1-1-2010

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SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CONTEXT: IDENTITY EMERGENCE AND LEGITIMATION

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December 20, 2009

ABSTRACT

Community ecologists, who consider the interdependence among organizations of different forms (Hannan and Freeman, 1986), have argued that that legitimacy can flow between organizational forms if they are sufficiently related or proximate in cognitive space (Ruef, 2000). *De alio* legitimation, the process by which an established population can facilitate the institutionalization of an emergent population, greatly minimizes the time period needed for the new form to achieve a taken-for-granted status (Dobrev, 2001). While some studies have looked at how this process operates across populations of organizations within the commercial sector, no study has looked at how this legitimacy might travel between populations of organizations which vary in their goals, from those following a purely commercial mission to those organizations which follow a social mission, or social enterprises (Mair and Martí, 2006; Phills et al., 2008). Our study fills this gap. Utilizing data from three major social entrepreneurship foundations – Ashoka, Schwab, and Skoll – as well as from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, we study the emergence of social entrepreneurship relative to commercial entrepreneurship in three countries: Brazil, Mexico, and India. We show that there is a relationship between the traditional commercial entrepreneurship and the growth of social entrepreneurship. However, varying institutional environments between countries impacts the extent to which social entrepreneurship and commercial entrepreneurship co-evolve.

Keywords: institutions, ecology, legitimation, organizational theory, social entrepreneurship, social enterprises

INTRODUCTION

Community ecologists, who consider the interdependence among organizations of different forms (Hannan and Freeman, 1986), have argued that that legitimacy can flow between organizational forms if they are sufficiently related or proximate in cognitive space (Ruef, 2000). *De alio* legitimation, the process by which an established population can facilitate the institutionalization of an emergent population, greatly minimizes the time period needed for the new form to achieve a taken-for-granted status (Dobrev, 2001). While some studies have looked at how this process operates across populations of organizations within the commercial sector, no study has looked at how this legitimacy might travel between populations of organizations which vary in their goals, from those following a purely commercial mission to those organizations which follow a social mission, or social entrepreneurs. The present study aims to fill this gap.

Social entrepreneurship is "a process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change and/or address social needs" (Mair & Marti, 2006: 37). Social entrepreneurs are the founders of these socially entrepreneurial initiatives. Social entrepreneurs tend to channel their time, effort, and resources toward the bottom of the social pyramid. Their main goal is to achieve social performance rather than financial performance (Dees, 2001). Social entrepreneurship is important as it promises to have a profound positive impact on various societal sectors, such as civic engagement, economic development, environment, health, human rights, and learning/education (cf. Ashoka Foundation categories).

Different social sectors attract social entrepreneurs at varying levels in any given country. When we consider social entrepreneurs across countries, the phenomenon is even more complicated. To date, scholars have not attempted to examine the varying interest levels in

social entrepreneurship in different social sectors. The aim of this paper is to offer a theory-grounded explanation as to why social entrepreneurs in different countries crowd specific social sectors over others.

The literature suggests that social entrepreneurs can be grouped into many categories. According to Dees (1998), social enterprise spectrum can range from 'purely philanthropic' to 'purely commercial.' Similarly, Paredo and McLean (2006) specified four classes of social entrepreneurs, from exclusively social to essentially commercial. For the purposes of this paper, we adhere to the pure or exclusive form of social entrepreneurs. As noted by Short, Moss, and Lumpkin (2009), while social entrepreneurship has been a topic of academic inquiry for nearly 20 years, relatively little empirical work utilizing formal hypotheses and quantitative forms of analysis has been undertaken. For the most part, work in this area consists of conceptual articles, case studies, and qualitative research studies. This research incorporates multivariate methods to complement the case study techniques which have dominated previous efforts, utilizing theoretical concepts derived from work in mainstream organizational theory, namely institutional theory and ecological approaches.

The research model primarily builds on population ecology theory (Hannan & Carroll, 1992; Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1991). One of the tenets of population ecology theory is that for a species to survive, it has to have a critical mass in terms of representation. Otherwise, support systems and social networks cannot evolve and the species would be vulnerable to extinction. Similarly, the argument in this paper is that social entrepreneurs working within a specific social sector cannot survive unless they achieve a critical mass. A second tenet of population ecology theory is that in every environment there exists a limit (i.e., carrying capacity) to the population size of a species. Such density-dependence logic would suggest that once a

critical mass of social entrepreneurs exists in a given social sector, the growth of the social entrepreneurs in that social sector would increase till that environment reaches its carrying capacity. This paper will inquire why certain social sectors fail to attract more social entrepreneurs while other sectors seem to have less trouble doing so. Effects of population density, institutional thickness, and carrying capacity will be examined to address the research question.

The paper is organized into five sections. First, population ecology theory is reviewed keeping social entrepreneur populations in mind. Second, three hypotheses are advanced regarding growth patterns of social entrepreneur populations. The next section reports on the data codification methods and model estimation. Interpretations of the population density graphs are presented in the fourth section. Theoretical and empirical contributions, limitations, and future research avenues are discussed in the last section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perhaps due to its infancy, research in social entrepreneurship has not explicitly dealt with its analytical levels. Akin to organizational levels of analysis, there are three levels of analysis in social entrepreneurship research: (1) individual social entrepreneurs, (2) populations of social entrepreneurs, and (3) communities of social entrepreneurs. Levels 2 and 3 can be analyzed using the population ecology framework.

The distinction between a population and a community of social entrepreneurs can be traced to their corresponding level of specification. "Population of organizations must be alike in some respect, that is, they must have some unit character" (Hannan & Freeman, 1977: 934). From a systems perspective, "a population of organizations consists of all the organizations within a particular boundary that have a common form" (1977: 936). Such underlying

commonality ought to be "significant in discriminating one form from another" (McKelvey, 1982: 110). Social entrepreneurs would belong to a specific population as long as they work within the same social sector (e.g., education, environment, health, etc.). In contrast, the community of social entrepreneurs comprises all of those who are engaged in social entrepreneurship, regardless of sector. Drawing ecological parallels, if populations are analogous to species, then communities are analogous to genus. Within a community, it would be difficult for social entrepreneurs of one population to switch or morph from one species to another (Betton & Dess, 1985: 754).

"[P]opulation events cannot be reduced to individual events (since individuals do not reflect the full genetic variability of the population and community events cannot be simply reduced to population events" (Hannan & Freeman, 1977: 933). Therefore, evolutionary events of a population of social entrepreneurs cannot be reduced to events in the lives of the individual social entrepreneurs; similarly, evolutionary events of the more macro notion of social entrepreneur community cannot be relegated to events that take place at its component population levels.

Growth of social entrepreneurs can be expected to be affected by two ecological considerations: "the capacity of the environment to support forms of [social entrepreneurs] and the rate at which the population will grow (or decline) when the environmental support changes" (Hannan & Freeman, 1977: 941). These two ecological considerations are more commonly referred to as legitimation and competition. "The rate of founding is proportional to the degree to which an organizational form is legitimate and inversely proportional to the level of competition" (Haveman, 1993: 594). "The joint effects of legitimation and competition explain to a large degree the specific S-shaped structure of population growth rates over time, from

emergence to the level of the carrying capacity" (Wissen, 2004: 256). The size of the population is capped by the carrying capacity of the environment (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Wissen, 2004).

"[R]esources available at any moment for each form of organization are finite and fixed" (Hannan & Freeman, 1977: 941). Density dependence model in organization ecology suggests that entry and exit of firms are affected by the population size and associated resource scarcity (Hannan & Carroll, 1992; Carroll & Hannan, 2000). Thus, it is no surprise that population density experiences a reversal of growth trends once it reaches carrying capacity. Not only are potential entrants discouraged to enter the population, but incumbents of the population may leave for a variety of reasons. In such cases the population density would decline beyond the S-curve, forming an inverted-U. Hannan and Carroll (1992) offer several empirical evidences of the inverted-U shaped relationship between organizational founding and population density in an array of industries, e.g., newspapers, breweries, insurance companies, and banks.

It may be possible for certain populations to make a successful comeback from their declining phases. This is mainly attributable to a more sophisticated level of learning and adaptation of humans over other species. Even Hannan and Freeman recognize that "[h]uman social organization presumably reflects a greater degree of learning or adaptation" (Hannan & Freeman, 1977: 937). Human-led organizations and their populations have such impressive abilities to learn and adapt that their potential to grow is much greater than other biological populations (Blau & Scott, 1962).

"Industry demography, or demography of the firm is concerned with the analysis of demographic processes of entry, exit, and firm growth in industries" (Wissen, 2004: 253) Social entrepreneurs operate in different social sectors, such as civic engagement, economic development, environment, health, human rights, and learning/education. As clusters of social

entrepreneurs evolve in any specific social sector, they are likely to benefit from greater availability of labor, supplies, media exposure, and donor presence. Economic geography scholars have referred to this as institutional thickness (Amin & Thrift, 1995; Wissen, 2004). Stuart and Sorenson argue that "industries cluster because entrepreneurs find it difficult to leverage the social ties necessary to mobilize essential resources when they reside far from those resources" (2003: 229).

Ecological research on the interdependence of organizational populations fulls under the broad rubric of community ecology. Studies in community ecology can be sorted into two kinds – one that considers functionally differentiated populations characterized by symbiotic relations, and another that studies the interdependence among commensalistic populations with similar, overlapping niches (Aldrich, 1999; Baum and Rao, 2004). An example of the first kind are Wade's (1995, 1996) studies of a technological community comprising personal compute manufacturers, software producers, disk drive producers, and user groups, as well as Ruef and colleagues' studies (Ruef 2000, Scot et al., 2000) of the healthcare organization community encompassing the relevant agencies, insurance companies, hospitals, HMOs, etc.

The population ecology of social entrepreneurs is most likely to be affected by various ecological constructs, such as density, institutional thickness, and carrying capacity. In the next section we build our hypotheses on these concepts.

HYPOTHESES

Following the logic of population ecology theory, social entrepreneur populations would initially grow steadily as legitimation process takes place. Newly undertaken socially entrepreneurial projects will increase the probability of awards or recognition (e.g., Ashoka fellowship). As the population gains increasing levels of legitimacy, the size of the population

will achieve its surrounding environment's carrying capacity, leading to fast increasing competition for factor conditions (e.g., funding and volunteers) and demand conditions (e.g., people or places with a special need) among social entrepreneurs. Thus, potential entrants will be discouraged by the prospects of that particular social sector and growth in that sector would begin to dwarf. As fewer and fewer new socially entrepreneurial projects get initiated (due to competition among social entrepreneurs), the existing pool of socially entrepreneurial projects will have a diminishing probability of receiving awards and recognition.

Just as firms with high visibility and prestige influence the behavior of other firms (Burns & Wholey, 1993), so too social entrepreneurs with high visibility and prestige (i.e., Ashoka fellows) will attract many other potential social entrepreneurs to follow the path of an existing Ashoka fellow. With a larger pool of social entrepreneurs working toward some common social goal within a specific sector, there will be a higher probability of one of them becoming a future Ashoka fellow. However, once the crowding of social entrepreneurs within a sector achieves its carrying capacity, the environment will not support additional social entrepreneurs Hannan & Carroll, 1992). Competition for funding, volunteers, labor, and materials will fast increase. Competition will replace the legitimation force that previously brought in large numbers of social entrepreneurs to that social sector. Thus, the probability of one of them becoming a future Ashoka fellow will quickly stop increasing and may even decrease if the existing mass of social entrepreneurs within that sector start exiting the sector. Thus,

> H1: Density of a social entrepreneur population (i.e., number of Ashoka fellows
>
> within a social sector) will initially demonstrate an S-shaped growth pattern and
>
> eventually mature into an inverted-U shaped outcome.

Social entrepreneurial movement is a little over three decades old (e.g., Mimi Silbert, Muhammad Yunus, and a few others had launched their social ventures in the 1970s), with the movement gaining some traction no more than two decades ago and momentum no more than a decade ago. Within any given country's social entrepreneurial movement, the period prior to traction can be characterized as dormant. On the other end of the spectrum, once momentum of the social entrepreneurial movement peaks for any specific population, a period of slowdown begins (note that due to the unlimited potential of humans to learn and adapt (Blau & Scott, 1962; Hannan & Freeman, 1977), the slowdown period of social entrepreneur populations may be abruptly cut short with a second burst of momentum). Thus, we have essentially four phases in the population life cycle of social entrepreneurs: dormancy, traction, momentum, and slowdown.

What affects the differential lengths of time till social entrepreneurship movement achieves momentum in a country is a question that has not been addressed in the literature. Different environments have varying degrees of population-specific institutional thickness (i.e., supporting conditions for the sector) (Amin & Thrift, 1995; Stuart & Sorenson, 2003), which facilitates social entrepreneurs of a particular population to grow in numbers. For example, social entrepreneurs in the health sector of one country may benefit from preexisting institutional thickness and therefore experience a shorter dormancy period than similar social entrepreneurs in another country where requisite institutional thickness did not preexist. In such case, the dormancy and/or traction period may continue for a long time while institutional thickness gradually increases and is ready to support further growth in the population. Therefore:

> *H2: For a social entrepreneur population (i.e., number of Ashoka fellows within a*
>
> *social sector), the length of the dormancy and/or traction period will be*
>
> *negatively related to the institutional thickness of its local environment.*

The density of a social entrepreneur population will continue to increase as long as there is adequate factor and demand conditions (i.e., carrying capacity) (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Different local environments have varying degrees of carrying capacity. A coarse proxy of carrying capacity would be a country's size (both in terms of total population and geographic area). Size would not only support greater factor conditions, but also larger demand conditions. All else being constant, the greater an environment's carrying capacity, the longer it will take to exhaust it. When the local environment's carrying capacity is larger, a social entrepreneur population will cross the peak of its momentum phase and enter its slowdown phase slower. Thus,

> *H3: For a social entrepreneur population (i.e., number of Ashoka fellows within a social sector), the duration before slowdown is positively related to the carrying capacity of its local environment.*

METHODS

The sampling frame of this study comprises 18 populations of Ashoka fellows (6 populations from India, Brazil, and Mexico). These 18 populations collectively represent 657 of the 1946 Ashoka fellows worldwide between 1982 and 2008. Social entrepreneurs in India, Brazil, and Mexico have been routinely selected as Ashoka fellows for more than two decades. Each country also contains a sizeable population in each social sector to generate density graphs for them. Since the purpose is to study social entrepreneurs at the population level, it is important to have large enough communities of social entrepreneurs so that sizeable populations exist within them. It ought to be noted here that there is always a risk of having populations within the community that may be too small or immature for empirical testing.

Ashoka distinguishes the work of social entrepreneurs in six possible areas, which correspond to six distinct populations. These six populations are civic engagement, economic development, environment, health, human rights, and learning/education. New fellows are selected annually on the basis of five criteria: system changing new idea, potential social impact, creativity, ethical fiber, and entrepreneurial quality. A key axiom of this paper is that Ashoka fellows of a given country capture a microcosm of the larger social entrepreneur population and community. Since data on social entrepreneurs at the grassroots level are largely unavailable, and since our level of analysis is the population instead of the individual social entrepreneur, studying populations of an elite group within the larger community is a *satisficing* alternative.

Entry to the population is clearly marked by Ashoka fellowship announcements on an annual basis. However, exits are not marked. However, in keeping with population ecological tenets, it is important to have a provision for exits from the population. Exits after a certain period of time are normal and expected. Hence, for the purposes of this paper, it was necessary to make an assumption on exits to estimate the growth of the population. Given that data on Ashoka fellows are available for slightly over two decades, a half-way mark of 10 years seemed intuitive as a starting point for exit events. Hence, Ashoka fellows selected more than 10 years ago were systematically dropped from the population to capture possible exits. We also used 8- and 12-year cutoffs to test whether the population density over time was sensitive to the cutoff. Further analyses show that the population density models of Ashoka fellows in different social sectors are not particularly sensitive to the cutoff choice.

Since the literature on social entrepreneurship have not discussed population level issues, measures of key constructs such as institutional thickness and carrying capacity are not clearly operationalized. Therefore, proxy data for these constructs are necessary.

At an unrefined level, it can be argued that an economically developed environment will have greater institutional thickness. This is because economic development is associated with more availability of certain amenities and resources that may directly or indirectly support the social sector and hence increase its institutional thickness. Economic development of a country is captured by purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusted per capita GDP. PPP-adjusted per capita GDP will serve as a rough proxy of institutional thickness for our graph analysis.

Carrying capacity refers to an environment's ability to support a population (i.e., social entrepreneurs) in terms factor conditions (e.g., volunteers, donor organizations, etc.) and demand conditions (e.g., people or places with genuine need). Countries with larger population and geographic area are likely to have environments with higher numbers of volunteers, donor organizations, etc. and more people and places with genuine need. Such an environment would be ideal for social entrepreneurs to thrive. Thus, a country's size in terms of population and geographic area may serve as a rough proxy for environmental carrying capacity for various social entrepreneur populations.

RESULTS

Preliminary data analysis is based on Ashoka fellows from three countries India, Brazil, and Mexico. India had 261 Ashoka fellows between 1982 and 2008, Brazil had 258 Ashoka fellows between 1985 and 2008, and Mexico had 138 Ashoka fellows between 1988 and 2008. It is assumed that each country serves as the boundary for the local environment for the social entrepreneur populations existing and operating within them. Within each country, a maximum of six distinct populations of social entrepreneurs can exist and collectively they comprise the social entrepreneur community. In India, 26 social entrepreneurs were selected as Ashoka fellows for their work in civic engagement between 1989 and 2008; 56 for economic

development between 1982 and 2008; 40 for environment between 1982 and 2008; 42 for health

between 1982 and 2008; 56 for human rights between 1982 and 2008; and 41 for

learning/education between 1989 and 2008. In Brazil, 32 social entrepreneurs were selected as

Ashoka fellows for their work in civic engagement between 1989 and 2008; 45 for economic

development between 1987 and 2008; 39 for environment between 1987 and 2008; 40 for health

between 1986 and 2008; 67 for human rights between 1987 and 2008; and 35 for

learning/education between 1985 and 2008. In Mexico, 20 social entrepreneurs were selected as

Ashoka fellows for their work in civic engagement between 1991 and 2008; 21 for economic

development between 1988 and 2008; 18 for environment between 1988 and 2008; 26 for health

between 1988 and 2007; 40 for human rights between 1988 and 2007; and 13 for

learning/education between 1988 and 2007.

In the remainder of this section, we will interpret the graphs of different social

entrepreneur populations in India, Brazil, and Mexico. Considering the existence of limited data

and the ongoing exploratory state of social entrepreneurship research, graph analysis is a

reasonable alternative to econometric analysis.

Graph Analysis

The density graphs of the six social entrepreneur populations in India show either a

partially-formed or fully formed S-curve (see Figure 1). Population density of Ashoka fellows in

civic engagement and human rights sectors demonstrate fully developed S-shaped growth pattern

with a hint of decline in the most recent year. Population density of Ashoka fellows in the

learning/education sector also demonstrate fully developed S-shaped growth pattern, but without

any hint of decline. Population density of Ashoka fellows in economic development and health

are still growing and have yet to plateau into a S-shape growth pattern. Within India, these two

social sectors seem to have the most promise for long-term growth potential. Lastly, population

density of Ashoka fellows in the environment sector seems to have gone through a complete

cycle, such that the density initially followed the S-shape and subsequently matured into an

inverted-U shaped graph, and more recently this population has experienced a second round

revival and a smaller sized S-shaped development.

Insert Figure 1 about here

In Brazil, five of the six social entrepreneur populations demonstrate partially formed or

fully formed S-curve (see Figure 2). In contrast, population density of Ashoka fellows in the

health sector demonstrates a classic inverted-U formation. Population density of Ashoka fellows

in environment and human rights sectors demonstrate fully developed S-shaped growth pattern

with a hint of decline in the most recent year. Population density of Ashoka fellows in the civic

engagement sector also demonstrate fully developed S-shaped growth pattern, but without any

hint of decline. Population density of Ashoka fellows in economic development and

learning/education sectors seem to have gone through a complete cycle, such that the density

initially followed the S-shape and subsequently matured into an inverted-U shaped graph, and

more recently these populations have experienced a second round of revival (note that the revival

of the economic development density graph is much stronger than that of the learning/education

density graph).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Lastly, several social entrepreneur populations in Mexico have population densities that

resemble the classic inverted-U shape (see Figure 3). Population densities of Ashoka fellows in

civic engagement, economic development, and human rights sectors have partially formed or fully-formed inverted-U shapes. Population densities of Ashoka fellows in health and learning/education sectors also have somewhat of an invert-U formation. These two social sectors seem to have failingly attempted a revival during the past several years. Lastly, population density of Ashoka fellows in the environment sector seems to have gone through a couple of rounds of growth and slow-down phases. The population density graph of this sector shows one large inverted-U, followed by a second small inverted-U, followed by a small S-shaped revival.

Insert Figure 3 about here

The interpretation of the population density graphs of eighteen social entrepreneur populations in India, Brazil, and Mexico render some preliminary support for hypothesis 1. It seems that different social entrepreneur populations (irrespective or social sector and country) go through an initial S-shaped growth pattern that subsequently matures into an inverted-U shaped outcome. It also seems that second and third round revivals in population growth are possible in certain social sectors.

Based on the PPP per capita GDP based proxy of institutional thickness, Mexico ($14,200) and Brazil ($10,200) stand at a distinct advantage over India ($2,900). Thus, within the context of supporting growth of social entrepreneur populations, the local environments in Mexico and Brazil are expected to have substantially more institutional thickness than the local environment in India. When we examine the population density graphs of Mexico and Brazil, we observe a sharp incline in four of the six social entrepreneur populations in Mexico. The only exceptions are human rights and learning/education sectors, where the dormancy and/or traction

period lasted about four years). In Brazil the dormancy and/or traction period seems to be considerably longer in a couple of social sectors. For instance, Ashoka fellows in civic engagement and human rights sectors have dormancy and/or traction lasting about 12-14 years. However, in some other social sectors of Brazil, the dormancy and/or traction period seems to be very short (e.g., about three years in the learning/education sector and nonexistent in economic development and health sectors). In contrast, three of the six social entrepreneur populations (e.g., economic development, health, and humans rights sectors) in India have about two-decade long dormancy and/or traction period. The dormancy and/or traction period is about a decade long for Ashoka fellows in civic engagement and learning/education sectors; the period is about 6-7 years for Ashoka fellows in the environment sector.

The preceding discussion lends preliminary support for hypothesis 2. Graph analysis suggests that institutional thick of the local environment (i.e., roughly measured by the PPP adjusted per capita GDP) substantially shortens the period before which social entrepreneur populations begin to experience growth momentum.

Based on the population and geographic size based proxy of carrying capacity, India (population of 1,166 million; area of 3.287 million sq km) and Brazil (population of 198 million; area of 8.514 million sq km) have a considerable advantage over Mexico (population of 111 million; area of 1.964 million sq km). Therefore, the local environments in India and Brazil are expected to have a larger carrying capacity of social entrepreneur populations than the local environment in Mexico. When we examine population density graphs of Ashoka fellows in India and Brazil, we observe that almost none of the populations (except the health sector in Brazil) have entered the slowdown phase in any recognizable manner. In contrast, population density graphs of five of the six social entrepreneur populations in Mexico show visible slow-

down resembling either partially formed or fully formed inverted-U. This contrast offers some support for hypothesis 3. That is, local environment carrying capacity seems to delay the onset of decline in the population density of social entrepreneur populations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main contribution of this paper is that it is the first to examine social entrepreneurs at the population level. The evolutionary dynamics of social entrepreneur populations can be useful to both existing and future social entrepreneurs within a specific social sector, and also to government and other donor organizations trying to determine the more efficient method of disbursing funds and other institutional support.

Social entrepreneurs vying to carve out their niche in specific social sectors ought to examine the relative position of that particular population and determine their social work strategy accordingly. To date, very little is known about social work strategy. It is intuitive to that the variety of social work strategies that social entrepreneurs engage in are most likely going to differ from the competitive strategies utilized by for-profit firms. Much research remains to be done on this growing field of research.

Government policy ought to be determined for specific social sectors taking into consideration the relative position of each population within its lifecycle. Government intervention may morph a social entrepreneur population from a slowdown phase to a growth momentum. Due to the unlimited potential of learning and adaptation by humans, populations of human-led ventures can make a comeback from declining phase more readily than other biological populations. Just because a social entrepreneur population has passed its peak and has entered its slowdown phase does not mean that that population cannot return to growth momentum. In several of the population density graphs, we observed repeated S-curve

formation. With proper policy interventions, a specific social entrepreneur population that has entered its slowdown phase can very well experience another bout of momentum in growth.

In this paper, population density refers to the number of Ashoka fellows working in any specific social sector (i.e., species-specific boundary) who have been inducted in the past ten years. Ashoka fellows who were inducted more than ten years ago were automatically removed from the population (to test for sensitivity of the cutoff point, we tried with 8 and 12 year cutoffs and the evolution graphs remained geometrically similar). As more data become available, additional tests would be necessary to validate the graphs presented in this paper.

Wissen (2004) recognizes that organizational ecology requires a very long time horizon (cf. he references the four-hundred year evolution of the Bavarian brewery industry). Suarez and Utterback's (1995) graphical display of six industries (e.g., typewriter, auto, television, tube, transistor, and calculator) spanned anywhere from three to six decades, with population graphs of the longest-spanning industry (e.g., typewriter industry) demonstrating the closest approximation of an inverted-U curve. Hannan and Freeman aptly note, "one needs a longer time perspective to study the population ecology of the largest and most dominant organizations (1977: 960). By focusing on Ashoka fellows (i.e., well established and highly renowned social entrepreneurs), we effectively attempted to examine the population ecology of the largest and most dominant social entrepreneurs. Thus, we need data spanning many decades to effectively capture the legitimacy and competition forces in play within various populations of social entrepreneurs. A limitation of this research is that data on social entrepreneurial growth in different countries are available for at most 25 years, a period too short to produce fully-formed graphs and establish strong empirical support of the ecological and evolutionary dynamics in the populations of social entrepreneurs. Notwithstanding, the graph analysis lend some preliminary support for the

hypotheses advanced in this paper. As more data become available at the grassroots level, more

in-depth studies on social entrepreneur populations need to be conducted to further our

understanding of the population dynamics of this very special group of entrepreneurs.

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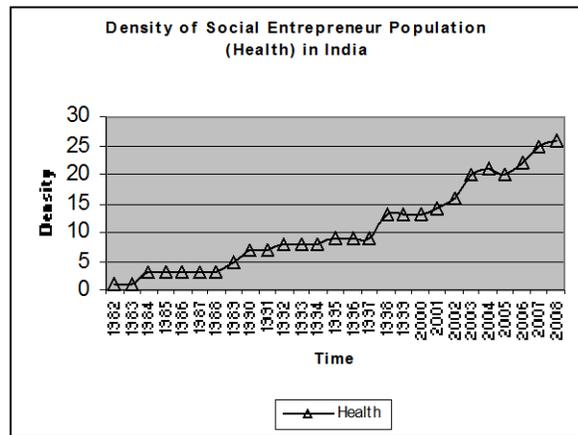
Figure 1: Density of Six Different Populations of Social Entrepreneurship in India
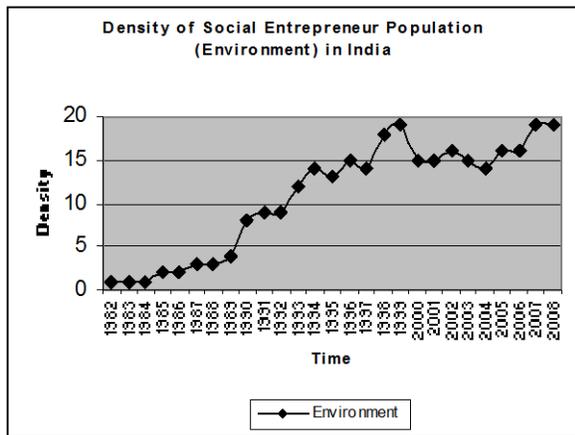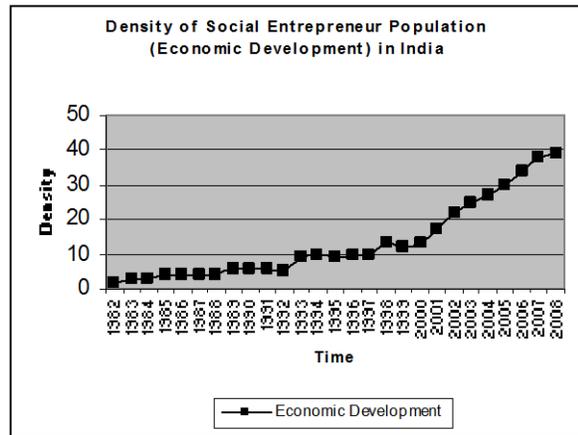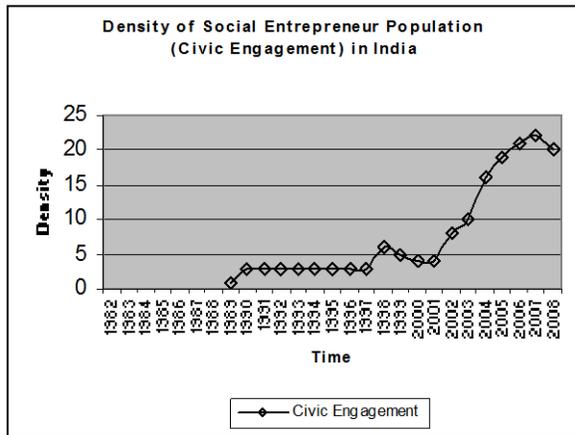

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Civic Engagement) in India

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Economic Development) in India

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Environment) in India

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Health) in India

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Human Rights) in India

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Learning/Education) in India

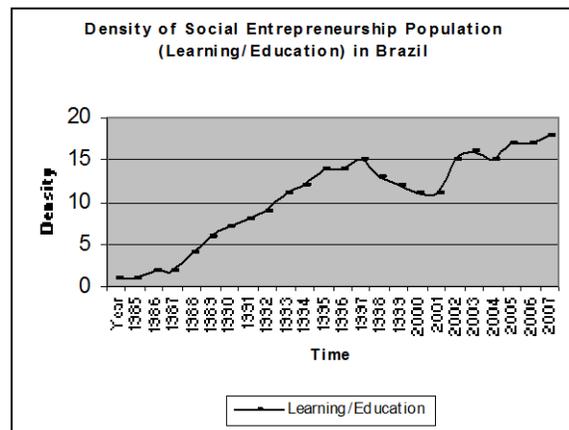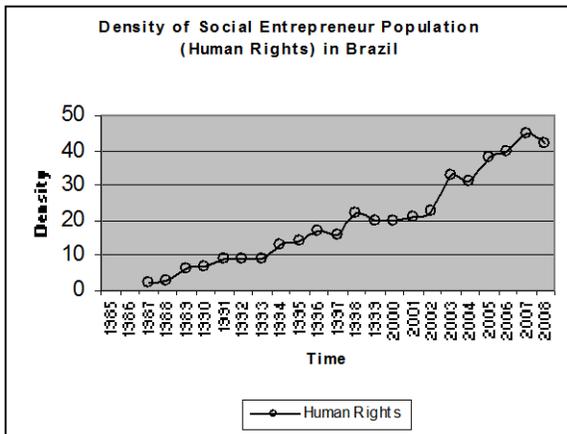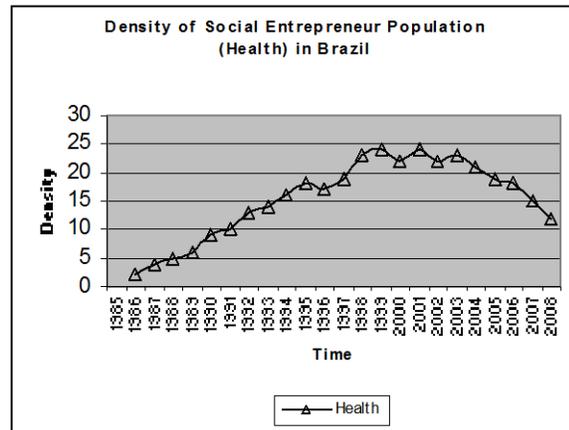**Figure 2: Density of Six Different Populations of Social Entrepreneurship in Brazil**

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Civic Engagement) in Brazil

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Economic Development) in Brazil

Density of Social Entrepreneur Populations (Environment) in Brazil

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Health) in Brazil

Density of Social Entrepreneur Population (Human Rights) in Brazil

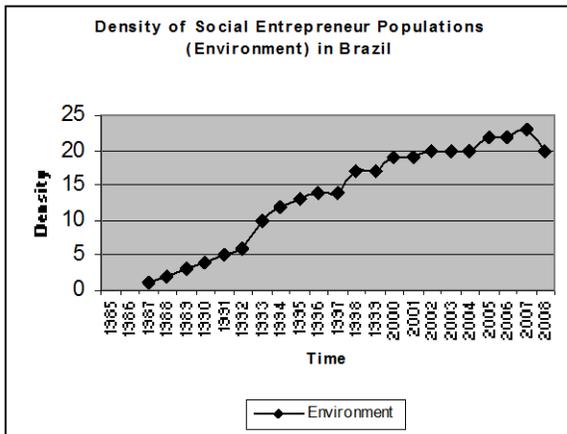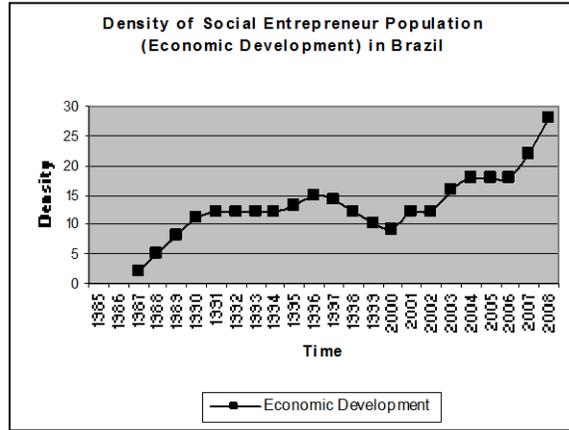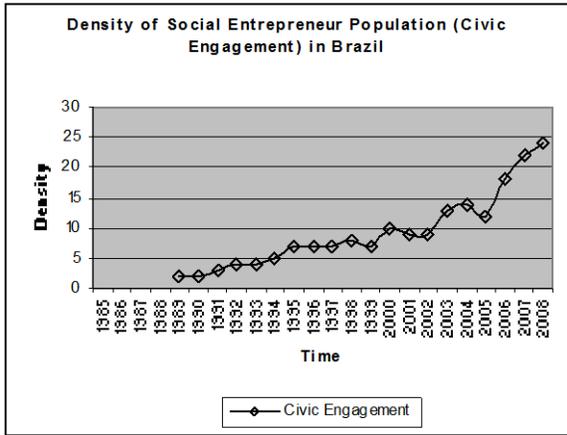Density of Social Entrepreneurship Population (Learning/Education) in Brazil

Figure 3: Density of Six Different Populations of Social Entrepreneurship in Mexico