

Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship: moving the relation forward. A bibliometric literature review.

Abstract

Research framework

This paper intends to explore the scientific production about social innovation and entrepreneurship. Social innovation (SI) is a thematic area that knows a progressive growth in the interests of academics, policy-makers and practitioners.

Starting in the mid-2000s - more particularly from 2010 onwards, especially after the 2008 macroeconomic crisis, driven by changes in global political, economic and environmental scenarios - the SI has become a way to find innovative and sustainable solutions to address relevant collective issues, including poverty, inequality and unequal allocation of resources.

It is also confirmed by the first main entrance of the term “social innovation” into the Institutional language in 1972 (one year after the exit from the Bretton-Wood agreement), when the Club of Rome involved the concept of social innovation between the recommendations of the “Limits to growth” with this proposition: “We believe in fact that the need will quickly become evident for social innovation to match technical change, for radical reform of institutions and political processes at all levels, including the highest, that of world polity”.

In their article for the Stanford Social Innovation Review, Phillips, Deiglmeier and Miller define social innovation as: “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals. A social innovation can be a product, production process, or technology (much like innovation in general), but it can also be a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, a social movement, an intervention, or some combination of them.”

For the aims of this research it is important to underline that in almost all the definition of social innovation can be identified explicit or implicit references to the concept of (social) entrepreneurship and of (social) entrepreneurs. The relationship among these concepts has become so tight that Stanford Social Innovation Review has pointed out the main difference among social innovation and social entrepreneurship: “Although social entrepreneurship has become a popular rallying point for those trying to improve the world, social change can happen outside of them. As a matter of fact, solutions have historically come from the nonprofit, private, and government sectors.

The concept of social innovation focuses attention on the ideas and solutions that create social value—as well as the processes through which they are generated, regardless of where they are coming from.”

This is the reason why we will not focus our review only on the relations between social innovation and social entrepreneurship but we aim at enlarging the spectrum of the analysis considering the concept of entrepreneurship as a whole.

Research motivations

The boundaries of the theme, however, have not yet been completely traced and shared. Often the ambiguity of the concept and the lability of the perimeter leads to associate SI with other terms, such as: sustainability; sustainable entrepreneurship; change; corporate social responsibility; co-creation/co-production; social capital.

Some recent studies – with a bibliometric methodology - have mapped the thematic clusters only related to the social entrepreneurship. At the moment there is no study of SI in its broad meaning and this lack suggests a space for a significant research agenda that we aim to usher with this paper.

Methods

To examine the structure and the evolution of SI literature, our research design was divided in 4 steps: papers selection, historiographic analysis, keywords coding process and multiple correspondence analysis.

Selection - We extracted 1340 papers for Social Innovation (SI) and, among these, we selected 221 papers containing simultaneously the two keywords “social innovation” and “entrepreneurship”, as all-inclusive term because our research has an explorative nature (Neely 2005; Taticchi et al. 2010; Bititci et al. 2012). We chose Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) database incorporated in Web of Science Internet library source and we extracted only research articles in English.

Historiographic analysis - We portioned our collections in two sub-groups according to SSCI subject areas: Entrepreneurship (Entrepreneurship; Business; Finance; Management Operations Research; Management Sciences) and Social sciences. According to papers citations and author appearances, we identified the most contributing authors and the most influential articles and then drew the historiographic map. This permit to understand the genealogic antecedents and descendants of SI research.

Coding - In order to map the structure of research we recoded all the papers through macro-keywords. We first developed an initial list of major keywords by iteratively sorting the individual keywords and regrouping them into coherent categories (Rugg and McGeorge 1997; Furrer et al. 2008); then three independent academic experts are reviewing this initial list (Milne and Adler 1999; Caldarelli et al. 2013) while two independent coders review all the papers and matched them with the macro keywords. We use a reliability test to assess the extent to which the coding overlapped together with the robustness of our findings. The tests should confirm that the coding made by the researchers is concordant.

Multiple correspondence analysis -The fourth and last step of analysis was the multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to examine the relationship between keywords papers, i.e. the conceptual structure of the field (Cobo et al. 2011; Batagelj and Cerinsek 2013; Borner et al. 2003). MCA is an exploratory data analysis without any restrictive assumption (Abdi and Valentin 2007). To perform MCA first, we carry out a complete disjunctive coding of our variables and then we build a Burt Matrix, composed of qualitative variables and organized into “individuals x variables”. Assuming that the most cited papers are more representative of the structure of the field, we perform MCA considering the weight (citations per year) assigned to the papers.

Findings preview

Considering that at this stage of the research the 3 independent reviewers and the 2 independent coders are employing the methods described above and so that the tests are in progress, we can show the preview of the findings related to the first two steps of our research design.

The papers selection has shown interesting insights about the academic production on social innovation and its related topics, represented in the following table:

Keywords-Plus (ID)	N. of Articles	% of Articles
Entrepreneurship	63	33%
Enterprise	18	10%
Innovation	17	9%
Framework	16	8%
Model	15	8%
Opportunities	13	7%
Perspective	13	7%
Governance	12	6%
Challenges	11	6%
Management	11	6%

The papers keywords analysis confirm that the issue of entrepreneurship is dominant and so that our theoretical assumption is correct.

The second preview of findings (figure 1a and 1b) is related to the second methodological step, the historiographic analysis.

Figure 1a – Annual Scientific Production

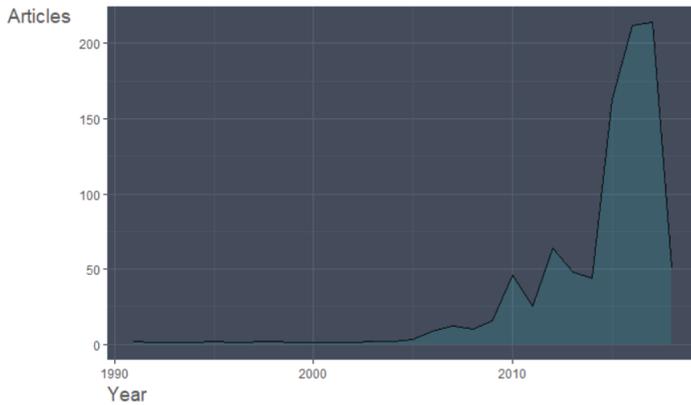
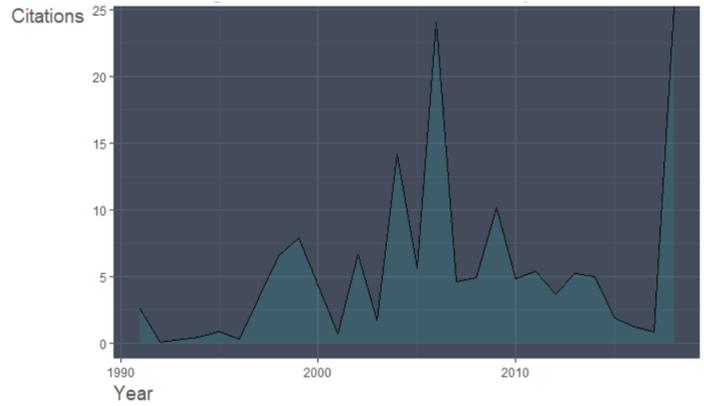


Figure 1b – Annual Average Citations per year



The other findings will be available after the reviewing and coding phase and will regard the analysis of the most contributing authors and of the most influential papers, the historiographic net and the multiple correspondence analysis.