Exploring Youth Perspectives on Social Entrepreneurship as a Path to Transformative Change

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ABSTRACT:
Social entrepreneurship (SE) has received increasing attention in academic literature as a potentially transformative business practice; however, the voices and contexts of youth are noticeably absent from these discussions. Yet, with 25% of the world’s population between the ages of 10-24, youth are poised to be powerful agents for change (PBR, 2015). In an effort to fill that gap in this research: Do youth at UVic involved in social change efforts perceive social entrepreneurship as a viable path to transformation?

OBJECTIVES:
1. Analyze youth perceptions of “transformation” and how to achieve it
2. Compare and contrast youth perceptions of social entrepreneurship (SE) and its relationship to transformation
3. Identify and describe perceived barriers and opportunities youth have experienced or expect, with regards to their engagement in social entrepreneurship
4. Use the insights generated from the above analyses to develop potential pathways for greater youth involvement in social entrepreneurship as a method to achieve social, ecological and economic transformation

METHODS:
As the body of existing knowledge in this area is small, this research was conducted using Grounded Theory following Corbin & Strauss (1990), a qualitative research approach in order to support its goal of hypothesis and theory generation. The primary method was in-depth, semi-structured interviews and data analysis was conducted using a three step coding process.

Who are transformation-focused youth?
Social entrepreneurship (SE) has received increasing attention in academic literature as a potentially transformative business practice; however, the voices and contexts of youth are noticeably absent from these discussions. Yet, with 25% of the world’s population between the ages of 10-24, youth are poised to be powerful agents for change (PBR, 2015). In an effort to fill that gap in this research: Do youth at UVic involved in social change efforts perceive social entrepreneurship as a viable path to transformation?

Why Victoria as a case study?
University campuses have a long history as sites of activism and are often hubs where young people develop and solidify their social consciousness (Broadhurst, 2014). Student life comes with the flexibility to pursue ideas, thus making campuses ideal sites to find transformation-focused youth. Victoria is one of the most entrepreneurial cities in Canada and the promotion of entrepreneurship/social enterprise is one of the main pillars of its recent Economic Plan (Taskforce, 2015). The site was also ideal due to the researcher’s physical proximity to campus and prior knowledge of on-campus activism.

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RESULTS:
For youth, capitalism and the way we perceive and evaluate peoples’ place in the economic system was the most commonly cited area in need of transformation. As a result, a discussion about potential mechanisms for intervening in the system from a bottom up perspective was well received by the participants. Overall, the participants indicated that SE was a path for youth to achieve the transformation they want to see both within society and within the business sector.

Personal Barriers
- Limited access to information
- Lack of skills and experience
- Financial risk

Societal Barriers
- Negative connotations of SE
- Conflict with current economic structures

Provide community belonging
Participants cited being part of a community of like-minded individuals as a way to foster a sense of belonging. Some participants indicated SE provided an opportunity to achieve this belonging off campus.

Empowerment
The act of participating in a socially entrepreneurial venture could be seen as a boost to confidence, provide a sense of ownership and decision making power

Why do youth perceive engagement in social entrepreneurship as a viable path for transformative change?

Figure 1: Opportunities SE provides for youth

Do transformation-focused youth at the University of Victoria perceive social entrepreneurship as a viable path for transformative change?

KEY TERMS:
Transformation is the capacity to create a new system when economic, ecological and/or social conditions make the current system unsustainable (Westley et al, 2013; Olsson & Galaz, 2012).

Social Entrepreneurship* is a way to blur the boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors to create initiatives that use wealth as a means to an end and not as an end in and of itself. In this way, these are ventures that serve a social need, but pay for themselves.

*Note: Since this idea is still new, in definition it is still emerging and the term itself is often and interchangeably throughout the literature with terms like social enterprise, community business, social firm, and mission-based social business development (Jenkins, 2010). As a result, social entrepreneurship appears to be used as a blanket term that makes reference to a movement towards the integration of business and social goals.

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Figure 2: Barriers youth face to engage in SE

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