The role of Service Design in the Effectual Journey of Social Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

The paper explores the common ground between the fields of social entrepreneurship and service design, in order to understand how the role of designers in social innovation projects relates to that of social entrepreneurs and identify new ways to connect the design practice with social transformation and social impact. To achieve this, the construct of effectuation in entrepreneurship is discussed, followed by suggestions on how it reveals fertile areas for research across the fields of service design and social entrepreneurship.

KEYWORDS: social entrepreneurship, service design, effectuation

Introduction

The term social innovation has been used to communicate different concepts across different areas of practice. It is used to describe novel programmes of governance, public services and processes of societal transformation (Mulgan, 2006), grass roots activities of local communities (Manzini, 2007) and wider systemic transformation (European Commission, 2010, p. 11). Defined as new ideas that meet social needs having both social goals and means and creating new social relations and collaborations (Murray et al., 2010) social innovations take the form of new products or services, new markets, processes, organizational forms and business models.

The study of social innovation and the contribution of service design in imagining and implementing social change has been recognised as one of the key emerging areas of service design research (Sangiorgi, 2010). This reflects the ubiquity of services and the realisation that due to their co-creative nature they can frame new, better ways of living with the potential for significant social impact.

Another field, which looks at the development of new ideas to meet social need, is that of social entrepreneurship. By challenging the economic discourse that is dominating the field

of entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship research has developed insights on the way entrepreneurs work with communities to identify needs and develop new offerings to address those, while building financially sustainable organisations. Such organisations are called social enterprise ventures (SEVs) defined as having an explicit social mission central to their operation and a market orientation, which is consistent to its social mission (Bacq & Janssen, 2012).

Given that the offering of most social enterprise ventures is services (SELUSI, 2011) and that there is an existing interest from service design practitioners and scholars towards the creation of social value, one could argue there is a natural affinity between the two fields. In order to explore how multidisciplinary research could be achieved in a fruitful way in this space, this paper presents some influential perspectives on design for social innovation followed by a discussion of the concept of effectuation in entrepreneurship and some suggestions for research in this space.

Design for social innovation

Stemming from early considerations around 'eco-design' (Chick, 2012; Fletcher & Giggin, 2001) the discourse around sustainability is now an important theme in design research. Early prompts to reconsider the role of designers in society (Papanek, 1983) as well as more recent projects exploring alternative design scenarios for environmental and social sustainability (DOTT07) have articulated an expanded scope of design that goes beyond the consumer culture and the design of artifacts, to discuss the design of services that aim to deliver social value.

Such initiatives have contributed to the development of new practices and methodologies of approaching social issues through design, a domain which is increasingly referred to as design for social innovation (Manzini, 2007; Chick, 2012). Mainly through participatory design, designers in this context have demonstrated that innovative service platforms and tools can be created to allow people to address social issues. Examples of such design initiatives would include the development of support systems for sensitive groups (e.g. Vanstone & Winhall, 2006; Tan & Szebeko, 2009) or capacity building projects with local government to facilitate public service provision (e.g. Cottam & Leadbeater, 2004; McManus & Piet, 2011).

Transformation design was one of the early terms used to express the need for a new design practice to address social problems (Burnes et al., 2006). The authors perspective was that in order to deliver long lasting change, designers should apply participatory design techniques and collaborate with other disciplines aiming to build capacity and redefine what the design outputs can be in that context. The application of this perspective in designing services was developed by Sangiorgi (2011) who identified certain principles for transformational change in interventions at the community level drawing from fields with a tradition at this level of intervention. She suggests that in designing transformative changes the citizens should be seen as agents, whose contribution to the delivery of the service is facilitated, aiming to build capacity and challenge existing decision dynamics.

The potential of services in delivering social impact were also discussed in the research around creative communities and collaborative services (Manzini, 2007) where they are seen as a way to frame new types of value exchange within complex networks of people and institutions. This stream of research looking at creative communities, demonstrates how

alternative scenarios of living can be developed through design and captured in innovative service models. They are defined as "*groups of people who cooperatively invent, enhance and manage innovative solutions for new ways of living, by recombining what already exists, without waiting for a general change in the broader system such as the economy, various institutions or infrastructures*" (Jegou & Manzini, 2008, p. 32). This concept is based on the notion that people who actively seek to solve problems within their community can give rise to new forms of organization that create social value while at the same time reinforcing the social fabric and improving environmental quality (EMUDE, 2006). The idea of "service and business ideas" (Jegou & Manzini, 2008, p. 28) is put forward as a way to capture the structure-the organizational and economic model that describes the concept of these services- in order to allow them to be replicated in a different location with similar groups of actors.

In the discourse around transformational and collaborative services the activity of designers working with communities is described implicitly as entrepreneurial, with designers essentially creating new types of organisation, identifying new sets of actors that could be involved in the delivery of services and describing new roles and relationships among these actors. This process is framed through participatory design and design thinking principles that capture the role of the designer as an intelligent actor in this context (Manzini, 2007). While considerations on the process of developing enterprises that build upon these new service models are beyond the scope of design research, it would be valuable to consider how the current understanding of the role of designers in this space relates to that of the entrepreneurs. To achieve that some relevant concepts from the field of entrepreneurship are presented below.

Social Entrepreneurship Background

Entrepreneurship research aims at a better understanding of the highly heterogeneous process phenomenon of entrepreneurship. The term entrepreneur evolved from a French term meaning "one who undertakes or manages" and was used in the 1800s by a French economist to capture the activity of someone who creates value by "shifting economic resources out of an area of lower and into an area of higher productive and greater yield" (Martin & Osberg, 2009, p. 31). Although the field has been established as a distinct domain of research, there is still no consensus about the object of study in the field with the concept of entrepreneurship being reinterpreted constantly (Cornelius et al., 2006). Some persisting perspectives include a focus on facing uncertainty (Knight, 1921), on introducing new processes and products by innovating (Schumpeter, 1934) and recognizing opportunities (Kirzner, 1978).

Recently, the phenomenon of entrepreneurship is conceived as more multifaceted than in the past (Bruyat & Julien, 2004) with researchers looking into its role in society and its social dimensions challenging the economic discourse that is dominating the field (Steyaert & Katz, 2004). Some of the assumptions that stem from the association of the field with economics, for example the fact that motivation of entrepreneurs is mainly wealth accumulation do not appear appropriate (Mitchel et al., 2007) as entrepreneurship is increasingly identified as an activity that contributes to society in other significant ways that are not captured by the commercial entrepreneurship literature (Steyaert & Katz, 2004).

Social entrepreneurship is a field of study that expands the scope of entrepreneurship research to include organizations that broadly aim to deliver social impact and address social issues as well achieving commercial goals. As a field, it has inherited the definitional

ambiguity and methodological complexities of the field of entrepreneurship and it is largely still at its infancy. In the1990's a substantial stream of publications emerged conceptualizing social entrepreneurship as "*a vast array of economic, educational, research, welfare, social and spiritual activities engaged in by various organizations*" (Leadbeater 1997, p. 3) or an activity that "*combines the passion of a social mission with an image of business-like discipline, innovation and determination*" (Dees, 1998, p. 1). As a result of this early work, the term social entrepreneur begun to emerge in academia at that time in both sides of the Atlantic.

At the same time different governments in Europe begun to create new legal forms to accommodate enterprises with social objectives, for example the socio co-operatives in Italy in 1991 and the Community Interest Company in the UK in 2004 (Hoogendoorn et al., 2010). As the field gained traction among academics and the public sector alike, cases of successful entrepreneurs gained significant amounts of attention such as that of the founder of Grameen Bank, Muhammad Yunus who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize or the founder of eBay, Jeffrey Skoll who founded the Skoll foundation to support social entrepreneurship in collaboration with the University of Oxford (Hoogendoorn et al., 2010).

Today, the importance of social enterprise ventures in addressing critical issues globally is well documented (Nicholls, 2004, 2006) receiving recognition from both scholars and the public sector (Stryjan, 2006). To a great extent the theoretical and empirical basis for research in the field of social entrepreneurship has been similar to that of its parent discipline of entrepreneurship in its early days, lacking a unifying paradigm and being mostly phenomenon driven (Mair et al., 2006).

The process of social entrepreneurship

More recently, scholars have highlighted that traditional approaches to entrepreneurship research do not often account for the process that links results with initial conditions in which the entrepreneur operates (Van de Ven & Engleman, 2004). In response to this trend, scholars call for a focus on the entrepreneurial process exploring conceptually significant stages and subprocesses in venture creation (Low & MacMillan 1988; Ucbasaran et al., 2001; Steyaert, 2007). These calls reflect the need for a better understanding of modes of action that include what entrepreneurs do to come up with business ideas, how they refine them and how they take action towards making them a reality. Understanding this process is critical in supporting entrepreneurship and enhancing its positive impact.

Although Davidsson (2006) claims that given the heterogeneity and variability in the entrepreneurial process its starting and ending points are impossible to clearly define, he suggests exploring both cognition and behavior, providing us with the following definition: "*entrepreneurial process is all the cognitive and behavioral steps from conception of a rough business idea, or first behavior towards the realization of a new business activity, until the process is either terminated or has led to an up-and –running business venture with regular sales*" (2006, p. 76).

A perspective on the entrepreneurial process, which fits with the considerations around the potential contribution of design in social entrepreneurship, is that of effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001). This approach re-focuses attention on entrepreneurial agency, highlighting entrepreneurial imagination as a way to deal with uncertainty. Effectuation seeks to explain the actions and logic that underlie the behavior of entrepreneurs. It is named in contrast to the traditional perspective on entrepreneurship, which is characterized as 'causal' to enable clearer theoretical juxtaposition (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008).

In the causal model, entrepreneurship is reflected as a linear process, driven by clear goals consistent with planned strategy approaches. In this view the outcome that the entrepreneur is seeking to achieve is a given and decisions are driven from systematic information gathering and analysis within certain bounds (Simon, 1996). This perspective is driven by the notion that to the extent that the future can be predicted, it can be controlled (Sarasvathy, 2001). The causation approach to entrepreneurship is visualized in Figure1 below.
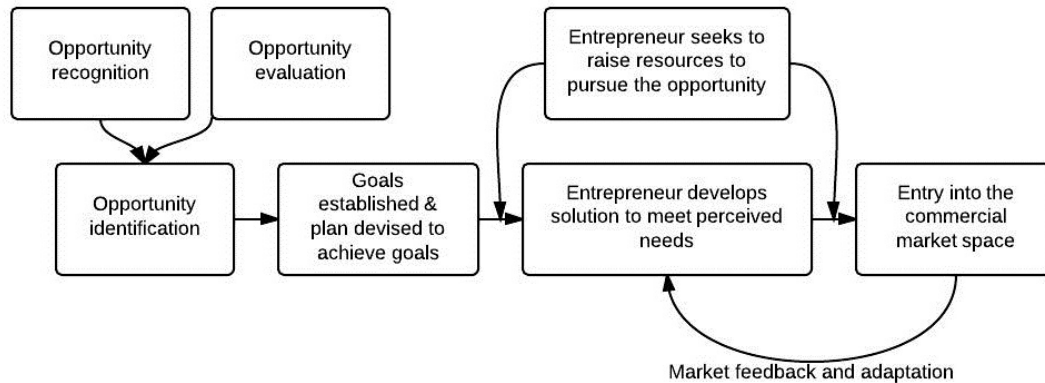

Figure 1. Causation approach to entrepreneurship (Fisher, 2012)

The conceptual model of effectuation on the other hand is consistent with emergent non-predictive strategies (Mintzberg, 1978; Wiltbank et al., 2006); it draws from empirical data to suggest that, entrepreneurs adopt a different decision logic under conditions of uncertainty. The decision process they actually use resembles more that of a chef who in order to prepare a meal, first identifies the ingredients she has available as opposed to reading a recipe and buying the ingredients subsequently.

The effectual approach was described by Sarasvathy (2008, p. 6) as "a logic of entrepreneurial expertise, a dynamic and interactive process of creating new artifacts in the world". It does not aim to replace but rather complement the causal model, describing the benefits of both processes in different instances during the initiation of business ventures depending on different conditions (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2002). Effectual processes are actor dependent and more appropriate for exploiting contingencies which makes them more appropriate in situations where human action plays an important role.

Sarasvathy (2003) summarises the effectual process of entrepreneurship as follows. To begin with, the effectual entrepreneur considers the means they have available, namely their own knowledge, abilities, experience and their social networks. Given these initial means they then consider what effects they can create as a way to control the future rather than attempt to predict it. This initial localized possibility will evolve to more robust configurations through the collaboration with other actors who are brought onboard. This logic is demonstrated through the following principles encountered in effectual entrepreneurs:

» Affordable loss rather than expected returns: Instead of focusing on maximizing returns, effectual entrepreneurs define acceptable levels of loss and experiment on different strategies with their limited means. Choices that lead to more options are preferred to those that maximize returns in the present;

» Strategic alliances: Interaction with potential partners and their pre-commitments are valued by effectual entrepreneurs since they open up new possibilities, reduce uncertainty and erect entry barriers for competition;

» Exploitation of contingencies: Contingencies that arise through time are seen as opportunities for different ways to create value from effectual entrepreneurs, potentially leading to new offerings or uses of existing resources.

Through this process the entrepreneur focuses on the controllable aspects of their environment and refines the final offering by gaining access to new means- the expanding cycle of resources- and the creative use of existing ones. This process is summarized in Figure 2. It accommodates the non-teleological aspect of entrepreneurial action, which facilitates viewing entrepreneurial agency as a way to creatively affect the conditions upon which the entrepreneur wants to act, generating the alternatives themselves (Steyaert, 2007).

It is this view of the entrepreneur as someone who creatively recombines available resources to produce new offerings that makes effectuation conductive to research around the role of designers in this space. In more detail, viewing the entrepreneur as an agent of change who welcomes contingencies and demonstrates creative exaptive behavior – finding new uses for existing resources- to deal with uncertainty and shape the market in which they are in, allows for considerations on the potential contribution of design thinking and the service design expertise in this iterative process of the formation of the new offering.
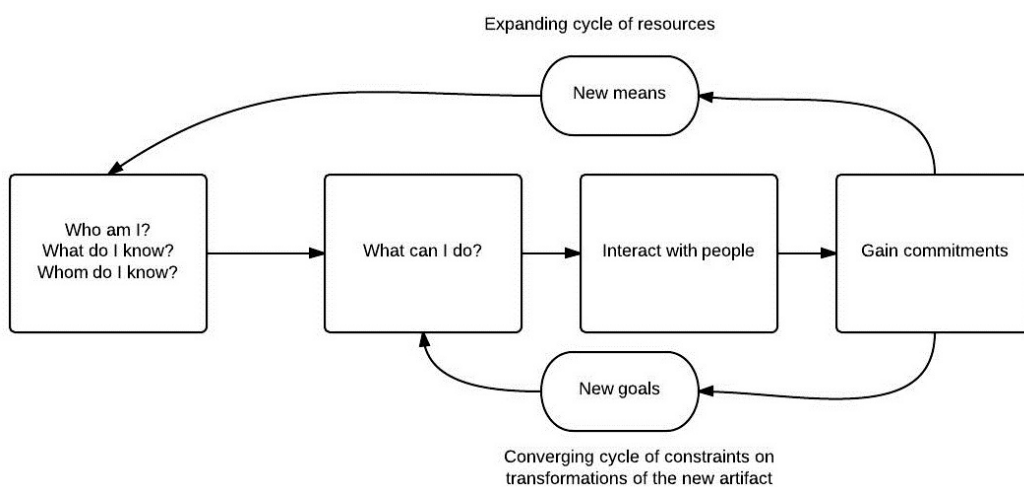

Figure 2. Effectuation approach to entrepreneurship (Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005)

Social Entrepreneurship and Service Design

Design for social innovation research has demonstrated the ability of designers to contribute to a better understanding of social issues and the development of innovative ways to address them, at the same time social entrepreneurship research looks at people who want to deliver social value and embark on a journey to build an enterprise around this vision. Currently research on the potential contribution of design in the early stages of the formation of social enterprise ventures is practically non-existent. Introducing connections between certain concepts across these two research areas will enable a cross-disciplinary perspective on value creation with implications for both fields.

Most SEVs offer services as opposed to manufactured goods in order to achieve their dual goal of commercial and social value creation (SELUSI, 2011). While such ventures can replicate existing models to achieve that, innovative SEVs challenge existing structures of service provision and create new streams of value among their previously underserved beneficiaries, their customers and the organisation. While practitioners from different design traditions can use this overview of the process of social entrepreneurship in considering potential areas of intervention, the focus of SEVs on innovation through new services and processes places social entrepreneurship closer to the domain of service design, which motivates the focus of this paper on this particular area of design.

In the work by Thorpe & Gamman (2011) on socially responsive design the decision making principles of effectuation are used to structure a design approach in dealing with uncertainty in social innovation projects where there is a constant evolution of goals and stakeholder relationships. In additional empirical work on such projects (Thorpe & Gamman, 2013) the term is used to describe the approaches of design students who adopted opportunistic and adaptive strategies in order to "control rather than predict the future". This is arguably an important parallel between theory and practice in the two fields highlighting the similar situations in which designers and entrepreneurs operate to develop social innovations.

While in this case the concept of effectuation is applied to suggest and evaluate instances of the design practice in social innovation projects, this paper uses effectuation primarily to illustrate the process often followed by social entrepreneurs, mapping their journey as a way to reveal different points for potential intervention drawing from the service design literature. The model of effectuation is a valuable starting point in considering areas of convergence between the two fields, as it puts emphasis on the creative ability of the entrepreneur, essentially describing how they engage in design through that process (Sarasvathy, 2003).

Recent empirical research demonstrated that in working with the public sector certain design firms develop innovative service models working adopting what Sangiorgi (2013) describes as an Outside In perspective. This approach is not limited to working within existing markets or organisations but rather involves engaging in design for service models that explicitly aim to change existing markets and systems. This approach is contrasted to an Inside Out perspective where service design agencies work within organisations to develop the capacity for innovation and change through design.

From the perspective of entrepreneurship research the Outside In approach observed in service design agencies is very promising as it represents a Design perspective to new venture creation as part of the service implementation process. For example the case of Participle working in collaboration with the public sector and other private organisations in addressing the needs for the aging population went beyond the design of an innovative service to articulate the a business case that would allow it to become sustainable as a distinct enterprise. This allowed the service model to become replicable and to be on its way to becoming a national service in the UK (Participle, 2013).

In projects where service design leads to venture creation through an Outside In perspective, business support is very important (Sangiorgi, 2013). More systematic research on the way existing knowledge on social entrepreneurship can be integrated with the Outside In perspective in Service Design can lead to a more holistic approach to social innovation. As a first step towards the inquiry in this field, the potential role of design in the effectual process is discussed below. Drawing from empirical data on the application of Service Design by practitioners, Meroni & Sangiorgi (2011) identified four key areas of intervention that map on the skill-set of designers, namely designing interactions, relations and experiences, designing systems to shape systems and organisations, exploring new collaborative service models and imagining future directions for service systems. While all four of these areas relate to the development of desirable, innovative services, two of them are especially relevant to the Outside In perspective of Service Design and the effectual process of entrepreneurship. In more detail working towards the development of new social enterprise ventures relates to the themes of imagining future directions for service systems and exploring collaborative service models (Figure 3).

Imagining future directions for service systems: Firstly service designers can contribute in imagining directions for services systems, making these visions more accessible to others and using them to engage different stakeholders in a dialogue about the service. In the development of social ventures this skill-set can support the effectual process by facilitating the articulation of alternative offerings given the existing means and by providing material that frames the subsequent exploration stage.

Initially entrepreneurs begin their journey by framing the type of social impact they want to achieve or the issue they want to address (Doyle & Ho, 2010). Using tools such as scenario building and storytelling the designers can help answer the question "what can I do?" of effectuation by helping them effectively express the vision that fuels the effectual process and communicate this vision to those involved with the service delivery.

Moreover, service design can provide the tools to visualise the different service concepts as they evolve through the effectual process, making practical issues related to the service delivery more visible. This will facilitate the creation of alternatives described in effectuation as well as the process of constant assessment the desirable and undesirable qualities of the various alternatives (Sarasvathy, 2003).
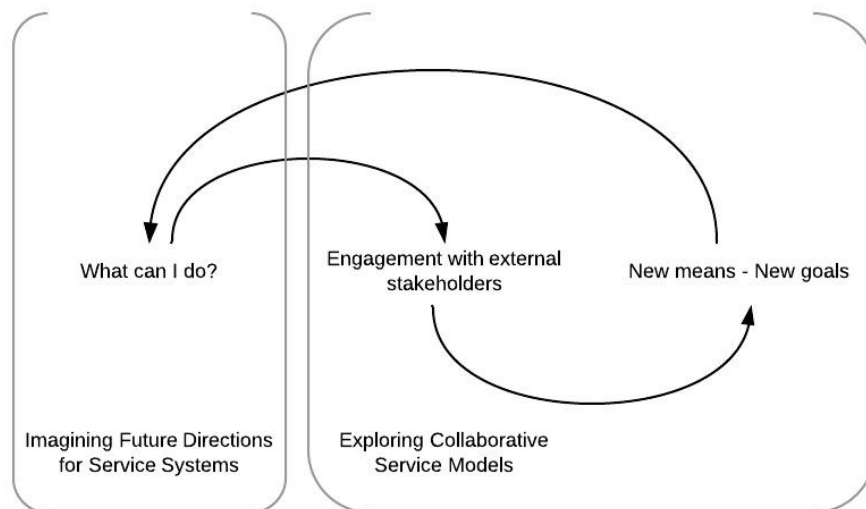

Figure 3. Areas of Design intervention in the Effectual process

Exploring collaborative service models: Effectual entrepreneurs use strategic partnerships as a way to bring key stakeholders onboard to deliver their version of the future (Sarasvathy, 2001), and are open to leveraging contingencies viewing them as opportunities for change. The interaction with external actors is a key part of the effectual process as well as the process of opportunity development in social entrepreneurship (Doyle & Ho, 2010). In that stage the material developed during the process of imagining future directions, can become a tool to engage the community in a dialogue on the different directions that the service could take, supporting the exploration of potential collaborative service models.

Drawing from service design this process could include experimentation with different models of service delivery such as co-production or co-creation (Freire &Sangiorgi, 2010; Cottam & Leadbeater, 2004). This would involve engaging the different stakeholders in a dialogue on the different roles they could play both in the design as well as the delivery of the service and how that would shape it. Moreover creating different prototypes to communicate ideas could facilitate the collection of pre-commitments which is a key stage in

effectuation. This may allow for the effectual iterations to be more conscious from the perspective of the entrepreneur and more meaningful for the various stakeholders who will be able to engage with the emerging service concept and more easily evaluate the extent to which they can contribute to the delivery of the service.

Finally using the above as an interpretative lens, design practitioners and academics can consider two types of projects, namely projects that start with an Outside In perspective, explicitly having the intention to form ventures and projects that evolved from design interventions and potentially could develop into ventures. In the first case the above considerations on the relationship between the empirically documented process followed by entrepreneurs and the design practice can help designers collaborate better with entrepreneurs by aligning their design work with their effectual journey. On the other hand in design projects that move towards a more mature and potentially financially sustainable phase this lens could provide a way to translate design work into steps towards the formulation of new ventures.

Conclusions

In imagining future directions for service design research, identifying its potential fit with other disciplines could suggest a space for meaningful knowledge exchange and mutual benefit with implications both in theory and practice. The field of social entrepreneurship was identified as one that presents the opportunity for such a knowledge exchange. With the theoretical framework of effectuation as a starting point the paper discussed the potential contribution of designers in emerging social enterprise ventures by supporting the imagining of future directions of the service system in which the enterprise operates, and the exploration of potential collaborative service models. These areas of potential design intervention are presented here not as an exhaustive list, but rather because they can be accomodated in the current understanding of the entrepreneurial process, and could act as prompts for a more targeted multidisciplinary discourse on the field of social innovation.

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