makers to promote alternative energy sources nor any regulation at that time. Consequently, policy makers considered wood chips as waste instead of a potentially valuable energy source. Besides the constraining conditions of the operating environment, the associations coped with resource scarcity (Di Domenico et al., 2010), because they did not possess sufficient resources (money, power, identify, network position), and therefore they can be identified as peripheral

actors. In contrast to actors with adequate resources, peripheral actors are assumed to be dependent and powerless and to face difficulties in building coalitions (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000). Furthermore, as noted in our study, the associations themselves did not have the intention to exploit wood chips as sustainable energy on a professional basis. Although it was clear that the associations were looking for alternative ways to generate income, they did not consider themselves entrepreneurs but as the ones who take care of landscape activities in a sustainable manner.

As one member of one of the associations firmly stated:

“As an agricultural association, we conduct landscape activities and we should not consider ourselves as energy providers.”

Engagement, knowledge sharing, and developing motivational frames

In the second phase, we observed that the engagement with the environmentalist changed the scope of these associations significantly. Before their engagement, they were focusing more on local exploitation of wood chips, but now they could see the potential for exploiting wood chips at a regional level. As the coordinator of “t Onderholt” commented:

“Yes, it was a good idea of these people [the environmentalist]. They also told us to engage with other agricultural organizations in the region as well because they have similar problems due to decreasing subsidies and might be fairly open to new initiatives.”

Another member of an association remarked:

“Today, we exist because of the subsidies we receive for doing local maintenance activities but this might change in the near future, so we are very interested to increase the economic value of the landscape.”

Thus, our case shows that embedded actors can increase their opportunities when collaborating with social movements by providing a potential context for future action. Thus social movements can contribute to opportunity identification, considered as an entry point for social entrepreneurial processes (Perrini & Fazzolari, 2006). However, it is important to note that the reason for the associations’ enrolment in the project was not just based on economic or opportunistic reasons. Our case shows how initially shared values matter at the start of the collaboration between the environmentalists and the associations. Both parties shared the value that it is important to preserve the natural environment and its unique characteristics.

As De Bakker & Den Hond (2008) argue, activists usually start their campaigns by collecting and organizing information on some issue about which they are concerned (e.g. sustainable development, human rights, labor conditions). The environmentalists in our case were well aware of the sustainable projects and other platforms in the region, as well as how each project might contribute to sustainable regional development. Furthermore, they had expert knowledge about biomass heating technology, which they had acquired from Germany, and other European countries where the use of biomass energy has already become a proven technology. Based on that knowledge, they could easily articulate the sustainable benefits for the region when they succeeded. In that way, the environmentalists could provide hands-on knowledge to interested parties in the region.

One of the environmentalists told us how that works out in practice:

“While the project is running, I am the one who responds immediately when somebody [potential customers, local authorities, etc.] wants to know something about biomass technology. In the name of the project [Stoken op Streekhout], I provide them all the information they need and it is free. In the end, we are only interested in sustainable regional development.”

The associations, in turn, had detailed contextual knowledge about the state of affairs in their communities and the responses of communities and policy makers regarding renewable energy. In addition, due to their experience in practicing landscape activities, they had an intimate knowledge of the biodiversity and growing conditions in the hedgerows and coppices. This information was considered crucial for processing and accumulating exact figures about available biomass on a regional scale. The knowledge exchange and collaboration between the environmentalists, the associations, and the Dutch Agricultural University, seemed to be fruitful in setting up collective action frames and opportunity evaluation. According to a suggestion by Benford & Snow (2000), motivational frames are especially useful when social movements attempt to make the new solution more prominent than the alternatives, and they include “the construction of appropriate vocabularies” (Benford & Snow, p. 617). The combination of the local knowledge provided by the associations with the environmentalists’ knowledge could now be constructed and used in promotional material and communications to communities, policy makers and other parties. Second, knowledge exchange helped the associations to evaluate the available opportunities because they enhanced their knowledge about biomass technology and its use, and the regional potential of available biomass that could be harvested. Moreover, the associations benefited from

information exchange with their German counterparts. They learnt about their working conditions and about the way they receive support from local communities and policy makers. In sum, we suggest that social movements can help in cultivating opportunities during the evaluation stage of social entrepreneurial process (Perrini & Fazzolari, 2006) by intensive knowledge exchange and network access, thus enabling the sharing of experience with other actors.

Framing problems to offer justifications and solutions to attract political and community involvement in the project was complicated. We observed in phase two how several attempts to shape the operating environment and mobilize others to their sustainable project failed due to weak responses from the operating environment. We identified some important constraining factors in our case. The first relates to the resource environment and the second to the opaqueness of the operating environment. Communities and policy makers did not see the potential of wood chips for their region. As one of the members of the member associations responded:

“Communities and local authorities consider wood chips as waste. Moreover, you even need to have a special allowance for storing it in some parts of the region and a special permission if you want to burn it in an open field. We have to work on that but it takes time. We cannot easily switch that.”

So the challenge was to make the prospect of using biomass as sustainable energy more relevant in people’s minds by deliberately changing the meaning structures (Weber et al., 2008). The challenge was to assign valuable properties to wood chips. This was done by first forging the relation between wood chips and their use as an energy source, and second, by comparison with other energy sources and technology, such as natural gas. Here they were able to rely on reports provided by accredited German institutes; the results were presented during organized events in the region. However, the efforts did not lead to any immediate change nor did they result in further mobilization of other interested parties. In other words, it takes time to change local customs and recruit support from local policy makers, even if the solution appears relevant and evidently contributes to regional sustainable development. We illustrate this by a response from a local policy maker:

“We like to facilitate every initiative. However, regarding biomass energy, we need good market regulations, which are simply not available right now. Of course, when we invest as pioneers in this technology for instance for our community swimming pool and use local biomass material, we can be

an example for others and other parties might be more willing to participate. However, this is no option because we lack the financial resources.”

Although the symposia organized by the project members resulted in some firm discussions about sustainable regional development, they did not lead to concrete commitments from local authorities and third parties.

Project experience, changing intentions and developing producer identities

In the third phase, we observed how creating producer identities, and providing business support and resources were helpful in the development of entrepreneurial processes within the associations. Before we discuss this, we turn first to the conditions that changed the intentions of the associations. Despite the recognition and evaluation of opportunities, the associations still considered their role in the project as farmers who perform landscaping activities and as engaging in developing a market for wood chips. However, in the face of declining subsidies and the disappointing project results, the associations started to reflect on their own position in the project. Instead of seeing their position as mere harvesters with a greater potential, they began to see their potential future as “sustainable energy providers”, a label that they could only give themselves by their involvement in this regional project. This observation shows how an actors’ degree of embeddedness (peripheral actor) together with participation in a collective action program enabled by social movements, inform the intentionality to change its position.

Furthermore, project experience with the other associations was helpful (the project has already been ongoing for two years), for they provided a platform from which they could jointly develop new activities and optimize existing ones by better coordination. As one key member of an association told us:

“Despite the administrative burden that we had with this [INTERREG-A], the collaboration with the other two associations during the past [two years] was very helpful because we developed a platform from where we could develop ideas about large-scale exploitation of our activities.”

We have shown how environmentalist provided individual support by working closely with the three associations and making resources available to them to conduct market studies and identify critical resources. Dees et al. (2004) emphasize that it is important for social entrepreneurs to plan resources and allocate time, people, and money. The close involvement of the environmentalists is important for the further resource planning needed to carry out

new activities Furthermore, we showed how the environmentalists attempt to create producer identities in their communication with communities and local authorities. Agricultural associations are not supposed to be a group of farmers who conduct harvesting activities, but can act as sustainable energy providers who take full care of production, storage, delivery, and maintenance of the technology. Furthermore, the environmentalists did not speak about single associations, rather presenting them as a regional collaboration and a powerful cluster. By doing so, they attempted to change their network position from dispersed and peripheral to central and powerful. Today, this identity construction is still ongoing, as well as activities to further the idea.

The results of our analysis according to the three phases are summarized in the following table (table 2)

	Social movement activities that support social entrepreneurial processes	Operating environment (political, community support, market)	Degree of embeddedness of actors (network position, identity, and network resources)	Outcomes for social entrepreneurial process
Phase 1	No involvement	Opaque, weak response from communities, third parties and local authorities.	Peripheral actors with limited network access and ability to induce change. Actors consider themselves as harvesters and farmers	Only limited opportunities to exploit.
Phase 2	Developing an opportunity structure by bridging local with project and expertise knowledge Developing a platform for collaboration.	Opaque, some response from communities, third parties and local authorities. Local authorities interested but no further commitments made	Still peripheral actors with limited network access and ability to induce change. However, but now collaborated closely as a cluster in the regional project. Actors still consider themselves as harvesters and farmers.	Increased prospects by enlarging the set of opportunities and evaluation criteria.
Phase 3	Providing hands on knowledge and network/business support in close collaboration with embedded actors Construction of producer identities.	Opaque, some response from communities, third parties and local authorities. Local authorities are interested but no further commitments made	Identified themselves as an increasing powerful macro-actor (because part of in a regional cluster. Only partially as mere harvesters but increasingly as potential entrepreneurs	Formalization of business plans. Resource planning (time, money, people) Development of an organizational form from which social entrepreneurial activities can be conducted in the future.

Table 2: Summary of the three phases and outcome for social entrepreneurship

It follows from our analysis that social movements can help embedded actors to develop social entrepreneurial processes. We identified the associations as peripheral actors (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000), with limited agency and habituated identity as farmer associations concerned with landscape activities. We thus showed how the degree of embeddedness constrained the ability of actors to discover and evaluate opportunities. Social movements can help social entrepreneurs to discover and evaluate larger scale opportunities. Furthermore, our study suggests that social movements can illuminate the possibilities and help develop evaluation criteria for embedded actors by sharing knowledge as well as by providing network access. Second, our study has shown how social movements develop platforms for collaboration and thereby enable knowledge exchange between mobilized actors, in our case the cluster of embedded actors. We also identified the importance of providing hands-on knowledge and providing network access to help embedded actors to plan resources and further formalize their social ventures. Finally, we found that social movements can help create producer identities by emphasizing the new role of embedded actors and presenting them as powerful actors with a regional coverage.

Conclusion

Our paper has analyzed the question, “How, why, and under what conditions can social movements contribute to the development of social entrepreneurial process developed by embedded actors in terms of opportunity identification, evaluation, formalization, and exploitation?” In understanding the conditions under which social movements collaborate with actors on an individual level, we applied an embedded perspective on the development of social entrepreneurial process (Mair & Martí, 2006; Smith & Stevens, 2010). We first juxtaposed the different characteristics of social movements and social entrepreneurs, arguing that both differ in important aspects, such as purpose, scope, scale, process capabilities and resources, and outcome. By treating them as distinct, we were better able to analyze the micro-processes involved when social movements interact with embedded actors, and how they engage in the development at each stage of the social entrepreneurial process. In so doing, we showed how interactions between social movements and embedded actors can be fruitful for the development of social entrepreneurial processes, even in the face of, or perhaps because of weak responses of third parties, communities, and local authorities.

Contributions and further research

We have contributed to the literature on social entrepreneurship and social movement in several ways. Purpose-oriented studies on social entrepreneurship depict social entrepreneurs as socially conscious individuals who act as highly visible change agents, as conceptualized by for instance Dees (1998) and Zahra et al. (2009). In our case, we found that the associations would not fit any of the types proposed by Zahra et al. (2009) because they are all already assumed to be social entrepreneurs acting at different levels with different resources. Researchers might miss the bigger picture when their focus is on identifying active social entrepreneurs. Thus, instead of introducing another type of social entrepreneur (for instance, “Social Entrepreneurs by Change” as the papers’ title suggests), our research draws attention to the identification of latent social entrepreneurs and their engagement with other actors in the development of social entrepreneurial processes. We have therefore contributed to the social entrepreneurship literature by showing how the motives and behaviors of latent social entrepreneurs are shaped by the changes in their degree of embeddedness (Mair & Martí, 2006; Mair & Noboa, 2003), their engagement in collective action process, and their responses to contextual circumstances.

Researchers have presented the processes involving social entrepreneurship as linear, successive stages (e.g. Broek et al., 2012; Guclu et al., 2002; Perrini & Fazzolari, 2006). Although we have also conceptualized these stages in our paper as successive stages, we observed that there were several detours and recursive loops between these stages throughout the course of the interactions. For instance, the embedded actors were constantly engaged in an evaluation process as the flow of information resulting from knowledge exchanges between them and the environmentalists continued. Furthermore, preparation for the formalization of social ventures (formation of clusters) was already ongoing after their engagement in the regional project. Although the cluster formation in phase 2 was not intended to develop social entrepreneurial activity (and thus officially to formalize a social venture) at that time, the collaborative experience with the other agricultural associations was helpful in the further formulation of social entrepreneurial activity later. These examples contribute to the social entrepreneurship literature by suggesting that there is a complex, iterative relationship between the elements, which together constitute a social entrepreneurial process. Future research is required for an in-depth examination of the relationship between

these various elements of social entrepreneurship processes, including the way these elements are informed by collective action processes and contingencies.

There is a growing body of social movement literature that is interested in the way movements influence entrepreneurial activity in sustainable markets (Barham, 1997; Sine & Lee, 2009; Weber et al., 2008). These studies show that sustainable change sometimes takes centuries for the involvement of movements. We have recorded only two years of movement activity in a nascent field, namely the development of a biomass energy market based on regionally harvested wood-chip, oriented towards regional sustainable development. We have contributed to the social movement literature by showing how environmentalists can influence social entrepreneurial activity by working closely together with targeted embedded actors. Driven by environmental concerns, our research shows how environmentalists can offer opportunities for social entrepreneurs and that they can be effective when they work closely and persistently with embedded target actors in the development of sustainable business activities and providing producer identities. This would especially be the case when contentious activity and framing efforts (Benford & Snow, 2000; Weber, et al, 2008; King & Pearce, 2010) are not immediately effective. Documenting the micro-processes involved in the engagement of movements in developing resource-environments together with embedded actors (e.g. closing the gap between supply and demand by setting up producer-user interfaces) in sustainable markets therefore may be an interesting avenue for future research.

We hope that our study has enhanced our knowledge of social entrepreneurship as a field of study and practice, by incorporating the role of social movements and embeddedness in the pursuit of sustainable change.

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