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Social Entrepreneurship as a Dimension of the Social and Solidarity Economy (Pioneering Models)

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Abstract: Social entrepreneurship is considered one of the most recent concepts to emerge in both the academic and official spheres, despite the earlier existence of diverse practices. Its emergence can be traced back to the early 1990s as a response to the failure of the market and state institutions to meet collective demands and address social problems with a social dimension. It involves the integration of social responsibility into economic activities, making the economy more humane in terms of health, employment, education and finance. This research paper aims to shed light on the nature of this phenomenon and highlight some pioneering models, considering that this phenomenon is relatively unknown in our Algerian context and is experiencing slow growth.

Keywords : Social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneur, social solidarity

1. Introduction:

Social entrepreneurship is a relatively new concept in the field of economics. Due to its economic and social importance, studies and research have focused on exploring the concepts and dimensions of this innovative concept with a social dimension. It involves the integration of social responsibility into economic activities, making the economy more humane. Social entrepreneurship, both as a scientific concept and as an organizational unit, is closely linked to the social, which is derived from society in general and the social order in particular. It encompasses various aspects related to social objectives, such as creating social impact, meeting basic needs, and functional components such as social entrepreneurship, social innovation, creating social value, seizing opportunities related to social problems that official entities have failed to solve. It aims to address social risks, initiate social change and achieve desired social transformation.

The emergence of the concept of social entrepreneurship as an official and scientific concept came after a journey of building its foundations in the field. The first intellectual visions of the concept were presented by social entrepreneurs themselves, who initiated the creation of these organizational units to address societal problems for which official institutions could not find solutions. These initial visions were the cornerstone of the abstraction process that helped official bodies to provide definitions that were in line with the human societies in which this type of entrepreneurship operates. Following the footsteps of official entities, researchers and academics continued the construction process, resulting in an abstract concept enriched by scientific studies and research.

Based on this context, this research paper aims to clarify this new concept in both ancient and practical terms.

2. What is social entrepreneurship?

Social entrepreneurship is a recent concept that has emerged with the development of the solidarity economy, based on mutual support and cooperation between economic and social partners over the last two decades. In the context of the crisis that the world has been experiencing since 2008-2009, which has affected the economic system and structure of countries, especially in Europe, economic plans have not been able to find effective solutions. This led countries to look for new ways to improve their development situation. Social entrepreneurship is an approach that provides tangible, innovative and effective solutions to meet social needs that were previously unmet by the state [1]

Combining economic efficiency, social benefit, freedom and solidarity, social entrepreneurship focuses on social awareness, performance and economic efficiency, while mobilizing citizens and encouraging their innovation. It emphasizes that there is no strong social project without a strong economic project.

Social entrepreneurship, or community entrepreneurship, also involves initiating the application of a creative idea that contributes to the development of society or specific segments within any area of life. It addresses an issue, problem or need relevant to the community by identifying and seizing opportunities, using available resources, mobilizing capacities and potentials and maximizing their use [1]

3. The basic characteristics of social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is characterized by several features that distinguish it from traditional entrepreneurship and enable it to have an effective impact. These characteristics can be summarized in four key elements:

Creative (unconventional) thinking: In its expression, social entrepreneurship embodies attempts to bring about revolutionary change to address social challenges. This is in line with what the economist Schumpeter called "creative destruction".

Providing sustainable solutions: Social entrepreneurship should include a strategy to achieve sustainable development and provide lasting solutions to deep-rooted societal problems. It goes beyond temporary or limited impact and focuses on lasting solutions that address inherent problems within a community.

Achieving positive social impact: Social entrepreneurship requires the creation of a significant social impact on communities. This impact can be measured by comparing the state of a community before and after the emergence of creative solutions to its persistent and challenging problems. Impact can be assessed at different levels, including government and society. In the short term, the impact of social entrepreneurship can be seen through tangible changes in the community's economy, such as job creation, value creation and increased savings compared to public spending. In the medium term, the value of social entrepreneurship is manifested in its potential to enhance social well-being, improve conditions, increase productivity and initiate development projects. In the long term, the most significant contribution of social entrepreneurship is its ability to create and leverage social capital.

These characteristics underscore the transformative nature of social entrepreneurship, emphasizing its aim to provide sustainable solutions and achieve substantial and measurable social impact.

4. Manifestations of social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship aims to create social value alongside economic value and to promote sustainable social change by providing innovative solutions to social problems and supportive services in various areas, including

- Catalyzing social change through unconventional approaches and initiatives.
- The core motivation is to create social value, separate from personal interest or gain.
- It can be realized in for-profit, not-for-profit, mixed or public sectors.
- Seeking solutions to pressing social problems.
- Balances purely voluntary efforts with pure profit motives to ensure the sustainability of the entrepreneurial project.

- Improves social welfare by expanding the choices and capabilities of individuals to meet their needs.
- Provides goods and services that the public or private sector may be unwilling or unable to provide.
- Alleviates poverty by empowering disadvantaged, poor and marginalized groups with employment opportunities and a decent livelihood.
- Provides health services in a variety of areas, ranging from awareness raising and psychological support to contributing to the response to emergencies or chronic diseases.
- Provides education, training and knowledge transfer services to develop the knowledge and skills of community members and enable their active participation in society.
- Preserving the environment and promoting sustainable development, including involvement in alternative and green energy projects.
- Social care projects, such as creating jobs for the unemployed or homeless, promoting pathways to social inclusion for marginalized people, and providing support services for vulnerable families.

These manifestations highlight the diverse areas in which social entrepreneurship operates and its commitment to addressing pressing social issues, promoting social welfare and achieving sustainable development [2.3]

5. The concept of the social and solidarity economy

This concept began to spread in the 1990s and gained increasing and widespread support as an innovative alternative to the traditional development model based on promoting growth. This came after social problems such as poverty and unemployment had worsened despite often high growth rates. Various terms have been used to refer to this concept, such as the voluntary sector, the non-governmental sector, the non-profit sector, the social economy and the solidarity economy.

The social and solidarity economy refers to a third sector as opposed to the public and private sectors. It includes cooperatives, non-profit organizations, social enterprises and charitable associations. These entities are characterized by the fact that they produce goods, services and knowledge while pursuing economic and social objectives and promoting solidarity.

All institutions belonging to the social and solidarity economy focus primarily on meeting social needs and addressing difficult social conditions, while also emphasizing the human element. They offer sustainable economic models, such as social enterprises. This branch of the economy examines the relationship between the economy and social behavior, analyzing consumer behavior and its influence by social aspects, ethics and other human considerations. It examines economic activities within society carried out by active organizations.

The social and solidarity economy aims to address major social and economic problems such as poverty and limited stable employment (in line with the Sustainable Development Goals 2023). It does this by facilitating access to finance, market information, factors of production, technology, support services and markets in order to reduce inequalities in the labor and product markets, improve income levels and ensure their sustainability.

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Social and solidarity economy activities share a set of core values and principles, which are outlined in the table below:

Table 1. values and principles of Social and solidarity economy.

1-Participation/cooperation	- Democratic governance is one of the core values of the social and solidarity economy. - Involvement of stakeholders, including users and beneficiaries, in decision-making. - Shared responsibility. - Empowerment of beneficiaries through participatory approaches to work. - Equality in the expression of opinions.
2- Solidarity and innovation	- An "innovative" alternative to traditional economic models. - It is part of an inclusive economy that benefits the most disadvantaged, marginalised and impoverished groups, which is difficult to achieve within the framework of conventional neoliberal economic plans or aid and development programmes. - The need for flexibility and innovation in directing resources and benefits to beneficiaries and contributors
3- Voluntary participation and autonomy	- Voluntary participation in social and solidarity economy institutions. - Bottom-up approach, creating institutions based on social needs - an inherently independent economy. - Providing opportunities for communities to create projects and acquire skills, resources, employment opportunities and benefits that cannot be achieved through the market economy.
4- Public interest	- Promoting a social culture based on cooperation and mutual support. - Sharing responsibility. - The main objective is growth and well-being for all, without diminishing the well-being of individuals within the group.

¹ Source (Asia, 2014, p.2)

6. The role of social entrepreneurship in the social and solidarity economy

In parallel with the development of the social and solidarity economy in many parts of the world, Brazil, for example, has more than 22,000 institutions of solidarity economy organizations, the majority of which are workers' cooperatives and productive enterprises employing more than 1.7 million people. In the European Union, it is estimated that 10% of the total number of enterprises belong to this economy, representing between 9% and 11.5% of the active population in countries such as Sweden, Belgium, Italy, France and the Netherlands. In addition, the sector contributes around 10% of GDP in France and Belgium and 10.2% in the Netherlands [4].

These figures highlight a reality that cannot be ignored by government and society. Social entrepreneurship is therefore becoming an important part of this and an emerging model of economic organization that relies on creative and innovative methods to create and develop projects and businesses that have a broad social impact. The success of these endeavors is measured by their social value (benefit) as well as the financial profit they generate. This is achieved by working towards the integration of vulnerable and unemployed groups into the workforce, enabling them to add value to themselves and their communities, rather than being mere consumers of grants and donations.

Second, social entrepreneurship, together with the social and solidarity economy, contributes to ensuring equitable access to and investment in natural resources through associations and cooperatives active in sectors such as agriculture and fisheries. In some

cases, social entrepreneurship provides alternative solutions to environmental problems through recycling and upcycling projects, innovation in the use of renewable resources, organic production of goods, or solutions to educational problems such as curriculum weaknesses and dropout rates through specialized private schools, centers or institutes.

Third, social entrepreneurship facilitates the empowerment of non-traditional economic agents, especially women who stay at home, especially in rural communities, and people with disabilities. This helps to structure informal activities and promotes professional integration.

Fourthly, in the context of the social and solidarity economy, social enterprises promote, on the one hand, the creation of new financing mechanisms and, on the other hand, the activation of existing instruments that can finance entrepreneurial initiatives that lack the necessary funding or are desired by certain entities, such as professional associations. Examples of such mechanisms include the National Unemployment Insurance Fund, the National Agency for Microcredit Management and the Zakat Fund, which is a diverse and significant source of financing for social entrepreneurship projects.

Fifth, social entrepreneurship promotes creativity and innovation by seeking and implementing non-traditional solutions to social and environmental challenges. It also promotes values and principles that deepen the sense of citizenship and social solidarity.

Sixth, it enhances the network of social relationships commonly referred to as 'social capital' in the business literature.

The proliferation of social entrepreneurship projects is a high-level manifestation of social capital, which generates social interactions based on participation in finding solutions to economic, social and cultural problems in society. The Algerian thinker Malik Bennabi referred to this network of social relationships as the "religious seed", meaning the religious element that connects and interacts between the elements of social change (the world of people, the world of ideas and the world of things) in order to fulfil its function effectively [5]

7. International models and experiences of social entrepreneurship

7.1. *Gramin Bank (Village Bank)*

Rampant poverty and hunger in various parts of Bangladesh prompted Professor Muhammad Yunus, an economics professor at Chittagong University, to consider ways to alleviate the plight of the poor and empower them to develop themselves by moving from idle potential to productive labor. He observed that some of these impoverished individuals were engaged in the production of local handicrafts, which they sold at a minimal profit margin after hard work. However, most of the profit went to the traders who provided the financing and set the selling price as they saw fit. In addition, these disadvantaged people were unable to borrow from banks because of the collateral requirements. In response, Muhammad Yunus approached the relevant authorities in his country and asked for a license to set up a bank based on the idea of providing small loans to finance home-based projects undertaken primarily by the poor, especially women. This request was indeed granted and the bank project was officially inaugurated in 1983. Its objectives were defined as follows [9]

- Provide banking facilities to poor men and women.
- To eliminate the exploitation of the poor by usurers.
- To create self-employment opportunities for the vast sector of untapped or under-utilized human resources.
- Empowering marginalized members of society through an institutional model that they can embrace and engage with, giving them social, political, social and economic strength through cooperation and mutual support.
- To manage the cycle of the old poverty trap: low income, minimal savings, minimal investment, return to old income, to become an upward trajectory of: low income, credit, investment, increased income, increased credit, more investment and further income.

Despite being described as a social business project, as mentioned earlier, Grameen Bank remains a unique creative experience, an innovative social idea in an economic context that seeks to develop and improve human potential, capabilities and quality of life by lifting individuals out of the cycle of poverty. It has proven that lending money to the poorest sections of society is not only possible, but also profitable. It has won numerous local and international awards, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006[10]. Like any successful experience, Grameen Bank has transcended its local context and expanded globally, with replication and adaptation in dozens of countries around the world.

Although Grameen Bank is classified as a non-Islamic interest-based bank, it does not seek to profit at the expense of the poor, and its founder has not taken personal financial benefits. In fact, the interest the bank earns on its loans covers the administrative costs of its operations. Nevertheless, there are many lessons to be learned from this innovative pioneering experience, including

- Emphasizing the need to find practical, on-the-ground solutions to social problems, rather than relying solely on theoretical discourse and teaching what should be [10].
- Addressing problems through the right innovative approach based on sustainable solutions rather than temporary expedients.
- Many practices and activities offered by traditional financial and social institutions perpetuate the existence of two closed circles: one leading to more poverty and the other to more wealth.
- Work and participation are fundamental values in addressing social challenges, especially widespread ones such as poverty and unemployment.
- Implementing solutions gradually, without rushing for immediate results, while maintaining a long-term vision [6].

7.2. *Tafhna Al-Ashraf Project (Salah Atiya)*

"Tafhna Al-Ashraf is the name of a small town that used to suffer from poverty, ignorance and disease. It is located in the centre of Mit Ghamr, which is part of the Dakahlia Governorate in Egypt.

Salah Atiya (1944-2016) was an agricultural engineer who, together with nine of his colleagues, came up with an idea for a project in their field. They agreed on a poultry project. Each of them contributed 200 Egyptian pounds and they needed a tenth partner to start their project.

Then Salah Atiya, an engineer, came and said to them, "I have found the tenth partner". They all replied, "Who is it?" He replied, "It is Allah (Praise be to Him). He will enter as our tenth partner and take ten per cent of the profits in return for guaranteeing us protection, care and safety from epidemics". Everyone agreed.

They started the project, and after a while the profits exceeded their expectations. The partners decided to increase the tenth partner's share to 20%. The increase continued year after year until it reached 50%. They agreed to use this percentage of the profits to invest in charitable projects in their village, "Tafhna Al-Ashraf".

They built a kindergarten to teach children Quran memorisation free of charge. They then set up a primary religious institute for boys, another for girls, followed by a preparatory institute for girls and another for boys. Later, they established a secondary Azhari institute for girls and another for boys [11].

As the profits from the project continued to grow, Salah Atiya thought of establishing university colleges. With the villagers contributing according to their abilities, they established a Muslim Foundation at the village level.

They built a college of Sharia and law, followed by a college of commerce, a college of religious foundations and another of educational sciences.

They also established a university for female students and another for male students. They also built a railway station on their own, and each student was given a free train ticket.

On the other hand, they set up specialized committees for village development, such as an agricultural committee made up of retired experts in the field to research ways of increasing agricultural productivity. There was also an education committee, made up of

retired professionals in the field, to look at ways of improving the level of education in the village. Similarly, there was a youth committee to occupy their leisure time, and a reconciliation committee to deal with disputes and seek reconciliation.

Salah Atiya also worked to identify widows and divorced women in order to find them ways to earn a living or to train them in trades and crafts that would provide them with a decent livelihood. He also provided artisans with tools and supplies for their work.

The result was that after a while there were no more unemployed or poor people in the village. The experience was extended to neighboring villages, and Engineer Salah Atiya would not visit a village and leave without setting up a Muslim Endowment House to help the poor, widows and unemployed youth set up projects that would lift them out of poverty. In the end, an agreement was reached between the engineer and his partners to do the entire project for the sake of Allah, and they became employees under the tenth partner, receiving salaries on the condition that they would not be impoverished or in need except for Him.

Some of the conclusions and lessons that can be drawn from this experience are as follows:

- The experience is a pioneering and multifaceted model. It is a model of social entrepreneurship that has integrated social objectives alongside the economic objective on which the project is based. This has been achieved by allocating a 10% share that has increased year by year. It is an alternative model to non-investing or stagnating foundations and a professional model to achieve sustainability in charitable work and its development.
- The experience is self-generated. It is not linked to any public or other institution. It began with the initiative of young people who took the lead in developing themselves and their society.
- The experience focused on two very important variables that have a strategic relationship with human development and play a prominent role in creating sustainable social change: education and work.
- The experience is an exemplary model that reflects a shift from individualism to collective action, that is, achieving development through participation by motivating the community to participate in meeting its needs and solving its problems.
- The experience provided a practical and realistic model that reflects the role of solidarity and the social economy, including "social entrepreneurship", in mobilizing the unemployed forces of society, especially those in marginalized areas, thereby contributing to the creation of development in its various dimensions, or what is commonly referred to as "sustainable development".

It is a unique experience based primarily on a spiritual and religious dimension, achieved through its stages and the promise of Allah to reward those who spend in His way, be it from their wealth, thoughts or efforts [7]

7.3. Barefoot College

India has long been known for its high level of creativity, especially in the area of solving social and economic problems. A notable experience in the field of social entrepreneurship is the one that started with a simple creative idea by its founder, banker Roy [9]. It soon transformed into a scientific academy based on a new educational approach outside the formal education system, called 'Barefoot College'. The name symbolizes its success in attracting the unemployed and marginalized in poor rural areas, who lack specific academic qualifications and have not had access to knowledge that would enable them to benefit themselves and their communities. This was evident in Banker Roy's own impoverished village, where young people were migrating to the cities, leaving the elderly, women and even children to walk the streets barefoot, bearing the visible signs of poverty. The Barefoot College aims to improve the lives of these impoverished people and others like them in the Rajasthan province of India. It is based on Gandhi's ideas about

lifestyle and work ethics, which focus on the need to use the knowledge and skills of the poor to develop the villages they live in, rather than relying on outside help.

Banker Roy decided to set up a training center, initially staffed by graduates and postgraduates from various disciplines, for the poor who have no alternative but to develop their skills and knowledge [12]. The aim of the college is to provide education and training, especially in the areas needed by their impoverished villages, such as the provision of clean drinking water, energy generation and health care. The philosophy of the academy is therefore to impart specialized knowledge and skills directly to individuals, especially the poor who belong to deprived rural communities with high illiteracy rates. This is done without the need to spend years in traditional educational stages to acquire basic and general knowledge, as is the case in formal education. The college comprises several units, including a library, an analytical laboratory, a training unit, an open theatre, a post office, dormitories and guesthouses, and internet cafes. Its activities now extend to hundreds of villages in many countries, benefiting more than two million people worldwide. Over the course of four decades, it has implemented several projects, including the following examples:

7.3.1. Project: Medical Centre

What began as a small clinic providing free services to the poor has grown to more than 200 health centers with trained health workers providing routine health checks.

7.3.2. Project: Shelters for the homeless

This project involves the construction of dozens of houses for the homeless, using government funding. The Barefoot Architects, graduates of the Academy, supervise all construction and building activities.

7.3.3. Project: Mother and child care

Several women have been trained to take on the role of midwives and perform various tasks, including regular monthly check-ups during pregnancy, raising awareness of the importance of proper nutrition, training in appropriate delivery methods, and necessary pre- and post-natal care.

7.3.4. Project: Desert Development

To combat the effects of the arid environment, the Academy has planted drought-resistant tree seedlings using a strategy based on traditional methods of rainwater harvesting. Several people have been trained to install, repair and maintain hand pumps, in addition to efforts to preserve the desert environment.

7.3.5. Project: Harnessing solar energy

The Academy has initiated a pioneering project to generate electricity from solar energy in remote villages. Illiterate and semi-literate men and women are involved in the manufacture, installation and maintenance of solar lighting units to provide clean energy without the need for specialized engineers and experts.

7.3.6. Project: Women's Empowerment

The Academy has launched a women's empowerment program that includes several aspects, such as raising awareness in the community about the importance of women's role in development, educating women about their legal and health rights, and providing income-generating opportunities through home-based crafts such as embroidery and knitting.

8. Conclusion

Despite the importance of social entrepreneurship and its functional building blocks at the official and academic levels, it is still in its infancy in many human societies, despite the political and economic conviction it enjoys. This is particularly evident in Arab societies in general and in Algerian society in particular. The shift towards this entrepreneurial mindset has become a necessity and a lifeline for many non-governmental organizations that rely on funding from charitable donations. In the wake of the financial crisis experi-

enced by human societies after the COVID-19 pandemic and the scarcity of financial resources for everyone, civil society organizations of all kinds are facing difficulties in carrying out their missions and providing financial and moral support to many vulnerable social groups. Therefore, social entrepreneurship needs to be transformed from a mere scientific concept or humanitarian phenomenon into a way of life in different societies. To achieve this concept, the following points can be embodied

- Integrating social development into projects in a more inclusive and efficient way through improved research methods, capacity building and partnerships.
- Promote a culture of self-employment and social work to achieve inclusive development, ensuring equal opportunities.
- Developing training programs and improving leadership skills for owners of innovative social projects.
- Encouraging social initiative as a means of identifying and creating potential social change through a combination of government intervention and commercial entrepreneurship.

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